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WHAT MAKES A PRESIDENT GREAT? TONY AWARD-WINNER JOHN RUBINSTEIN CHANNELS PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER IN CRITICALLY-ACCLAIMED SOLO PERFORMANCE

***Eisenhower: This Piece of Ground* opens Olney Theatre Center's 86th season in the Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab**

(Olney, MD – August 27, 2024) – This election season, **Tony Award-winner John Rubinstein** (*Pippin, Children of a Lesser God*) will play a **four-week special engagement at Olney Theatre Center as President Dwight D. Eisenhower in *Eisenhower: This Piece of Ground***, a new American play by **Richard Hellesen** and directed by **Peter Ellenstein**. Following an acclaimed Off-Broadway run last year that included an **Outer Circle Critics Award Nomination**, The New Los Angeles Repertory Company (Peter Ellenstein, Producing Artistic Director) production comes to Olney Theatre Center's Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab **September 27 - October 20, 2024**. Tickets are on sale via Olney Theatre Center's Box Office (301-924-3400) and at olneytheatre.org/eisenhower

Press is invited to attend a special VIP performance on Saturday, September 28 at 8:00 pm and may request tickets by emailing sstraub@olneytheatre.org. Because of the size of the theatre, some press may be asked to attend an alternate performance on Sunday, September 29 at 1:30 pm. Production photos are available [here](#) with the password 'press'

Adapted from a vast array of General Eisenhower's memoirs, speeches, and letters, *Eisenhower: This Piece of Ground* is a candid and fascinating fictional eavesdropping on President Dwight D. Eisenhower at his Gettysburg, Pennsylvania farm. **It is 1962, and the *New York Times Magazine* has published its first list ranking the American Presidents in order of greatness. Pondering his poor placement on the list (22nd out of 31), Eisenhower looks back on his life** - his Kansas upbringing, his decorated Army career, his victories in World War II, and his two terms as President – and contemplates the qualities and adversities that make an American President great.

"Every artistic director I know (especially in the DMV) feels a special responsibility when selecting the fall show in a Presidential election year" says **Jason Loewith**, Olney Theatre's Artistic Director. "When Peter Ellenstein first pitched me the show, I was skeptical that it would strike the right tone for our season. But looking more closely, I realized that Eisenhower's ability to transcend party and ego in service to the country makes him a great figure to examine at this polarized, politicized moment. He's a war hero who warned about the dangers of the

military-industrial complex, a fiscal conservative who built highways and expanded social security, and a Republican who signed Civil Rights legislation and ordered the National Guard to enforce desegregation. **I don't know if I would have voted for him in 1952 or 1956, but in 2024, it's refreshing to spend time with him in John's extraordinary portrayal.**"

Director **Peter Ellenstein** went on a similar journey. "I knew almost nothing about Eisenhower except that he was in charge of World War II and was President during the 'Leave it to Beaver' years. **My image of Ike was a somewhat kindly, stodgy, conservative figurehead. But after reading some of his speeches, I discovered that he really was one of the most fascinating and important people in American history.** His life and career were packed with so many world-altering events. Richard Hellesten, has crawled inside Ike's skin to fashion this remarkable play that tells Eisenhower's story and speaks with profound hope to our own times. In John Rubinstein, we are so fortunate to have found an actor who could interpret the complexity of Ike's intellect, judgment, scope, humor, and humanity."

"With such division in the country today, **I wanted to go back in our history and look at an individual who led with faith and optimism during a very crucial time,**" says playwright Richard Hellesten. "Despite the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the start of the Civil Rights movement, Eisenhower believed in Democracy. On our stage, Eisenhower says 'some days it feels like democracy is going to have a hell of a time persevering. But this piece of ground, that we all share...if we're going to leave our young people something better, then we just can't be complacent. ...We have to keep choosing the harder right instead of the easier wrong. Never be content with half-truth when the whole truth can be ours.'"

A special discussion with Ellenstein, Hellesten, and Loewith will take place prior to the opening night performance on Saturday, September 28 at 5:00 pm in the Multz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab. The event is \$10/free for Olney Theatre Center members and will also be livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube.

Developed by New Los Angeles Repertory Company, *Eisenhower: This Piece of Ground* was first presented in fall 2022 in Los Angeles by Theatre West in association with New Los Angeles Repertory Company.

Eisenhower: This Piece of Ground features a scenic design by Michael Deegan; costume consultation by Sarah Conly; lighting design by Esquire Jauchem; and projection and sound design by Joe Huppert.

JOHN RUBINSTEIN (Dwight D. Eisenhower) originated the title role in the Broadway musical *Pippin*, directed by Bob Fosse, and won the Tony and Drama Desk Awards for his performance in *Children of a Lesser God*. Other Broadway appearances include *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Ragtime*, *Hurlyburly*, *M. Butterfly*, *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial* (Drama Desk nomination), *Getting Away with Murder*, *Fools*, *Love Letters*, and the 2013 *Pippin* revival. He appeared off-Broadway in *Counsellor-at-Law* (2005 Lucille Lortel Award, Outer Critics' Circle and Drama League nominations), *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Urban Blight*,

Cabaret Verboten, and *Morning's at Seven*. Regionally: *Wicked* in LA, and the international tour of the *Pippin* revival. He starred in the TV series, "Family" (Emmy nomination), and "Crazy Like A Fox", and over 300 episodes. Films include "Being the Ricardo's", "Hello, I Must Be Going", "21 Grams", "Red Dragon", "The Boys from Brazil", "Someone to Watch Over Me", "Daniel, Zachariah," and "Getting Straight". He directed the world premiere of A. R. Gurney's *The Old Boy*, and *Counsellor-at-Law*, *Company*, *Brigadoon*, *Macbeth*, *The Three Sisters*, *Phantasie*, *Nightingale*, *The Rivals*, *A Little Night Music*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Into The Woods*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, and *The Rover*. He composes film and TV music ("Jeremiah Johnson", "The Candidate", "The Dollmaker", "China Beach", among others), hosted two classical music radio programs, played keyboards in a rock band, and has recorded over 200 audiobooks, most numerous Jonathan Kellerman's Alex Delaware series of Los Angeles crime novels. He is married to Bonnie Burgess, and their son Max is the youngest of his five children, joining Jessica, Michael, Peter, and Jacob.

RICHARD HELLESEN (Playwright) is the author of numerous plays and musicals for adult and young audiences. His work has been seen at the Denver Center, South Coast Repertory, Los Angeles Repertory Company, Sacramento Theatre Company, Geva, Florida Stage, Gretna Theatre, Sundance Children's Theatre, Imagination Stage, People's Light & Theatre, City Theatre in Miami, B Street Theatre, and Ford's Theatre in Washington DC, where he is an Associate Artist. He has received playwriting awards from the National Theatre Conference, the Beverly Hills Theatre Guild, the Philadelphia Festival Theatre for New Plays, and PEN USA-West; his two-dozen short plays include five finalists for the Actors Theatre of Louisville Heideman Award. A member of the Dramatists Guild, he has twice been Playwright-in-Residence at the William Inge Center for the Arts in Kansas.

PETER ELLENSTEIN (Director) is Producing Artistic Director of the New Los Angeles Repertory Company. He is a multi-award-winning director, producer, new play midwife, and educator, whose work has been seen all over the country. For thirteen years, Peter was Artistic Director of the William Inge Center for the Arts in Kansas where he created many innovative playwright development programs such as the William Inge Home Playwright Residencies, partnerships with leading national arts organizations (Martha Graham Company, Cornerstone Theater) and rural arts and education partnerships.. He served seven years as Producing Director of the original Los Angeles Repertory Company, for whom he directed the LA Premiere of *Assassins*, *Odets' Rocket to the Moon*, and many other acclaimed productions. Peter served as Interim Artistic Director of both the Gretna Theatre in Pennsylvania, and the Jerry Herman Ring Theatre at the University of Miami in Florida. Peter has been a consultant, board member, panelist and site visitor for many institutions including the National Endowment for the Arts, California Arts Council, Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) and KCACTF. Peter directed a nationally prominent streaming version of Richard Helleesen's *Necessary Sacrifices*. He has a decades long artistic relationship with Richard Helleesen and has directed the premieres of many of Richard Helleesen's plays. Peter comes from a theatre family, his father was noted actor/director Robert Ellenstein and his brother David is longtime Artistic Director of North Coast Rep and current interim Artistic Director of Laguna Playhouse.

PRODUCTION DETAILS

The New Los Angeles Repertory Company production of
Eisenhower: This Piece of Ground
by Richard Hellensen
directed by Peter Ellenstein

DATES, LOCATION, TICKETS

September 27 - October 20, 2024
Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab
Olney Theatre Center
2001 Olney-Sandy Spring Road
Olney, MD 20832
Tickets: \$45 - \$95 available at 301-924-3400 or olneytheatre.org/ike

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Wednesday - Saturday evenings at 7:30 pm
Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday matinees at 1:30 pm

ACCESSIBILITY

Audio Described performance on Wednesday, October 9 at 7:30 pm
ASL Interpreted performance on Thursday, October 10 at 7:30 pm

RELATED EVENTS:

BEHIND THE SCENES: Opening Night Conversation

Saturday, September 28, 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm
Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab
\$10/free for Olney Theatre Center Members
Livestreamed on Olney Theatre's Facebook and YouTube pages
Olney Theatre's Artistic Director is joined by *Eisenhower* playwright Richard Hellenson and director Peter Ellenstein to discuss the process of bringing a towering figure of the 20th Century to the stage.

BEYOND THE STAGE

In conversation with Tony Award winner John Rubinstein

Sunday, October 6th, 3:30 - 4:30 p.m.
Mulitz-Gudelsky Lab Theatre
\$10

OLNEY THEATRE CENTER BOOK CLUB

Book Club

Title: "Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World"
By Evan Thomas
Discussion Date: October 8, 2024 at 6:00 pm

Location: Olney Library 3500 Olney Laytonsville Rd, Olney, MD 20832
Free with RSVP to attend the discussion.

Evan Thomas's startling account of how the underrated Dwight Eisenhower saved the world from nuclear holocaust. Upon assuming the presidency in 1953, Dwight Eisenhower set about to make good on his campaign promise to end the Korean War. Yet while Eisenhower was quickly viewed by many as a doddering lightweight, behind the bland smile and simple speech was a master tactician. To end the hostilities, Eisenhower would take a colossal risk by bluffing that he might use nuclear weapons against the Communist Chinese, while at the same time restraining his generals and advisors who favored the strikes. Ike's gamble was of such magnitude that there could be but two outcomes: thousands of lives saved, or millions of lives lost.

Published 2012 by Little, Brown & Company. 484 pages

Where can I find the book?

You can purchase a copy through [Friends of the Library's](#) store on bookshop.org. A substantial portion of each sale benefits Friends of the Library Montgomery County in support of Montgomery County Public Libraries. There are also three copies available in the [MCPL system](#), along with the e-book and Audio Book.

ABOUT THE NEW LOS ANGELES REPERTORY COMPANY

THE NEW LOS ANGELES REPERTORY COMPANY (Producer) is inspired by the vision of the original co-founder and Artistic Director, Robert Ellenstein, who received career achievement awards from the LA Weekly and the Company of Angels for his lifetime of contributions to the theatre. The original Los Angeles Repertory Company was founded in 1966. It strove to bring theatrical experience to its highest form. Until it paused operations in 2006, LA Rep maintained a credo that the quality of the work should take precedence over all other considerations. In concentrating on quality rather than quantity, the Rep built a steady following of avid theatre-lovers. Over 40 years, the original LA Rep produced a wide variety of plays, new and old, including the professional L.A. premiere of George Bernard Shaw's magnum opus *Back to Methuselah*, multiple productions of an award-winning six-actor *Hamlet*, the L.A. premiere of Stephen Sondheim & John Weidman's *Assassins*, the West Coast Premiere of Martin Sherman's *Messiah* and Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, as well as Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Shaw's *Misalliance*, Odets' *Rocket to the Moon*, and Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, all of which garnered tremendous critical praise and numerous awards.

ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER

Mission

Olney Theatre Center for the Arts produces and curates theatrical performance for the diverse audiences in our community, and educates, learns from, supports, and inspires a more inclusive generation of theater-makers.

Vision

We strive to become an arts and culture powerhouse, redefining the American regional theater movement by cultivating and sharing the creativity of our community.

History

Founded in 1938 as a summer playhouse, Olney Theatre Center now produces world and American premieres of plays and musicals and reimaginings of familiar titles year-round; presents the work of leading companies and artists; tours nationally and locally; teaches students of all ages; and mentors a more inclusive generation of theatremakers. For more than eight decades, Olney Theatre Center has brought impactful theater performance and education to our community, helping to grow the vibrancy and vitality of our home in the Washington, DC, region.

Over the years, some of the biggest names in theater and film have appeared on our stages, including Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Bob Fosse, Phillip Bosco, Eve Arden, Eva Gabor, Burl Ives, Jose Ferrer, Carol Channing, Olivia de Havilland, Tony Randall, Paulette Goddard, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Jane Seymour, Anne Revere, Frances Sternhagen, Arthur Treacher, James Broderick, Olympia Dukakis, Sir Ian McKellen, Marica Gay Harden, John Colicos, Uzo Aduba, Alan Cumming, Cheyenne Jackson, Robin de Jesus, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, among many, many others.

Olney Theatre is now the cultural anchor of a rapidly changing region and serves one of the most diverse, best-educated, and wealthiest counties in the country. Situated on the unceded land of the Piscataway-Conoy people, the Olney area was once a rural farming community with a unique Quaker heritage. Now, the area is occupied by every kind of family that makes up 21st Century America, along with major corporations, shopping districts, civic associations, non-profit organizations, and a diverse collection of houses of worship. Montgomery County's 1 million residents play a dynamic role in the Baltimore-Washington corridor and are a driving force behind the region's creative economy.

Olney Theatre Center employs 40 full-time staff, 20 part-time positions, 26 early career apprentices and players, and more than 400 professional artists annually. The Theatre intends to continue expanding to better meet the needs of our community.

For more information, please visit olneytheatre.org/history

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