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For Immediate Release

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Houston Rockets GM Producing Original Basketball Musical

SMALL BALL will premiere April 2018 at Houston's Catastrophic Theatre

Daryl Morey, General Manager of the Houston Rockets, is working with acclaimed avant-garde company The Catastrophic Theatre to produce SMALL BALL, a new musical with book and lyrics by Mickle Maher and music by Merel van Dijk and Anthony Barilla.

Morey, who is a Catastrophic Theatre board member and a lifelong musical theatre lover, agreed to commission SMALL BALL based on a pitch by Artistic Director Jason Nodler. Morey and Nodler are both admirers of Maher's experimental sensibility and 'how-did-he-think-of-THAT' sense of humor.

According to Morey, "When I heard Mickle was interested I jumped at the chance to work with him. His writing style is note perfect for the kind of shows I enjoy. Nothing can properly describe Mickle but my best attempt is he combines W.S. Gilbert's humor with A. Laurent's depth. While basketball might be the hook that got this started, SMALL BALL's ironic love story and Merel & Tony's music are going to be what people remember."

SMALL BALL began with a question from Nodler to Morey: "What about a basketball musical? We both love Mickle's work and we all love basketball, so what if we asked him to write a basketball musical for us?" In Nodler's words, "Daryl and I both knew that if we gave Mickle this simple, unlikely pitch he would come up with something unlike anything we might have imagined. The experience of Mickle's work is like peeling an onion and realizing in the end that it has magically reconstituted itself as a whole pomegranate. Some people may hear the words "basketball musical" and think they're in for a trifle of a play. But with Mickle on book and lyrics and Merel & Tony on music, nothing could be further from the truth; each of the lead artists are serious, funny, and seriously funny. And what's happened since we put them together has been a revelation. SMALL BALL is unlike anything else I've experienced in 25 years working in theatre."

Morey agreed to serve as a producer, and Maher, an avid basketball fan, agreed to write the script. The play that emerged is fantasy-comedy about an American journeyman ("never-was") basketball player who ends up playing for a recently discovered island country that attempts to join the march of globalization by fielding an international basketball team. The problem? The newly discovered country is Lilliput (from *Gulliver's Travels*) and none of the American's teammates is more than six inches tall.

“Having Daryl involved is like having the world's most informed dramaturg. Anytime I have a question about basketball, even the most obscure one, he has both the answer and usually a compelling story to go along with it. The fact that he also knows a huge amount about musical theater is naturally a plus,” Maher said.

Said Maher of composers van Dijk and Barilla: “They are madly talented and have such distinct vision and voices. It's a small miracle that the world has conspired to bring us three together.”

“Merel & Tony,” as they are known to their rapidly growing audience, are most notable for their wonderfully melodic contributions to NPR’s “This American Life.” Anthony Barilla is an international composer, writer, and theatre artist that has recently relocated to his former home of Houston after spending the last several years living in Kosovo and the Republic of Georgia. Merel van Dijk is a Dutch composer living and working in Rome, Italy.

According to Nodler, “The collaboration is an unusual and serendipitous one. It’s rare that a major sports GM would have a love of musical theatre just as it is rare that an avant-garde theatre company would be so filled with serious NBA basketball fans.”

The production brings together several long-time collaborators. The Catastrophic Theatre has produced seven of Maher’s plays, including two world premieres, making him the theatre’s most produced playwright. The musical also reunites director Jason Nodler and composer Anthony Barilla, the creative team behind the critically acclaimed rock operas *Speeding Motorcycle* (with legendary outsider artist Daniel Johnston) and *Bluefinger* (with Pixies frontman Frank Black). Nodler will direct SMALL BALL while Barilla will perform and serve as music director. The play runs in Houston from April 6 - May 12, 2018.

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Lead Collaborator Bios

DARYL MOREY (producer) has served as the Houston Rockets General Manager since 2006-07, compiling the 2nd best record in the NBA over his tenure including multiple deep playoff runs. He was named "Forty Under 40" most promising executive in sport from SportsBusiness Journal and was included in Fast Company’s “Top 10 Most Creative People in Sports”. Morey is the co-chair of the annual MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference, the largest annual sports conference. He graduated from Northwestern in 1996 with a MBA from MIT in 2000. He loves the theatre and has invested in and produced numerous plays such as *Godspell*, *Side Show*, and *Disaster!* Twitter: @dmorey

MICKLE MAHER (book, lyrics) Maher’s plays have appeared Off-Broadway and around the world, and have been supported by grants from the NEA, the Rockefeller Foundation/MAP fund, and Creative Capital. They include *There is a Happiness That Morning Is*; *Song About Himself*; *An Apology for the Course and Outcome of Certain Events Delivered by Doctor John Faustus on This His Final Evening*; *The Hunchback Variations*; *The Strangerer*; *Spirits to Enforce*; *Cyrano* (translator); *The Cabinet*; *Lady Madeline*; *The Pine*; and *An Actor Prepares* (an adaptation of Stanislavsky's seminal book). He is a cofounder of Chicago’s Theater Oobleck, and has taught playwriting and related subjects at the University of Chicago, Columbia College, and Northwestern University.

MEREL & TONY (composers) met in 2013 while working on an art installation in a small Dutch village. Since then, they have released several EPs of songs, written music for THIS AMERICAN LIFE, recorded an album of protest songs funded by a grant from the Houston Arts Alliance, and toured Texas with their band, THE WOE WOE WOES. Merel & Tony now divide their time between Rome and Houston.

JASON NODLER (director) is the founding artistic director of The Catastrophic Theatre. His original plays include *Bluefinger: The Fall and Rise of Herman Brood*, *Life is Happy and Sad*, *Speeding Motorcycle*, *Meatbar*, *King Ubu is King*, and *In the Under Thunderloo*. He has directed more than 50 productions in Houston, Austin, Atlanta, Providence, Pittsburgh, and New York. Nodler is a NEA/MacDowell Colony fellow, a four-time MAP Fund grantee and recipient of an individual artist grant from Creative Capital. He was artistic director of Infernal Bridegroom Productions for ten years.

THE CATASTROPHIC THEATRE (producer) was founded in 2007 by veteran theatre artists Jason Nodler and Tamarie Cooper who brought together an ensemble of trained and untrained artists of all disciplines, many of whom have been collaborating for more than 20 years. Also known as the co-founders of the nationally acclaimed Infernal Bridegroom Productions, Jason and Tamarie have written and directed some of Houston's most memorable theatrical productions. The Catastrophic Theatre is Houston's premier creator and producer of new work for the theatre. Since its first production in 2008, the company has received two MAP Fund commissioning grants, created new work in collaboration with international music stars Black Francis and Daniel Johnston, appeared twice in American Theatre magazine's annual feature naming the most anticipated plays of the coming season, attracted audiences from The Netherlands, England, Australia and across the United States, and has been featured in hundreds of theatre and music stories worldwide.

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