

Media Contact:

Anne Shuff, Finance & Communications Consultant
ashuff@lanterntheater.org or (215) 829-9002 x111

Download Press Photos:

lanterntheater.org/press

Join the Conversation Online:

#CraftsmanLTC

Lantern Theater Company Announces “Plays from the Lantern Archives” – New Program Launches with a Filmed Version of *The Craftsman* by Bruce Graham, Streaming March 2 – 28, 2021

PHILADELPHIA (February 22, 2020) – **Lantern Theater Company** continues its reimagined 2020/21 season with the announcement of **Plays from the Lantern Archives**, a new program celebrating some of the finest productions from recent seasons brought vividly back to life on screen. Plays from the Lantern Archives will launch with ***The Craftsman*** by celebrated Philadelphia playwright **Bruce Graham**, directed by **M. Craig Getting**, and streaming **March 2 – 28, 2021**. Three plays by **William Shakespeare** will follow, all directed by Artistic Director **Charles McMahon**, including ***Measure for Measure*** (streaming **April 6 – May 2, 2021**), ***The Tempest*** (May 4 – 30, 2021), and ***Coriolanus*** (June 1 – 27, 2021). Tickets and additional information are available online at www.lanterntheater.org. Additional plays and events will be announced throughout the 2020/21 season as they are confirmed.

As with this season's newly conceived filmed productions of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol* and ***Molly Sweeney*** by **Brian Friel**, which is streaming now and **extended through February 28, 2021**, all productions from the Lantern's archives were filmed at St. Stephen's Theater by the Lantern's Emmy Award-winning partners at **Natural Light Films**. While *A Christmas Carol* and *Molly Sweeney* were filmed without audiences due to Covid-19, productions from the Lantern's archives were filmed with audiences present during their original performance runs and have been professionally edited.

Plays from the Lantern Archives will launch with *The Craftsman*, a darkly ironic tale of ambition, genius, and deception by celebrated Philadelphia playwright Bruce Graham, **streaming March 2 – 28, 2021**.

Commissioned and developed through the Lantern's New Works Program, this world premiere production played to sold-out houses throughout its 2017/18 season run and was a smash hit with audiences and theater

critics alike. For *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, **Toby Zinman** wrote: “Graham has given us not only a juicy slice of history, but also plenty of relevance to chew on as we contemplate the world.” Writing for *WHYY News*, **Howard Shapiro** said, “Riveting theater... a stirring world-premiere production from Lantern Theater Company.” *DC Metro Theater Arts*’ **Deb Miller** called *The Craftsman* “a richly layered examination of truth and deception, human motivation and widespread gullibility,” lauding both Graham’s script and the Lantern’s production: “Bruce Graham proves once again that he is a master at observing the human condition and understanding the deep-seated emotions that drive us. And the Lantern’s world-class production proves once again that this is the thinking person’s go-to theater company, delivering Graham’s insightful vision with a superb cast, director, and design team.” Directed by Lantern resident director **M. Craig Getting**, the cast of *The Craftsman* includes **Mary Lee Bednarek, Dan Hodge, Anthony Lawton, Brian McCann, Paul L. Nolan,** and **Ian Merrill Peakes**.

“We are thrilled to bring back *The Craftsman* for a limited streaming run,” said Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon**. “It’s a terrific story, told by a brilliant Philadelphia playwright and featuring an exceptional cast of Philadelphia actors. When we originally created this world premiere production in 2017 after a series of developmental readings, the response from our audience was tremendous. *The Craftsman* was extended as long as possible before the next play in the season had to be produced. The true events in the story came as a real surprise to almost everyone in the audience, and we are gratified to share this opportunity for audiences to revisit Bruce Graham’s great play – or to discover it anew.”

From the ashes of World War II, Dutch patriots discover that one of their own – a rich and reputable art dealer – has sold rare Vermeer paintings to the Nazis. Accused of treason and on trial for his life, he must decide whether to destroy his own reputation or to reveal bigger secrets behind these works that the Dutch consider national treasures. *The Craftsman* uses the strange case of historical figure **Han van Meegeren**, a 20th-century Dutch artist and art dealer, to explore how we define and value art, the reverberations of war into peacetime, and how ethical actions in one world can fail in the next.

Johannes Vermeer was born, lived, and died in Delft during the mid-17th century, and his paintings are considered among the finest of the Dutch Baroque era. His works are beloved for their sublime depiction of light, the richness of his pigmentation, and their focus on the daily lives of the rising merchant class and their domestic servants in Vermeer’s contemporary society. Just 34 of his paintings are known to have survived, and they are concentrated in a few museum collections around the world, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (5), the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (4), the Mauritshuis in The Hague (3), the Frick Collection in New York (3), and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (3 confirmed, a fourth disputed). Vermeer has been the subject of countless biographies and novels, including Tracy Chevalier’s 1999 novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, later made into the 2003 film of the same name directed by Peter Webber and

starring Colin Firth as Vermeer and Scarlett Johansson as his servant who became immortalized in his art. Illusionist Teller of Penn & Teller directed the 2013 documentary *Tim's Vermeer*, produced by Penn Jillette and Farley Ziegler, which focused on inventor Tim Jenison's quest to reproduce Vermeer's *The Music Lesson* to test his theory that Vermeer painted with the help of optical devices.

Three weeks after V-E Day when World War II victory was declared in Europe on May 8, 1945, **Han van Meegeren** was arrested in Amsterdam and charged with treason for having sold a Vermeer painting, considered a Dutch national treasure, to Nazi banker and art dealer Alois Miedl in 1942 – the punishment for which was death. Miedl sold the painting, *Christ with the Adulteress*, directly to German Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring. Before the war, Van Meegeren had been an intermittently successful society portrait painter and art dealer, but his fortunes soared as the Nazis came to power and occupied the Netherlands. When the war ended and with his life at stake, Van Meegeren turned his trial into a very different self-indictment. He died in Amsterdam in 1947.

Inspired by Van Meegeren – and by all who collect art obsessively and value it highly – playwright Bruce Graham has created a fictional Van Meegeren who mesmerizes even while fully displaying his flaws and prejudices. After building a career based on craft and deception, his efforts to reveal the truth fall on deaf ears. At the same time, his jailors and prosecutor – men who fought in the Dutch Resistance during the war – are trying to rebuild their own lives, their careers, and civil society in the Netherlands during a period of scarce resources and moral uncertainty. Each character in *The Craftsman* must come to terms with his or her actions before, during, and after a war that witnessed the atrocities of the Holocaust, the destruction of the continent's economies, and the pillage of European culture.

The Craftsman director **M. Craig Getting** was honored to participate in the development of this commissioned work and approached the play as a jumping-off point to explore the allure of revenge, the problem with cultural gatekeepers, and the lies we accept in search of the truth. During a research trip to the Netherlands in 2016, Getting gained an understanding of how the Amsterdam of *The Craftsman* is a city deeply scarred but on the mend; its citizens have resisted the Nazi occupation, and they are now on the hunt for collaborators and enablers. “I was intrigued by the moral ambiguities embedded in the play – the hate felt by the victors toward the vanquished is calcifying and putting good people at risk of acting unethically now that they have power,” said Getting. “Given that the play hinges on the authenticity of a few Vermeers, the play also asks us to consider how authentic we need something to be, particularly an artwork, for it to be meaningful and valuable.”

“If art holds the mirror up to nature, then *The Craftsman* holds a funhouse mirror up to art,” said Charles McMahon. “Bruce Graham has created a fascinating world where the assumptions we make about the world around us keep shifting until the very notion of authenticity itself may seem like a shallow fiction.”

“To me the play is about overcoming hate,” said playwright **Bruce Graham**. “As I get older I realize that hate can be more corrosive than battery acid.”

Tickets for *The Craftsman* are **\$15 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 *The Craftsman* for one viewing anytime during the March 2 – 28, 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

Bruce Graham is the author of fourteen published plays: thirteen with Dramatists Play Service and one with Samuel French. His plays include *Burkie*, *Early One Evening at the Rainbow Bar & Grille*, *Moon Over the Brewery*, *Minor Demons*, *Belmont Avenue Social Club*, *The Champagne Charlie Stakes*, *Desperate Affection*, *Coyote on a Fence* (winner of The Rosenthal Prize), *According to Goldman*, *Something Intangible* (winner of seven Barrymore Awards, including Outstanding New Play), *Any Given Monday* (Barrymore winner for Outstanding New Play), *The Outgoing Tide* (Joseph Jefferson Award, Best New Play), *Stella and Lou*, *North of the Boulevard*, *White Guy on the Bus*, *Rizzo*, and *Funnyman*. *Fully Accessible* and *The Happy F!@#%G Blind Guy* have been published in Best Ten-Minute Plays of 2013 and 2014. His one-man show *The Philly Fan* plays semi-continuously throughout the Philadelphia area. Graham recently returned to acting, appearing as Ernie in *Rumors*, Eddie in *Lost in Yonkers*, Richard in *Time Stands Still*, Milt in *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, Artie in *Hurlyburly*, and Arthur in *Pterodactyls*. He has received grants from the Pew Foundation, the Princess Grace Foundation (Statuette Award Winner), the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Philadelphia Theatre Initiative. With Michele Volansky, he is the author of the book *The Collaborative Playwright*. A graduate of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Graham teaches film and theater courses at Drexel University and divides his time between South Philadelphia and Elkton, Maryland with his wife Stephanie.

About the Artists

The Craftsman director **M. Craig Getting**'s other credits include Lantern productions of *The Last Match*, *The Heir Apparent*, *An Iliad*, *Oscar Wilde: From the Depths*, *QED*, *Heroes*, and *A Skull in Connemara*. Getting also serves as the Lantern's education director, overseeing the award-winning [Illumination](#) education program and [The Empathy Project](#), the Lantern's pioneering partnership with the Sidney Kimmel Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University. Getting holds a BA in drama from Kenyon College.

Anthony Lawton plays artist, art dealer, and accused traitor Han van Meegeren, fresh from his highly acclaimed performances in *Molly Sweeney* by Brian Friel and in his original adaptation of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*. Lawton's other recent acting credits include Lantern productions of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and *Measure for Measure*. Lawton is well known to Philadelphia audiences for his original works for the stage – including *The Foocycy*, 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 Barrymore nominations 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."

Ian Merrill Peakes plays Dutch military captain Joseph Pillel, a man hardened by war and trying to rebuild his country. A Barrymore and Helen Hayes award-winning actor, Peakes' stage credits include *Molly Sweeney* at the Lantern, as well as 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*.

Additional members of *The Craftsman* cast include **Mary Lee Bednarek** (*The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and *Coriolanus*) as Van Meegeren's wife Johanna; **Dan Hodge** (*Hamlet*) as legal prosecutor Boll; **Brian McCann** (*The Gospel According To...* and *Coriolanus*) as prison guard Augustun, art restorer Rotke, and the Judge; and **Paul L. Nolan** (*Copenhagen*) as distinguished art critic Abraham Bredius.

The design team for *The Craftsman* includes scenic designer **Meghan Jones** (*The Vertical Hour*, *Betrayal*, and *Don't Dress for Dinner*), costume designer **Kayla Speedy** (Lantern debut), lighting designer **Shannon Zura** (*The Vertical Hour* and *Betrayal*), projection designer **Janelle Kauffman** (Lantern debut), and sound designer **Christopher Colucci**, an eight-time Barrymore Award-winner who has worked on 27 Lantern productions, including *Molly Sweeney* and *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*.

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 and *Molly Sweeney* by Brian Friel, which has been extended through February 28, 2021.

Following *The Craftsman*, the Lantern's reimagined 2020/21 season will include *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, and *Coriolanus*, as well as newly filmed plays that can be safely rehearsed, staged, and recorded. 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
The Craftsman

WRITTEN BY:
Bruce Graham

DIRECTED BY:
M. Craig Getting

CAST:
Mary Lee Bednarek as Johanna van Meegeren
Dan Hodge as Boll
Anthony Lawton as Han van Meegeren
Brian McCann as Augustun/Rotke/Judge
Paul L. Nolan as Abraham Bredius
Ian Merrill Peakes as Joseph Pillel

CREATIVE TEAM:
Meghan Jones, Scenic Designer
Kayla Speedy, Costume Designer
Shannon Zura, Lighting Designer
Christopher Colucci, Sound Designer
Janelle Kauffman, Projection Designer
Rebecca Smith, AEA Stage Manager

PRESS INFORMATION:
Anne Shuff, Finance & Communications Consultant
ashuff@lanterntheater.org or (215) 829-9002 x111

TICKET INFORMATION:
Online: www.lanterntheater.org
By Phone: (215) 829-0395

TICKET PRICING:
\$15 per household/device
\$50 for a digital archive pass, including *The Craftsman* and upcoming streams of *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, and *Coriolanus*

STREAMING ON DEMAND:
Tuesday, March 2 – Sunday, March 28, 2021

PLAY SYNOPSIS for LISTING EDITORS:

From the ashes of World War II, Dutch patriots discover that one of their own – a rich and reputable art dealer – has sold rare Vermeer paintings to the Nazis. Accused of treason and on trial for his life, he must decide whether to destroy his own reputation or to reveal bigger secrets behind these works that the Dutch consider national treasures. Commissioned and developed through the Lantern's New Works Program, this new play by celebrated Philadelphia playwright Bruce Graham spins a darkly ironic tale of ambition, genius, and deception. *The Craftsman* is part of Plays from the Lantern Archives, a new program celebrating some of the finest productions from recent Lantern seasons, brought vividly back to life on screen. This world premiere performance was professionally filmed with a live audience in November 2017.