



UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

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NEWS

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The Hairy Dutchman is Center Court for World Premiere

Andy Bragen's New Play to be Presented by International Theatre Program

"Tennis is never just tennis," says a character in Andy Bragen's *The Hairy Dutchman*, a play that will receive its world premiere April 23 by the International Theatre Program in Todd Theatre on the University of Rochester's River Campus.

And indeed, for a group of hardened young New Yorkers in Bragen's latest work who come together regularly on a set of decaying New York City public tennis courts, tennis becomes a world for all things—romantic and professional rivalry, historical preservation, civic ideals, and life and death.

"This play, funny and touching in turn, is about much more than tennis," says Nigel Maister, director of *The Hairy Dutchman* and artistic director of the University of Rochester's International Theatre Program. "It's a theatrical tour de force that enables us to see the world through the history and strategy of the game itself while evoking the perennial question 'what is home?'"

Commissioned as part of the International Theatre Program's New Voice Initiative, *The Hairy Dutchman* revolves around the present-day loves, struggles, and idiosyncrasies of 13 characters who spend their time on tennis courts built on a landfill where various historical artifacts surface through cracks in the court's surface. When threatened by destruction by city bureaucrats, the court's players are pushed to the brink in their attempt to preserve their beloved locale. "*The Hairy Dutchman* evokes the idea that the values and spirit of 17th century Dutch New York were perhaps closer to the fundamental spirit and values of liberty and openness we still cherish about New York City than to the Puritan or myopically individualistic values that followed," says Maister. "Bragen has created a work that allows the shadows of the past to make themselves known in the present."

The New Voice Initiative is an innovative play development process, originated by Maister, which commissions and develops a new professional work for the theater with a promising, early-career American playwright. The playwright, in residence at the University for half of the fall semester, works with students and the program's director in developing the new work which receives a world premiere production in the spring. "You could say this is the performing arts' equivalent of doing research and development as the scientific community is known for doing—literally developing new blood for the American theater," says Maister.

Bragen spent the fall semester as the Leslie Braun Visiting Playwright at the University while developing *The Hairy Dutchman* with a company of student actors. "What's important is not simply the commissioning, but the commitment to production, which is not very common with a lot of theatres," says Bragen of his experience.

The New Initiative Program aims to produce a new work every four years, with this year's initiative funded by 1971 alumna Leslie Braun. Previous works developed and premiered by the Theatre Program include Joanna Scott's *Speakeasy* and two time Obie Award-winner W. David Hancock's *The Puzzle Locker*, subsequently produced by the University of Iowa.

A native New Yorker, Bragen is the winner of the Clubbed Thumb Biennial Commission for his play *Ranch Home* and the author of *Spuytyn Duyvil* (aka *In Spite of The Devil*), developed at the 2004 Seven

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Devils Playwrights Conference and produced by Brown/Trinity Playwrights Repertory Theatre in July 2008. *Greater Messapia*, another Bragen work, was produced at Queens Theatre in the Park in March 2004. In addition to being a playwright, Bragen is also a translator, working directly from French and Spanish, and with a co-translator from Japanese. Other plays and translations have been seen and heard at numerous theatres in New York City and elsewhere, including The Guthrie Theatre, Ars Nova, Rattlestick, LAByrinth, EST, Repertorio Español, Soho Think Tank, and NYU's hotINK Festival. The playwright is currently juggling his time between Rochester and Sewanee: The University of the South, in Tennessee, where he is the Tennessee Williams Fellow for 2008-2009.

Originally from South Africa, Maister is a writer himself and has an extensive record with new plays having previously directed the world premieres of W. David Hancock's *The Puzzle Locker*, Howard Marc Solomon's *The Wildman*, and Ernesto Brosa's *Towards Canaan*, among others.

Set and costume designer Arnulfo Maldonado worked with the International Theatre this past season on its production of Michael John LaChiusa's musical *Hello Again*. A graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and recipient of the 2008 Princess Grace Theater Fellowship, Maldonado has exhibited at the Prague Quadrennial, the international exhibition of scenography and theater architecture, among other theater credits. Lighting designer Thomas Dunn has worked on three previous International Theatre productions, as well at other colleges and regional theaters. Sound design is by William J. Pickens, who was the audio engineer and resident sound associate at Geva Theatre Center for four years. He also recently designed the sound for the International Theatre's production of *Hello Again*.

The Hairy Dutchman will run April 23 to April 25 and April 29 to May 2 at 8 p.m., with a matinee on Sunday, April 26, at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$6 (UR students), \$8 (for UR faculty, staff, alumni, and for seniors 55+), and \$10 (general public.) Tickets can be reserved online at www.rochester.edu/theater or purchased at the door one hour prior to the performance. Todd Theatre is located in the Todd Union building on the River Campus.

About the University of Rochester

The University of Rochester (www.rochester.edu) is one of the nation's leading private universities. Located in Rochester, N.Y., the University gives students exceptional opportunities for interdisciplinary study and close collaboration with faculty through its unique cluster-based curriculum. Its College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering is complemented by the Eastman School of Music, Simon School of Business, Warner School of Education, Laboratory for Laser Energetics, Schools of Medicine and Nursing, and the Memorial Art Gallery.

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