



take a seat **on the house**

**“It is a hopeless endeavor
to attract people
to a theatre unless
they can be first
brought to believe
that they will never get in.”**

Or so writes Charles Dickens in *Nicholas Nickleby*, but I have a more than sneaking suspicion that this sentiment is incorrect. The largest barrier to attracting audiences *is* the idea that they will never get in — because they can't afford it. Align that sentiment with the misconceptions that theatre is not meant for everyone, that it's not relevant, or that it is just plain boring, and one begins to understand the hurdles the theatre community, along with many other arts organizations, struggle with every day.

So what's the theatre community to do? The idea is simple: Provide an opportunity for skeptics to experience for themselves what they are missing out on: a local, live theatrical performance. And better yet, let them see it for free.

That's right, free.

Kicking off on October 16, participating Dallas theatres will join nearly 700 theatrical companies in over 120 other cities across the nation for **Free Night of Theater 2008**. Created in 2005 and managed by Theatre Communication's Group, the organization for American not-for-profit theatre, *Free Night* was designed with the goal of increasing the national theater-going population from 30 to 50 million people. In 2008, *Free Night* enters its 4th year and will provide nationally 75,000 tickets to new audiences. The *Free Night* Dallas program includes over 24 area theatre companies and will make over 3,000 tickets available for free.

Free Night of Theater is not simply a gimmick. *Free Night* is an open invitation and a reminder that theatre in Dallas is a vital cultural resource that is energetic, engaging, and accessible to everyone. *Free Night* makes the bet that once a new patron experiences the unique dramatic exchange of live theatre; they will be hooked and will return as a paying customer.

Free Night Dallas is also a celebration of the extraordinary history of theatre here in our community and an opportunity to bridge that past with the exciting future that lies ahead. In 2009, the Dallas Theater Center will observe its 50th anniversary. With that milestone comes recollection of theatre practitioners like Paul Baker and Adrian Hall, trailblazers whose legacies play a pivotal role in the shaping of the Theater Center, the Dallas theatre scene, and also add to the rich history of American theatre.

Dallas Theater Center is not alone, however, in its milestone year. The 2008–09 season also marks twenty-five exceptional years for the Dallas Children's Theatre (DCT). Since founding DCT in 1984, Robyn Flatt has created what *American Theatre* and *Time* magazines refer to as one of the leading professional family theatres in the nation. The Festival of Independent Theatres (FIT) recently concluded its 10th season at the Bath House Cultural Center as the place for smaller and edgier theatre companies in town to explore experimental work within a nurturing environment.

Neighborhoods throughout Dallas will see more opportunity to experience theatre due to an influx of performance spaces. The South Dallas Cultural Center reopened after renovation in November 2007, adding to this Fair-Park-area facility a state-of-the-art black box theatre. The City of Dallas Public Library opened a black box theatre at the Hampton Illinois Branch Library in 2006, and two more will be completed in the next year at the new Pleasant Grove and Lochwood Branch Libraries. TeCo Theatrical Productions recently completed renovations at their home, the Bishop Arts Theater Center in Oak Cliff. With the opening of the new Wylie Theatre in 2009 and the City Performance Hall in 2010, theatrical performances will return to the Dallas Arts District as well.

A larger national audience also notices the accomplishments of Dallas's theatrical community. In 2007 Dallas Summer Musicals received their first-ever Tony Award for Best Special Theatrical Event as producers of *The Two and Only* on Broadway. Michael Jenkins, Dallas Summer Musical's impresario, repeated the honors in 2008 with the Best Revival of a Play award for *Boeing Boeing*. In 2006 *Transatlantic Liaison*, a production originated at Dallas's Theatre Three, enjoyed an extended run with the same cast at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York and was referred to as an "ingenious production" by the *New York Times*. Undermain Theatre recently took their production of Neil Young's *Greendale* to New York, and Martice Enterprise's two-person show, *Heaven Forbid(s)!*, just ran at the New York International Fringe Festival.

So I pose the question: When was the last time you attended one of the many theatres in town? Never been? Has it been a while? Well, here is your chance to make going to the theatre a reality — for free. I promise, though it may be your first time to experience Dallas's live theatre — it won't be your last. **The only way to reserve tickets will be online at dallasculture.org, beginning at noon on October 1.**



Fred Curchack and Laura Jorgensen star in *The Monkey: The Quest to the West* at Undermain Theatre, Dallas, one of the many performing venues offering free tickets to the public as part of the Free Theater program. Photo courtesy of Lisa Taylor Press.

The Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA) is a division of the City Manager's Office. OCA works to enhance the vitality of the City and the quality of life for all Dallas citizens by creating an environment wherein arts and cultural organizations can thrive so that people of all ages can enjoy opportunities for creative expressions and the celebration of our community's multicultural heritage.