

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 7, 2011

CONTACT

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**CELEBRATE *THIS WONDERFUL LIFE* FOR THE
HOLIDAYS AT THE LAGUNA PLAYHOUSE**

**James Leaming plays over 30 characters in a one-man
re-imagining of Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life***

November 25 – December 24, 2011

LAGUNA BEACH, CA – November 7, 2011 – Share the hope and humor of Frank Capra's adored Christmas classic *It's A Wonderful Life* this season with The Laguna Playhouse production of *This Wonderful Life* running November 25 – December 24, 2011. Written by Steve Murray, this heartwarming holiday treat stars the virtuosic James Leaming who portrays George Bailey, Clarence the Angel, Mary, Old Man Potter, and over thirty more of Bedford Falls' finest citizens. Directed by Peter Amster, *This Wonderful Life* is the first of two family-friendly holiday focused productions in the playhouse's 2011/2012 season lineup.

Artistic Director, Ann Wareham offers "We are thrilled to share the excitement of the season with our patrons and community by presenting this very special and joyous production. Peter and James have masterfully crafted a unique, heartwarming and entertaining holiday theatrical experience and we are fortunate to have them bring Bedford Falls to life here at The Laguna Playhouse."

Amster and Leaming initially teamed on the production at Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota in 2008 then Syracuse Stage in 2009 and most recently Cleveland Playhouse in 2010.

"I had admired Jim's performance as George Bailey in the American Blues Theatre's production of *It's a Wonderful Life*, so I gave him the script, told him to look at a few scenes, and read for me." exclaims director Peter Amster. "Well, his George was, as expected, dead-on, but the surprise and delight for me was finding a real chameleon of an actor who could embody and give voice to Mr. Potter, Mary, Mrs. Bailey, Violet Bick, and all the other inhabitants of Bedford Falls with great vividness, presence and affection. What followed was one of the most satisfying professional relationships of my 40-odd year career in the theatre. Jim is a gifted actor, a generous, open-hearted man, and now, a good friend. I am looking forward to our Laguna Playhouse production the way that many people look forward to, well, Christmas."

James Leaming enthusiastically remarks "The audience, the collective personality of people who will most likely never be in the same room again together, is the last cast member in the show. We listen to each other and find our way through the story together. This, of course, is true for all live theater but I have never felt it as personally as with the journey through *This Wonderful Life*. It feels brand new... every night."

The design team for *This Wonderful Life* includes Jeffrey Dean (Scenic Designer), Aaron Muhl (Lighting Designer) and Kevin Kennedy (Sound Designer).

BIOGRAPHIES

Peter Amster is pleased make his directorial debut at The Laguna Playhouse with *This Wonderful Life*, a production which has garnered praise at the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota, The Cleveland Play House, and Syracuse Stage. Although now a resident of Sarasota, he spent most of the last 40 years in Chicago, where he was nominated for Joseph Jefferson Awards for his direction of *Once on This Island*, *The Word Goes Round*, and *The Rothschilds* at Apple Tree Theatre, and *Pride and Prejudice* at Northlight Theatre. Other Chicago area theatres where he has worked include Steppenwolf, the Goodman, the Court, Live Bait, Pegasus, and Route 66. He has directed at many other regional theatres, including the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, GEVA Theatre in Rochester, Indiana Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Peninsula Players, the Weston Playhouse, and, most recently the Maltz Jupiter Theatre. Peter has directed and choreographed operas for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theatre, Skylight Opera in Milwaukee, and Light Opera Works in Evanston, IL. Although now retired from academe, he has taught opera, theatre, and performance studies at Northwestern University, CALARTS, LSU, DePaul University, Columbia College and Roosevelt University.

James Leaming is honored to share *This Wonderful Life* this holiday season with The Laguna Playhouse after playing Cleveland Playhouse in 2010, Syracuse Stage in 2009 and Asolo Repertory in 2008. Most recent performances include the world premiere of *Broke* at the Alliance Theatre in Georgia; 9 seasons at Peninsula Players in Door County, WI: *A Few Good Men*, *Cherry Orchard*, *Foreigner*, *Caught In The Net*, *A Man For All Seasons*; Asolo Repertory: *Devil's Disciple*, *Winter's Tale* and *Inventing Van Gogh*. He is a founding member of American Blues Theater in Chicago since 1985 with performances in *Tobacco Road*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Two Rooms*, *Bad Moon*, *A Lie Of The Mind*, *Catch 22*, *American Dead*. In Chicago he has worked for Steppenwolf, Northlight, Victory Gardens, Goodman, Body Politic, Next, Fox Theatricals. James has also performed with Canamac Productions in *Botanic Garden* with his wife Carmen Roman and direction by Olympia Dukakis. Professional training credits include American Conservatory Theatre (San Francisco), Second City (Chicago). James is also the recipient of the After Dark Award for Best Actor for *The Man Who Fell In Love With The Moon*; Sarasota Magazine Award for Best Actor and Best Show for *This Wonderful Life* and a Joseph Jefferson Award for the set design of *Tobacco Road* at American Blues Theatre. Most recent film/television credits include *Prison Break*, *Early Edition*, *Running Scared*, *Code Of Silence*. James is a proud member of Actors Equity Association.

TICKET INFORMATION

Ticket Prices:

\$30 to \$65

Performances

November 25 – December 24, 2011

Tuesday – Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday evenings at 7:00 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m.

Thursday matinees December 1, 15 and 22 at 2:00 p.m.

(Dates and times subject to change)

FOR INFORMATION & TO PURCHASE TICKETS:

CALL: 949.497.ARTS (2787) - GROUP SALES: 949.497.2787 ext. 229

VISIT: www.lagunaplayhouse.com

ABOUT LAGUNA PLAYHOUSE

949-497-2787

www.lagunaplayhouse.com

Administrative Hours:

Monday – Friday: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Box Office Hours:

Tuesday – Sunday: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

(open until 8 pm on performance days)

Moulton Theatre Physical Address:

606 Laguna Canyon Rd., Laguna Beach, CA 92651

Founded in 1920 and celebrating its 90th anniversary in 2011-2012, The Laguna Playhouse is one of the oldest continuously-operating theatres on the West Coast. In January 2011, The Laguna Playhouse was honored at the Laguna Spirit Awards and received The Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce Premiere Business of the Year award.

More than 100,000 theatergoers annually attend performances at the Laguna Playhouse. Its continued artistic excellence, audience popularity and critical acclaim have helped make The Playhouse one of Southern California's most important nonprofit theatre companies. The Playhouse has produced national tours of *The Belle of Amherst* (with Julie Harris) and *Copenhagen*, and has presented many world, national and regional premieres.

Over the years, the Laguna Playhouse has garnered numerous awards from LA Drama Critics Circle, NAACP, Backstage, OC Weekly, and many more, and was named Best Arts Organization by ArtsOC. Notable performers that have performed at The Laguna Playhouse include Bette Davis, Harrison Ford, Charles Durning, Marlo Thomas, Roddy McDowell, Rita Rudner, Cloris Leachman, and Sally Struthers.

The Laguna Playhouse is noted for its Youth Theater Education and Outreach programs. In 1989, its Youth Theater was recognized as "Outstanding Children's Theatre" by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. The theater's touring production, TheatreReach, brings books to life on stage for elementary school children throughout southern California.

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