

CATCO AND PHOENIX TO MERGE IN 2010

The boards of the Contemporary American Theatre Company (CATCO) and The Phoenix Theatre for Children have approved a new initiative to merge the two non-profit Columbus theatre companies into a single 501(c)3 corporation in 2010. Under the new business model, CATCO, a professional Equity theatre company founded in 1984, and The Phoenix Theatre for Children, a family-focused theatre company established in 1993, will pool their artistic, financial, and human resources to better serve central Ohio theatre-goers of all ages.

“These companies have a combined 41 years of service in Columbus,” stated Milt Baughman, Interim President of the Greater Columbus Arts Council. “This proposed new business model will allow audiences to begin learning about the theatre arts as young as kindergarten and grow with the company well into adulthood.”

Combining resources will allow the companies to broaden programming to include larger cast productions and musicals, investing in more community actors while expanding established audiences. It will also provide the opportunity to create a more robust educational program.

“This is an exciting work in progress, one which I feel brings real opportunity for both companies to broaden our horizons,” stated Trip Lazarus, President of the Phoenix Board of Directors. “By combining our skills and resources, we’ll create a highly efficient organization which will enable us to provide quality theatre to wider audiences and better serve the central Ohio community.”

As approved by the boards, Phoenix Artistic Director and founder Steven C. Anderson will become Artistic Director of the new corporation. Anderson has 28 years of experience in Columbus theatre, including company administration, development, and creative vision. He has also managed several innovative collaborations with other Columbus arts organizations and established educational partnerships with multiple Ohio social service agencies.

CATCO Managing Director T.J. Gerckens will continue that role within the newly merged company. Gerckens has served CATCO for 12 years in various roles including Managing Director, Production Manager, and Lighting Designer.

CATCO Artistic Director and founder Geoff Nelson has been asked to serve as Artistic Director Emeritus. “Geoff’s keen leadership and artistic innovation have been integral to the success of CATCO in the 25 years since he founded the company,” stated Bob Saik, President of the CATCO Board of Directors. “We look forward to his continued involvement in this exciting new chapter of the company’s growth.”

The boards will continue to work on the logistics of the merger including board leadership and size, the expansion of educational opportunities, and programming selection for the 2010-11 season. Both CATCO and Phoenix will each continue to present under their already established brands. CAPA has been providing personalized back office services for both companies—seven years for CATCO and five years for Phoenix—and will continue to do so for the newly merged company.

“We celebrate the commitment of collaboration that this merger represents,” said Doug Kridler,

President and CEO of The Columbus Foundation. “This shows once again that the arts can be resilient and very smart when it comes to facing the realities and opportunities of the times.”

Both companies will retain their current office space—CATCO at the Riffe Center and Phoenix at the Columbus Performing Arts Center—and continue to present public performances at the Riffe Center’s studio theatres. The merger will not affect subscriptions, single ticket prices, or season programming for either company in the 2009-10 season.

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About the Contemporary American Theatre Company (CATCO)

CATCO is central Ohio’s professional Equity theatre company. Its mission is to produce diverse, high-quality, and exciting theatrical work that celebrates our common humanity. For more information, visit www.catcoistheatre.org.

About The Phoenix Theatre for Children

The Phoenix Theatre for Children is a collective of artists who work collaboratively to create original productions for young audiences. The Phoenix is committed to providing young people and their families with theatrical experiences that encourage and enhance an awareness of self and the world in which we live. Frequent themes of the plays are self-reliance, an awareness of the importance of community, the personal empowerment of young people, and our responsibilities as citizens of the world. For more information, visit www.phoenix4kids.org.

About Phoenix Artistic Director Steven C. Anderson

Steven C. Anderson has served central Ohio theatre lovers for more than 28 years, beginning at the Leo Yassenoff Jewish Center where he founded Popcorn Players, then as Director of Education and Associate Producing Director at Players Theatre, to founding Phoenix in 1993. He has garnered many awards, including numerous honors from the Columbus Dispatch, an award for a decade of collaboration and excellence from the Central Ohio Theatre Critics Circle, and five nominations for artistic excellence by the Greater Columbus Arts Council.

About CATCO Artistic Director Geoff Nelson

Geoffrey Nelson founded CATCO in 1984 and has been its Artistic Director ever since. Among the shows he has directed are *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Shorts Festival 2000*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Taking Sides*, *The Homecoming*, and *A Christmas Memory*. Under his leadership, CATCO has developed into central Ohio’s professional resident theatre company, renowned for its acting and adventurous play choices. CATCO has also taken a leadership role in producing new works, including the bi-annual Shorts Festival, and in touring and outreach activities. In 1997 CATCO won the Governor’s Award for Arts Outreach. Nelson has also been the recipient of the Ohio Theatre Alliance Encore Award, an Ohioana Citation, and received a Huntington Foundation award for arts leadership in 2002.

About CATCO Managing Director T.J. Gerckens

T.J. Gerckens became CATCO’s Managing Director in 2008 after serving as Production Manager for 11 years. In 2004, Columbus Business First Magazine named him one of Columbus’ “Top Forty Under Forty” for professional achievement, recognition, and community service. His lighting designs have been seen regionally, on and off Broadway, and at the Metropolitan Opera, receiving numerous awards including Chicago’s Jefferson Awards, L.A.’s Ovation and Theatre Critic’s awards, the Bay Area Critic’s Circle Award, and New York’s Drama Desk Award.

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