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For immediate release

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The Catastrophic Theatre Presents Eugene Ionesco's Absurdist Classic, *Rhinoceros*

The Catastrophic Theatre continues its tradition of presenting avant-garde classics with Eugene Ionesco's anti-fascist comedy *RHINOCEROS*

(Houston, TX) Regarded as one of the landmark plays of the 20th century, *RHINOCEROS* is a modern masterpiece that comments on the plight of the human condition, made tolerable only by self-delusion. The production begins November 17 and runs through December 10. Tickets are on sale now and can be purchased at matchouston.org or by calling the Box Office at 713-521-4533. Performances are Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00 p.m., and Sundays at 2:30 p.m.

A rhinoceros suddenly appears in a sleepy town, trampling through the peaceful streets. Soon another appears, and another, and another until it becomes clear that ordinary citizens are actually transforming into beasts as they learn to "move with the times." Martin Esslin, author of the classic book *THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD*, notes that "what the play conveys is the absurdity of defiance as much as the absurdity of conformism, the tragedy of the individualist who cannot join the happy throng of less sensitive people, the artist's feelings as an outcast..."

Full of biting wit and nightmarish anxiety, *RHINOCEROS* is Eugene Ionesco's most famous play. Ionesco fled Rumania in 1938, as more and more of his acquaintances began to adhere to the fascist Iron Guard. Reflecting on how this period in his life informed *RHINOCEROS*, he noted: "I remembered that in the course of my life I have been very much struck by what one might call the current of opinion, by its rapid evolution, its power of contagion, which is that of a real epidemic. People allow themselves suddenly to be invaded by a new religion, a doctrine, a fanaticism.... At such moments we witness a veritable mental mutation. I don't know if you've noticed it, but when people no longer share your opinions, when you can no longer make yourself understood by them, one has the impression of being confronted with monsters—rhinos, for example. They have that mix of candor and ferocity. They would kill you with the best of consciences."

RHINOCEROS premiered in Paris in 1960 in a production directed by, and starring, French theatre legend Jean-Louis Barrault and was seen later the same year at the Royal Court in London, directed by Orson Welles and starring Laurence Olivier. Despite its canonical status, the play has received relatively few professional productions in the U.S. The Catastrophic Theatre's new production will be directed by Catastrophic Associate Director Tamarie Cooper, who directed the play in 2003 with *Infernal Bridegroom Productions*, to much critical acclaim.

RHINOCEROS features a powerhouse cast of Houston favorites: Arianna Bermudez, Noel Bowers, Jeanne Harris, Karina Pal-Montano Bowers, George Parker, Becky Randall, Rachel Rubin, Joel Sandel, Kyle Sturdivant, and Abraham Zeus Zapata. Set by Ryan McGettigan, Costumes by Macy Lyne, Lights by Hudson Davis, Sound by Shawn St. John, and Props by Lauren Davis.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Eugène Ionesco was born on November 26, 1909, in Slatina, Romania. The following year, he moved with his family to Paris where he lived for the next sixteen years until his parents divorced, and he returned to Romania with his father. In 1928, he began studying French literature at the University of Bucharest. In 1938, he received a fellowship from the Rumanian government to write a thesis on the subject of death in modern French poetry. He moved to Paris and began his research, but the German invasion of 1940 forced him to relocate to Marseilles. He returned to Paris after the war and found work as a translator and proofreader. It was not until 1948 that Ionesco wrote his first play. Having decided at age 40 that he should learn English, he picked up an English primer. However, he did not learn English as he had intended, but rather became aware of some astonishing truths—for example that there are seven days in the week, that the floor is down, the ceiling up—things he already knew but that he had never seriously thought about or had forgotten and that seemed to him as odd as they were indisputably true. Ionesco set about adapting his experience into a play, *The Bald Soprano*, which was staged on May 11, 1950, at the Théâtre des Noctambules. Like many of the other “anti-plays” which would soon emerge from Ionesco’s mind, *The Bald Soprano* rejected the logical plot, psychological character development, and Aristotelian thought of conventional drama, instead creating an anarchic new brand of comedy meant to reflect the meaninglessness of modern human existence. *The Bald Soprano* went unnoticed until certain established writers and critics stumbled upon it and decided to champion the strange little play, throwing an international spotlight on the now middle-aged Ionesco. He followed this remarkable success with a string of critically acclaimed plays including *The Lesson* (1951), *The Chairs* (1952), and *Jack or The Submission* (1955). On January 25, 1960, *Rhinoceros*, a landmark play that reflected Ionesco’s personal experiences with Fascism, premiered at the Odéon and was subsequently translated and performed around the world. Shortly thereafter, in what would be one of the defining moments of his career, Ionesco was identified by the critic Martin Esslin as one of the primary dramatists of what he called the “Theatre of the Absurd.” Esslin’s terminology resonated in a world still numbed by the senseless violence of World War II, and the label stuck to Ionesco, forever joining him in the mind of the public with other “absurdist” writers such as Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, and Harold Pinter. Eugène Ionesco died on March 29, 1994, at the age of 84. His other plays include *The Killer* (1959), *Exit the King* (1962), *Hunger and Thirst* (1966), *Macbett* (1972), and *Journeys Among the Dead* (1981).

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2017-2018 SEASON

Season tickets can be ordered online (matchouston.org OR catastrophictheatre.com) or by phone (713-521-4533). Subscribers can purchase a 6-play package containing *Evening At the Talk House*, *Rhinoceros*, *Leap and the Net Will Appear*, *Small Ball*, *The Strangerer*, and *Jim Lehrer and the Theatre and its Double and Jim Lehrer's Double*; prices range from \$180-\$210.

ABOUT THE CATASTROPHIC THEATRE

Formed in 2007 by Jason Nodler, Tamarie Cooper, The Catastrophic Theatre is Houston’s premier creator and producer of new work for the theatre. The nationally acclaimed organization is dedicated to developing productions that foster a meaningful exchange between artists and audiences. A recipient of two prestigious MAP Fund commissioning grants, the theatre has gained an international reputation for its original pieces, which have attracted audiences from across the United States, Europe, and Australia. Artistic director Jason Nodler is the recipient of a NEA/MacDowell Colony fellowship, a Houston Press Mastermind award, and an unsolicited and unrestricted creative grant from Creative Capital. Named Houston’s Best Theatre Company by the Houston Press in 2009, The Catastrophic Theatre offers Houston audiences a repertoire of challenging, innovative work that can’t be seen anywhere else in the country.

TICKET INFORMATION: All performances are held at The Midtown Arts Theatre Center (MATCH). Tickets can be ordered online (catastrophictheatre.com OR matchouston.org) or by phone (713-521-4533). ALL PERFORMANCES ARE PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN.

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