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#PlagueLTC

**Lantern Theater Company Presents the American Premiere of
The Plague, Adapted by British Playwright Neil Bartlett
From the Albert Camus Novel**

***Professionally Filmed Digital Production Premieres Today and
Streams on Demand Through November 7, 2021***

PHILADELPHIA (October 7, 2021) – **Lantern Theater Company** is thrilled to continue its Fall 2021 Digital Season with an American premiere digital production of ***The Plague***, furthering the company's mission to engage audiences with plays that investigate and illuminate what is essential in the human spirit and the spirit of the times. Infection, quarantine, panic, and closed borders are invoked in **Neil Bartlett's** sharp adaptation of **Albert Camus'** masterful 1947 novel *La Peste*, originally written following World War II to serve as a political warning to future generations about fascism. Directed by Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahan** and featuring Philadelphia actors **Kirk Wendell Brown, Peter DeLaurier, J Hernandez, Anthony Lawton,** and **Amanda Schoonover**, *The Plague* premieres today and streams on demand through November 7, 2021. Tickets and information are available online at **www.lanterntheater.org**.

Using only text from Camus' classic novel, Bartlett's adaptation premiered in 2017 at London's Arcola Theatre and was hailed by *The Guardian* theater critic Michael Billington as "an ingenious update of Camus' chilling fable... Neil Bartlett reminds us that anything is possible in the theatre." Writing for the *Evening Standard*, Fiona Mountford called Bartlett's adaptation "Camus made chilling and contemporary... haunting and powerful."

The story of *The Plague* follows five characters – a local doctor, an investigative journalist, an activist, a local government employee, and a black marketeer – as they detail their experiences before an investigative committee, from the first discovery of a dead rat in the city to the closing of the city gates to quarantine. After

nine months, the painstaking development, trial, and distribution of “the serum” that can help the infected recover leads to the reopening of the gates and the end of the plague. However, the eradication of the plague is not an untainted victory. The doctor concludes the play by saying, “Joy is always under threat... the plague bacillus never actually dies. I think the best way of getting to know a town is to say how people work there, how they love each other, and how they die.” *The Plague* asks how a society holds together in extreme conditions – whether caused by politics, health crises, or social change – and shows us how it requires a million individual choices and acts of conscience, often known only to ourselves.

“I was moved by the insight, stylistic originality, and timeliness of Neil Bartlett’s adaptation, and producing *The Plague* during a worldwide pandemic when the Lantern is closed to in-person audiences could not be timelier,” said Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon**, who also helms the Lantern’s filmed production. “Camus’ *La Peste* has often been interpreted as an allegory for the wave of fascism that swept over Europe in the lead-up to World War II. While it certainly works in that context, the novel’s direct story – that of an outbreak of plague in the Algerian city of Oran – stands on its own as a work of great insight into how a catastrophe affects the psyche of a people. Written in an austere style, Camus’ novel seeks to create a feel of objective reporting. We watch as a city in quarantine slowly comes unglued under the social and psychological pressures of the outbreak and the lockdown. Before long, the situation begins to reveal the character of the city. At first it is weak, vain, materialistic, and unprepared.”

“The outbreak is an unimaginable event for such a society,” McMahon continued, “and despite the evidence, it takes weeks before people are able to accept what is happening. Institutions are slow to respond. Experts disagree about exactly what is going on, and authorities are paralyzed precisely when they need to be decisive. The various ways in which people respond to the plague in the story – both immediately and over time – have become heartbreakingly familiar and recognizable over the past year and a half in the real world. For those of us who tell stories for a living, the most urgent question is: ‘How can we make those stories as meaningful as we can for the people in our communities?’ I hope that in our own way we are bearing a faithful witness to the experience of our own times.”

Lantern Theater Company will further explore the themes of *The Plague* on its **Lantern Searchlight blog**, available online at lanterntheater.org/searchlight. Published articles will delve into plague as a metaphor for political movements, parallels in historical plagues, Camus and the plague of fascism, and post-World War II Paris, plus behind the scenes interviews with the artists and much more. New content will be added throughout *The Plague*’s streaming run.

Tickets for *The Plague* are **\$20 per household/device** and are available online at www.lanterntheater.org or by calling the Lantern Box Office at **(215) 829-0395**. Closed captioning is available. Ticket buyers will receive

an email confirmation with a private ticket access link, which will provide on-demand access to *The Plague* for one viewing during the October 7 – November 7, 2021 streaming period. The production 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. A **Digital Fall Pass is also available for \$35**, which includes one ticket for *The Plague* and *Me and the Devil* (streaming now through October 17, 2021).

About the Artists

The Plague director **Charles McMahon** co-founded Lantern Theater Company in 1994 and serves as artistic director in addition to directing, writing, and acting for the company. McMahon has directed all but one of the Lantern's annual Shakespeare productions, including recent productions of *Othello* (shuttered after one preview performance in March 2020 due to Covid-19), *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, and *Coriolanus*. Other Lantern directing credits include *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry V*, *New Jerusalem*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *La Ronde* (also translator and adapter), *Richard III*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *King Lear*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, and *A Doll's House*. Recent acting credits include reprising the role of Heisenberg in *Copenhagen*, and writing credits include *Oscar Wilde: From the Depths* and co-creating an original adaptation of Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales*.

Kirk Wendell Brown takes on the role of Grand, a government employee. Brown's stage credits at the Lantern include *Measure for Measure*, *Hapgood*, *Coriolanus*, *As You Like It*, and *The Train Driver*. He has also appeared on local stages at the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, Arden Theatre Company, People's Light, Walnut Street Theatre, InterAct Theatre Company, The Wilma Theater, and Delaware Shakespeare.

Peter DeLaurier plays local activist Jean Tarrow. Celebrating 53 years in professional theater in 2021, DeLaurier has appeared at the Lantern in numerous productions including *The Tempest*, *Underneath the Lintel*, *Skylight*, *QED*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Emma*, *Heroes*, *The Train Driver*, and *An Iliad*. Also an award-winning playwright and director, DeLaurier has directed Lantern productions of *Molly Sweeney*, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, *The Island*, *Vigil*, *36 Views*, *Red Velvet*, and *Hapgood*. He will direct *A Man for All Seasons* in the Lantern's upcoming 2021/22 mainstage season.

J Hernandez plays Raymond Rambert, an investigative journalist. *The Plague* marks J's fourth production with the Lantern, including *The Tempest*, *As You Like It*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Other local credits include productions with Philadelphia Theatre Company, Arden Theatre Company, InterAct Theatre Company, Philadelphia Artists' Collective, and Shakespeare in Clark Park.

Anthony Lawton takes on the role of Dr. Rieux, the local doctor. Lawton's recent Lantern credits include *Molly Sweeney*, his original adaptation of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*, and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. Lawton is well known to Philadelphia audiences for his original works for the stage – including *The Foocy*, which had its world premiere at the Lantern in 2005, and *The Light Princess*, which premiered at Arden Theatre Company in 2017. His original adaptations of works by C.S. Lewis, Shel Silverstein, and others have earned him praise from *Philadelphia City Paper* as the city's "Best One-Man Theatre."

Amanda Schoonover takes on the role of black marketeer Cottard. She previously appeared at the Lantern alongside Peter DeLaurier in *QED*. In addition to her longtime theater career in Philadelphia, she is best known for her role as the waitress on AMC's *Dispatches From Elsewhere*.

The design team for *The Plague* includes scenic designer **James F. Pyne, Jr.** (recent Lantern credits include *Othello* and the now-streaming *Me and the Devil*), costume designer **Leigh Ivory Clark Paradise** (*Molly Sweeney*), lighting designer **Shon Causer** (*Me and the Devil*, *The Gospel According To...*, and many others), and sound designer and composer **Christopher Colucci** (co-creator of the Lantern's original adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* and sound designer for *Molly Sweeney*, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, and many others). Lantern Production Management Fellow **Isabella Gill-Gomez** served as the associate lighting designer, Lantern Artistic Associate **Hannah Spear** as assistant director, and longtime Lantern Stage Manager **Rebecca Smith** was the associate producer.

About Lantern Theater Company

Founded in 1994 and now in its 28th 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, including readings of Shakespeare plays in spring 2020; filmed versions of fully realized theatrical productions of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol* in December 2020 and *Molly Sweeney* by Brian Friel in January-March 2021; and this spring's Plays from the Lantern Archives series, which included professionally filmed and edited versions of its 2017 world premiere production of *The Craftsman* by Bruce Graham and three recent Shakespeare productions: *Measure for Measure* (2019), *The Tempest* (2018), and *Coriolanus* (2017).

In addition to *The Plague*, the Lantern's Fall 2021 Digital Season continues with the world premiere digital production of *Me and the Devil*, co-written and directed by Steve H. Broadnax III and streaming on demand now through October 17, 2021. In its recently announced 2021/22 Mainstage Season, the Lantern will return to

live performance in December 2021 with its original adaptation of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*, co-created by theater artists Anthony Lawton, Christopher Colucci, and Thom Weaver, followed by the Philadelphia premiere of two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner Lynn Nottage's satirical *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine*, the Philadelphia professional premiere of Robert Bolt's award-winning classic *A Man for All Seasons*, Tom Stoppard's Tony Award-winning comic masterpiece *Travesties*, and a fourth play to be announced soon.

More information about the Lantern is available online at www.lanterntheater.org.

Lantern Theater Company – Fall 2021 Digital Season
FACT SHEET
The Plague

WRITTEN BY:

American Premiere by Neil Bartlett
Adapted from *La Peste* by Albert Camus

DIRECTED BY:

Charles McMahon

CAST:

Kirk Wendell Brown as Grand
Peter DeLaurier as Jean Tarrou
J Hernandez as Raymond Rambert
Anthony Lawton as Dr. Rieux
Amanda Schoonover as Cottard

CREATIVE TEAM:

James F. Pyne, Jr., Scenic Designer
Leigh Ivory Clark Paradise, Costume Designer
Shon Causer, Lighting Designer
Christopher Colucci, Sound Designer & Original Music
Isabella Gill-Gomez, Associate Lighting Designer
Hannah Spear, Assistant Director
Rebecca Smith, Associate Producer

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TICKET INFORMATION:

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

TICKET PRICING:

\$20 per household/device
\$35 Digital Fall Pass, which includes access to *The Plague* and *Me and the Devil*
Closed captioning is available for all streaming productions

STREAMING ON DEMAND:

Thursday, October 7 – Sunday, November 7, 2021

PLAY SYNOPSIS for LISTING EDITORS:

Infection, quarantine, panic, and closed borders are invoked in this sharp adaptation of Camus' masterful novel *La Peste*, originally written following World War II to serve as a political warning to future generations about fascism. Bartlett's compelling drama is all the more startling for how contemporary and timeless the action plays out on the stage: "*How would I react if the plague came for me?*"