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#MollyLTC

Lantern Theater Company Presents New Production of *Molly Sweeney* by Brian Friel, Professionally Filmed and Streaming On Demand January 22 – February 14, 2021

PHILADELPHIA (December 30, 2020) – **Lantern Theater Company** continues its reimagined 2020/21 season with a **newly filmed production of *Molly Sweeney*** by legendary Irish playwright **Brian Friel**, directed by **Peter DeLaurier** and featuring **Anthony Lawton, Ian Merrill Peakes, and Geneviève Perrier**. This fully designed and safely realized production was filmed at the Lantern's artistic home at St. Stephen's Theater in Center City Philadelphia by the Emmy Award-winning filmmakers at **Natural Light Films**. Hailed by *The New York Times* as "a deeply moving meditation on hope, change, and despair," *Molly Sweeney* will stream on demand **from Friday, January 22 through Sunday, February 14, 2021**. Tickets and information are available online at www.lanterntheater.org.

Molly Sweeney deftly explores how human beings make decisions and influence the lives of others. Inspired by Oliver Sacks' essay *To See and Not See*, the play follows Molly, a 41-year-old Irish woman who has been blind since she was ten months old. Raised at home rather than being sent to a school for the blind, she was taught by her father to appreciate the tactile world around her and has become a self-assured and independent woman – until her husband Frank and her ophthalmologist Mr. Rice persuade her to undergo a risky surgery to restore her vision.

The Lantern will present *Molly Sweeney* at a time when we are all painfully aware of how those in power make decisions that affect our health and our livelihoods. The play examines how the characters make assumptions about the lived experiences of others. Frank and Mr. Rice are less concerned with Molly's perspective and more focused on their own goals, Frank needing to "fix" Molly and Mr. Rice seeing an opportunity to regain

professional success after losing his career to alcoholism. One justification Frank and Mr. Rice provide for attempting the surgery is that Molly has “nothing to lose.” But by the end of the play, Molly is alone.

“The fundamental act of being human is to make meaning from the world around us,” said Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon**. “Our individual interpretations of the raw sensory material of the world we share both create our own identities and form our unique personal contributions to our community. Molly’s story is one of a woman whose ability to experience and create that meaning is utterly transformed by one event. Suddenly everything she has is new, what she had before is gone, and she must find a whole new way to interpret the world at the most basic level of experience. *Molly Sweeney* is a play that we knew we could produce safely in this strange and disturbing time. It is also a play that strikes a deep and resonant chord of compassion for a bruised and battered humanity. Friel’s voice is both loving and honest, enabling us to see the flaws of his characters right alongside their courage and kindness.”

Lantern Theater Company will delve into the themes of *Molly Sweeney* on its **Lantern Searchlight blog**, available online at lanterntheater.org/searchlight. Published articles will explore the Oliver Sacks essay that inspired Friel’s play, the geography and psychology of Friel’s plays, and behind the scenes interviews with the artists about making theater during a pandemic. New content will be added throughout the production’s run.

Tickets for *Molly Sweeney* are **\$20 per household** and are available online at www.lanterntheater.org or by calling the Lantern Box Office at **(215) 829-0395**. Ticket buyers will receive an email confirmation with full instructions and a private ticket access link, which will provide on-demand access to *Molly Sweeney* for one viewing anytime during the January 22 – February 14, 2021 streaming period. The play can be viewed on most internet-connected devices with email/web browser access, including desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and select smart TVs. The Lantern Box Office will be accessible by phone and email for extended hours throughout the streaming period to provide assistance.

About the Playwright

Brian Friel has often been called the Irish Chekhov and was long recognized as Ireland’s greatest living dramatist until his death in 2015. His work includes *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1991 Olivier Award for Best New Play and 1992 Tony Award for Best Play), *Translations*, *Faith Healer*, *Freedom*, *Wonderful Tennessee*, *The Home Place*, and *Lovers*, which the Lantern produced during the 2002/03 theater season. *Molly Sweeney* is one of 14 Friel plays set in the fictional town of Ballybeg, from the Irish *Baile Beag* meaning “small town.” In reference to the comparison between himself and Anton Chekhov, Friel has said it may be because “the characters in the plays behave as if their old certainties were as sustaining as ever, even though they know that their society is in meltdown... They seem to expect their problems will disappear if they talk about them – endlessly.”

About the Artists

Molly Sweeney will be directed by longtime Lantern artistic partner **Peter DeLaurier**, whose recent directing credits include Lantern productions of *Hapgood* by Tom Stoppard, *Red Velvet* by Lolita Charkabarti, *36 Views* by Naomi Iizuka, and *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, both by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona. DeLaurier created an original adaptation of Molière's *The Misanthrope*, which was scheduled to have its world premiere at the Lantern in spring 2020 before being postponed due to Covid-19. He has also graced the Lantern stage in productions of *The Tempest*, *An Iliad*, *Underneath the Lintel*, *QED*, *The Train Driver*, *Emma*, *Heroes*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *Skylight*. DeLaurier is a seven-time Barrymore Award nominee and received the award twice: for his role as The Librarian in *Underneath the Lintel* at the Lantern and as Kent in *King Lear* at People's Light. He is an artistic associate at People's Light and has been a member of their resident company since 1991.

Geneviève Perrier takes on the title role of Molly Sweeney in her ninth production with the Lantern. Her previous Lantern credits include *The Vertical Hour*, *Betrayal* (Barrymore nomination), *Photograph 51* (Barrymore nomination), *A Child's Christmas in Wales* (Barrymore Award for Outstanding Ensemble), *Private Lives* (Barrymore nomination), *The Lonesome West* (Barrymore nomination), *The Screwtape Letters*, and David Hare's *Skylight*, for which she was honored with the 2008 Barrymore for Outstanding Leading Actress in a Play. Perrier has also worked locally with Arden Theatre Company, Azuka Theatre, The Berserker Residents, Headlong, Philadelphia Theatre Company, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, EgoPo Classic Theater, Theatre Exile, and Pig Iron Theatre Company.

Ian Merrill Peakes returns to the Lantern as Molly's husband, Frank. He previously appeared as Dutch military captain Joseph Pillel in the Lantern's critically acclaimed world premiere of *The Craftsman* by Bruce Graham. A Barrymore and Helen Hayes award-winning actor, Peakes' stage credits also include productions with Walnut Street Theatre, Arden Theatre Company, Theatre Exile, Philadelphia Theatre Company, The Wilma Theater, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, American Conservatory Theater, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Folger Theatre, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and many others. Film and television credits include *Still Standing*, *Hack*, *Homicide*, *Buried Girl*, and *Lebanon*, *PA*.

Anthony Lawton will play ophthalmologist Mr. Rice, fresh from his highly acclaimed original adaptation of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*, which the Lantern streamed on demand during the 2020 holiday season to audiences across the United States and the world, including viewers in the U.K., Canada, Mexico, Ireland, France, Australia, Bermuda, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Lawton's other recent acting credits include Lantern productions of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *Measure for Measure*, and the world premiere of *The*

Craftsman by Bruce Graham. Lawton is well known to Philadelphia audiences for his original works for the stage – including *The Foocy*, which had its world premiere production at the Lantern in 2005 and earned five Barrymore nominations including Best New Play, and *The Light Princess*, which premiered at Arden Theatre Company and earned eight 2017 Barrymore nominations including Best New Play and two wins. He has also created original adaptations of Shel Silverstein’s *The Devil and Billy Markham* and C.S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*, which he has performed at the Lantern and across the U.S. under the aegis of his Mirror Theatre Company, earning him praise from *Philadelphia City Paper* as the city’s “Best One-Man Theatre.” His acting credits also include film, television, and local productions with Arden Theatre Company, Walnut Street Theatre, The Wilma Theater, 1812 Productions, and the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival.

The design team for *Molly Sweeney* includes scenic designer **Nick Embree** (recent Lantern credits include *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *Hapgood*, and *Copenhagen*), costume designer **Leigh Ivory Clark Paradise** (Lantern debut), lighting designer **Janet Embree** (*Henry V*), and sound designer and composer **Christopher Colucci**, an eight-time Barrymore Award-winner currently working on his 27th Lantern production. **Michael P. Toner** is the dialect coach.

About Lantern Theater Company

Founded in 1994 and now in its 27th season, Lantern Theater Company’s mission is to produce plays that investigate and illuminate what is essential in the human spirit and the spirit of the times. The Lantern serves the Philadelphia region with artistic and educational programming, notably partnering with middle schools and high schools in the Philadelphia School District to provide in-classroom residencies in support of curricular learning. Throughout the Covid-19 health crisis, the Lantern has continued to provide artistic programming on both a free and paid basis, ranging from readings of Shakespeare plays to filmed versions of fully realized theatrical productions, including *Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol* in December 2020.

Following *Molly Sweeney*, the Lantern’s reimagined 2020/21 season will include streaming productions of newly selected plays that can be safely rehearsed, staged, and filmed, as well as filmed plays from the Lantern production archives. Additional details will be announced as events and dates are confirmed. More information about the Lantern is available online at www.lanterntheater.org.

Lantern Theater Company – 2020/21 Season
FACT SHEET
Molly Sweeney

WRITTEN BY:
Brian Friel

DIRECTED BY:
Peter DeLaurier

CAST:
Anthony Lawton as Mr. Rice
Ian Merrill Peakes as Frank Sweeney
Geneviève Perrier as Molly Sweeney

CREATIVE TEAM:
Nick Embree, Scenic Designer
Leigh Ivory Clark Paradise, Costume Designer
Janet Embree, Lighting Designer
Christopher Colucci, Sound Designer & Original Music
Michael P. Toner, Dialect Coach
Rebecca Smith, Associate Producer

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TICKET PRICING:
\$20 per household

STREAMING ON DEMAND:
Friday, January 22 – Sunday, February 14, 2021

PLAY SYNOPSIS for LISTING EDITORS:

In this New York Drama Critics' Circle Award-winning play, Molly Sweeney leads a full and productive life as a woman with blindness. But her husband Frank can never leave well enough alone. His insistence that she undergo a risky surgery to restore her sight has powerful and unintended consequences. Inspired by Oliver Sacks' essay *To See and Not See*, legendary Irish playwright Brian Friel tells this gentle tale from the shifting perspectives of Molly, Frank, and the surgeon who values his skills above his patients.