

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chicago Playworks for Families and Young Audiences Presents:
THE DAY JOHN HENRY CAME TO SCHOOL

CHICAGO, IL, (March 9, 2015) – The Theatre School at DePaul University will present *The Day John Henry Came to School* by Eric Pfeffinger, directed by Ernie Nolan, as the final production of the 2014-2015 Chicago Playworks for Families and Young Audiences season. This production opens April 7, 2015 and runs through May 16, 2015, at DePaul’s historic Merle Reskin Theatre. Performances are Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10 AM, and Saturdays 2 PM. Special Friday performances (10 AM) will occur on April 24 and May 1. A Sunday performance will be held on April 12 (2 PM).

John Henry loves technology, but doesn’t love doing his homework. If buttons and gadgets are not involved, he’s not interested. When his teacher, Mr. Gellert, is replaced by a mega-computer, Johnny couldn’t be happier. Then his steel-driving great-great-grandfather arrives for show-and-tell, and Johnny must take on the challenge of his life! This contemporary tale focuses on the value of hard work and the strength of the human spirit.

Recommended for ages 8 and up. Themes include: Ancestry; Confidence; Diligence; Folklore and Tall Tales; Motivation; Technology and Humanity.

For more information about pre-show and post-show educational activities and highlighted curriculum connections, please visit theatre.depaul.edu to download the free Teacher Guide. Teacher Guides are also available by calling the Box Office.

The performances on May 1 and 2 will be interpreted in American Sign Language. Call TTY: 773.325.7975. April 18 is USO of Illinois Day. U.S. Armed Forces personnel and their families, with a valid military ID, can attend the performance for free. Visit www.tixfortroops.org to reserve tickets, or call 312.922.1999 for more information. Join the cast for a post-performance autograph session on April 18. The performances on April 30 and May 9 will be followed by a post-show discussion. Visit the website or call the Box Office for additional details.

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Tickets are \$10. Subscriptions and group rates (15 or more people) are available. DePaul employees, alumni, and college students receive a discount (with ID). Tickets are available online or by calling the Box Office at (312) 922-1999.

DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre is located at 60 E. Balbo Drive at Michigan Avenue, in Chicago. For information about parking, please contact the Box Office. The theatre is accessible via CTA busses (3-King Drive, 29-State Street, 146-Michigan/ Museums and others), and CTA El stops (Red, Blue, Brown, Green, Orange, Purple and Pink).

The cast features **Maddie Baird** (Chorus), **Trevor Bates** (Chorus), **Michael Buono** (Chorus), **Aida Delaz** (Chorus), **Tyler Esselman** (Mr. Gellert), **Maya Malan-Gonzales** (Jeanie), **Denzel Irby** (Johnny Henry), **Christopher Jones** (John Henry), **Juwan Lockett** (Chorus), **Asia Martin** (Chorus), and **Jessica Maynard** (Ms. Huntington).

The production staff includes **Ernie Nolan** (Director), **Elyse Balogh** (Scenic Designer), **Meg Burke** (Costume Designer), **Daniel Friedman** (Lighting Designer), **Morgan Lake** (Sound Designer), **Gen Zoufal** (Dramaturg), and **Mario E. Wolfe** (Stage Manager).

About the Director: **Ernie Nolan** is dedicated to reimagining stories for young audiences. As Producing Artistic Director of Emerald City Theatre in Chicago, he created the ECT Playground, a process to develop new TYA works. His various Emerald City directing credits include *Pinkalicious* (Broadway in Chicago transfer), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Seussical*, *Jungle Book*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, and *A Nutty Nutcracker Christmas*. A resident artist of The Coterie Theatre in Kansas City, MO, he has also directed and choreographed world premieres by such Tony-nominated artists as Willy and Rob Reale, Stephen Schwartz, Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens, and Bill Russell and Henry Krieger. For Chicago Playworks he has directed *The BFG*, *The Giver*, *The Witches*, and *A Wrinkle in Time*. In March 2012, Ernie made his Off-Broadway debut as a choreographer with *Lucky Duck* at the New Victory Theatre. His work as a TYA playwright has been featured both nationally and internationally. He has adapted and directed such story book favorites as *If You Give a Cat a Cupcake*, *If You Take a Mouse to School*, and *The Adventures of Doctor Dolittle*. His adaptation of Mo Willems' *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* was invited to perform in Chicago's Millennium Park. Ernie's plays *A Fairy Tale Life*, *Snow White as Performed by TJ Barker and His Troupe of Theatricals*, and *Beasts* are published and licensed by Dramatic Publishing. He currently serves on the Illinois Theatre Association and as the Vice-President of Theatre for Young Audiences USA.

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The Theatre School at DePaul University educates, trains, and inspires students of theatre in a conservatory setting that is rigorous, disciplined, and culturally diverse. The school and its students strive for the highest level of professional skill and artistry. A commitment to diversity and equality in education is central to its mission. As an integral part of the training, The Theatre School produces public programs and performances from a wide repertoire of classic, contemporary, and original plays that challenge, entertain, and stimulate the imagination. The school seeks to enhance the intellectual and cultural life of the university community, the city, and the profession.