

## **NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE**

*For Immediate Release*

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### **AMERICAN PREMIERE**

#### ***Sex Diary of an Infidel***

***Covert Sex Trade, Lascivious Tourist Exchange, Unfolding Secrets***

January, 31, 2006; St. Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announces the opening of *Sex Diary of an Infidel* written by Michael Gurr, and directed by Ching Valdes-Aran, on February 10, 2006. Penumbra's production hails as the U.S. premiere for this award-winning Australian play.

In this intriguing drama, Gurr elegantly investigates levels of human intimacy by playing on the limits of cultural and carnal boundary. Jean, an Australian journalist, and Martin, a photographer, are traveling to follow a lead into a covert sex trade. The characters, closed and remote as islands themselves, illuminate a lascivious tourist exchange between Australia and the Philippines. Clandestine relationships, parasitic and murky, mirror the greater political arena. "Sex Diary" delves into the space between reality and fantasy, exploding human perceptions of difference. The dramatic unfolding of secrets reveal that no one is what they seem, and in the end, what each has in common is the thing they most fear.

First performed in Melbourne in 1992, *Sex Diary of an Infidel* has since toured Australia and is the recipient of several awards including the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Drama, New South Wales Literary Award for Drama, and 8 Green Room Awards, including Best Play. Commenting on the play today, playwright Michael Gurr says, "Time does mysterious things to plays. Now, the sex tour metaphor for Western exploitation seems more to the fore, and transsexual Toni's [character] choices more politically resonant."

Penumbra has always been a pioneer in pushing the envelope both artistically and thematically, garnering a national reputation with audiences and funders as an artistically courageous organization. Penumbra is thrilled to bring this provocative new work to the region, producing it under the finest artistic standards, and as always, from within the African American experience. Penumbra's mission is committed to creating a forum where artists and audiences may share a rigorous engagement with one another as they tackle complicated questions.

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Penumbra Theatre founder and artistic director, Lou Bellamy says, “This show brings the conversation to a level frankly not possible anywhere else. This is the very essence of what it means to find human commonality, cultural connection and sustenance outside and in spite of the pillars of oppression.”

Gurr has written a powerful play that explores the intrigue, beauty, and darkness of desire, need, and desperation as human connection becomes confused with political game. Valdes-Aran infuses the production with her bold imagery and a charged physicality that creates a palpable, tension filled energy that arouses the senses, arrests the breath, and exposes a complex web of truth and lies. Contemporary, edgy, vibrant and sexy, this production is performed by a dynamic ensemble featuring artists from the Twin Cities, and guest artists from New York. This amazing cast stars: Alexis Camins, Laura Esping, Casey Greig, Phil Kilbourne, Sam L. Landman, and Carolyn Pool. This long awaited mid-west premiere promises to provoke, engage, and inspire with its intriguing and bold look at topics of immediate relevance for today’s world.

#### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS:**

**MICHAEL GURR** (Playwright) is an award winning playwright from Australia. Plays include *Underwear*, *Perfume and Crash Helmet*, *The Hundred Year Ambush* and *DesireLines*. In 2003 he compiled *Something to Declare* for Actors for Refugees which has been performed more than a hundred times throughout Australia. Gurr’s plays have been produced Australia-wide and on ABC and BBC radio. He has written screenplays, including *Departure* and *Emmett Stone*, poetry, political commentary and speeches for the Australian Labor Party. He has directed for the National Theatre Drama School, Victorian College of the Arts, St. Martins and La Mama. He has taught acting Master Classes extensively. He is currently working on a commission for Melbourne’s Red Stitch Theatre and writing *Days Like These*, a diary on theatre and politics for Melbourne University Publishing.

**CHING VALDES-ARAN** (Director) is also an adaptor, choreographer, and an OBIE award winning actress. She was a resident director at La Mama E.T.C. from 1989-1996. This is her second production at Penumbra Theatre. She directed *Slippery When Wet* in Penumbra’s 2005-2006 Season. Other directing credits include: Ma-Yi Theatre, Immigrant Theatre Vineyard S.P.A.C.E, Public Theater Wake-Up Festival, Ohio Theater Tweed Festival, among others. Acting leading roles include: Lady Macbeth (Broadway) Bernarda Alba (NAATCO), Empress of China (Cincinnati Playhouse), Medea (Pan-Asian Rep), Clytemnestra (Yale Rep), Mother Courage (Ma-Yi), Philoktetes (Berlin), to name a few. Her work has been seen internationally in France, Italy, Greece, Germany, Scotland, and Southeast Asia. Ms. Valdes-Aran was honored with a 2004 Fox Fellowship from the William & Eva Fox Foundation and the 2004 Charles Bowden Award from New Dramatist. Other Awards include: The Spenser Cherashore Award, Asian Cultural Council Artist Fellow, and MAP Rockefeller Grant. Upcoming T.V. and film releases include *Across the Universe* by Julie Taymor, *Filthy Gorgeous* on Showtime, and *Feel* by Matt Mahurin.

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**JULIE MCGARVIE** (Assistant Director) is a multidisciplinary theatre artist who writes, directs, and performs. Recent original collaboration credits include *Surface*, an interdisciplinary performance piece, and *Migration*, a dance, video, and music performance. Other directing credits include *Skriker* by Caryl Churchill, *When We Dead Awaken* by Henrik Ibsen, *Rockabye* by Samuel Beckett, *Talk to Me Like the Rain* by Tennessee Williams, and *I See* by Julie McGarvie, Don Mabley-Allen and Shundreya Robinson. Julie received her MFA in directing from the University of Minnesota. She has worked in the development of an interdisciplinary art degree program at the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities, teaches acting and audition workshops, and is the Marketing Director at Penumbra. She is currently working on a video installation piece with her artistic collaborator Ryan Philippi, scheduled to premiere at CalArts, 2007.

**ALEXIS CAMINS** (Toni) New York credits include: *To the Colored American Soldier* at Studio Tisch, *Zen Junior High* at HERE Arts Center, *Eyes of the Heart* and *Antigone* at National Asian American Theater Company, and *Vincent* in the NY Fringe Festival. Regional credits include: *Yemaya's Belly* at Portland Stage Company, *In the Darkness*, *Joy of Having a Body* at the Guthrie Lab, *The New Americans* at NYSAF, *Saint Joan* at Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum. Film/TV credits include: *The Order of the Serpentine*, Spike TV, short film *The Concoction*, and videogame *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. Alexis received his MFA at NYU Grad Acting. As a playwright, two of his plays have been produced; *Everything* at Desipina and Co. and *To the Colored American Soldier* at Studio Tisch. His play *Family Lies* was recently presented in Theater Mu's New Eyes Festival.

**LAURA ESPING** (Laura) has worked at many area theatres including At the Foot of the Mountain, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask, Theatre de la Jeune Lune, the Jungle Theater, Pillsbury House Theatre, and the Guthrie Theater. She was last seen in *Far Away* at Pillsbury House, playing Portia in MN Shakespeare Theatre's *Merchant of Venice*, and in the *Christmas Carol* at the Guthrie. She holds a BA from the University of Iowa and an MFA from the University of Minnesota.

**CASEY GRIEG** (Tony) was most recently seen in *American Sublime* at Gallery Atitlan, *Iphigenia* for Ten Thousand Things, and *Romeo and Juliet* at the Guthrie Theater. Casey has also performed at the Jungle Theater, Eye of the Storm, Illusion Theatre, and in the world premiere of *Good Boys* by Jane Martin at the Guthrie Lab. He was named City Pages Best Actor in the Twin Cities 2002.

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**PHIL KILBOURNE** (Max) has appeared on the Penumbra stage in *Dinah Was*, as well as *Black Eagles*. His last show was at the Jungle Theatre, *Bone Dry*. He also appeared at the Jungle in *Hapgood*, *Perfect Crime* and *The Dazzle*, for which he was named Best Actor by the City Pages *Best of the Twin Cities 2005*. He also appeared as Oppenheimer in *The Love Song of J. Robert Oppenheimer* at Frank Theatre, and in *String Fever* for Playwrights Platform. For the past nine years Phil has been involved with the theatre-based training company *Theatre at Work, Inc.* His latest project for them was directing *None of Our Business* for Twin Cities Public Television and Verizon Wireless. Phil has a BFA in Acting from Boston University and an MFA in Directing from The Ohio State University.

**SAM L. LANDMAN** (Martin) recently appeared in *A Closer Walk With Patsy Cline* for Troupe America, a repertory version of *Hamlet / Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* for Theatre Pro Rata and *An Empty Plate At the Café Du Grande Boeuf* for Girl Friday. He was also in *Fire Ball* at the History Theater, Press. His next role will be in *Guys On Ice: The Wisconsin Ice-Fishing Musical* for Troupe America at Grand Casino.

**CAROLYN POOL** (Jean) is a Minneapolis based actor whose work has been seen all over the country. Recent work includes Dorothy in *That's Mr. Benchley to You, Mrs. Parker* for Joking Apart Theater, Eddi in *Bone Dry* and Claudia in *Honour* at the Jungle Theater, Stella in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (an AEA Showcase) Catherine in *Proof* at Park Square, Zanoia in *Mercy of a Storm* at Florida Stage and the Illusion Theater, Carol in Craig Wright's adaptation of *Main Street* at the Great American History Theater, and on occasional Mondays, she can be seen in *Thirst* at Joe's Garage. Carolyn also stars as Valerie in the short film *A Specialist in His Field* which has been an audience favorite at film festivals across the United States.

**LOY ARCENAS** (Scene Design) Broadway credits include: *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, *Once on this Island*, *Prelude to a Kiss*, *High Society*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Night of the Iguana*. Regional credits include set design for American Conservatory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Arena Stage, Berkeley Rep, Goodman Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Laguna Playhouse, Mark Taper Forum, Seattle Rep, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Shakespeare Theatre. Directing credits include Warren Leight's *No Foreigners Beyond This Point*, *The Romance of Magno Rubio* (Obie Award), *Flipzoids*, *Middlefinger*, *Watcher*. Mr. Arcenas has received several awards which include an Obie Award for sustained excellence of Set Design, LA Critics Circle Award, and the Jeff Award. He's from the Philippines.

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**CZERTON LIM** (Associate Scene Design) is completing his MFA degree in scene design at University of Washington School of Drama. He recently assisted Loy Arcenas in *No Foreigners Beyond This Point* for Ma-Yi Theatre Company and assisted designers for Seattle Opera and Utah Shakespearean Festival. Past design credits include *Mother Courage and Her Children Execution of Justice*, *Macbeth*, and *Panophobia* for UW School of Drama, an African-American production of *The Glass Menagerie* for Ethnic Cultural Theatre, and *Boom Town* for Essential Theatre. Mr. Lim received the 2004 Marvin Sims Design Fellowship for The KCACTF Summer Intensives with Ming Cho Lee at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

**MARK DOUGHERTY** (Light Design) Penumbra designs include: *On the Open Road*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Two Trains Running*, *King Hedley II*, *Dinah Was*, and *Slippery When Wet*. Mark has also designed at Theatre L' Homme Dieu, Guthrie Theatre 'Lab', and The Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, WI. He is a graduate of St. Cloud State University.

**ALEXANDRA GOULD** (Costume Design) has been working as a costume designer in Minnesota and Wisconsin for the past four years. For two and a half seasons she ran the costume department for St. Croix Festival Theater, where she also designed the shows. In addition to designing for Penumbra, she has also designed for Theater Unbound, The Paul Bunyan Playhouse, and Gustavus Adolphus College.

**MALO** (Sound Design) is the creative force behind the critically acclaimed group Tribe of Millions. The band has played to packed houses across the country, won several awards, and were featured artists on VH-1. Malo has also played with Me'Shell Ndegeocello, The Black Crows, Soul Asylum, Chaka Khan, and has worked with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. In addition to performing, Malo has also scored films including *Street Guns* and *The Visionary*, and commercials for Target Market, Target, Marshall Field's, Mervyn's, African American Adoption Agency, and Dunwoody Institute. Theater work includes Djola Branner's *Mighty Real*, *A Slow Ride on the Big Muddy*, *Straight as a Line* at the Hennepin Center for Performing Arts, *Dinah Was*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Two Trains Running*, *Seven Guitars*, and *King Hedley II* at Penumbra Theatre.

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## *Quick Reference*

<b>Production:</b>	<b>Sex Diary of an Infidel</b>
<b>Artists:</b>	<b>Michael Gurr</b> (Playwright) <b>Ching Valdes-Aran</b> (Director) <b>Julie McGarvie</b> (Assistant Director) <b>Lou Bellamy</b> (Producer)  <b>Ensemble:</b> <b>Alexis Camins</b> (Toni), <b>Laura Esping</b> (Laura), <b>Casey Greig</b> (Tony), <b>Phil Kilbourne</b> (Max), <b>Sam L. Landman</b> (Martin), and <b>Carolyn Pool</b> (Jean).  <b>Design team:</b> <b>Alexandra Gould</b> (Costumes), <b>Loy Arcenas</b> (Set), <b>Czerton Lim</b> (Associate Set), <b>Mark Dougherty</b> (Lighting), <b>MALO</b> (Sound)
<b>Dates:</b>	<b>February 8 &amp; 9</b> (previews) <b>February 10</b> (opening) <b>February 10 – March 5</b> (run) <b>March 5</b> (closing)
<b>Performances:</b>	Wednesdays at 10:00 am Thursdays at 7:30 pm Fridays at 8:00 pm Saturdays at 2:00 and 8:00 pm Sundays at 2:00 and 7:30 pm
<b>Tickets:</b>	\$32 Discounts available for students, seniors & groups Call Penumbra Theatre Box Office at 651-224-3180 Or purchase online at <a href="http://www.penumbratheatre.org">www.penumbratheatre.org</a>
<b>Theatre Location:</b>	Penumbra Theatre 270 North Kent Street St. Paul, MN 55102
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