



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Nov. 16, 2018

Contact: Sarah Mills Bacha  
614.563.1066

**CATCO/CATCO is Kids ring in holidays with regional premiere  
of *The Christmas Schooner* Nov. 28-Dec. 16**

*Heartwarming Christmas musical celebrates 25 years of charming audiences*

The crew of a Great Lakes schooner risks everything to bring a cargo of Christmas spirit to European immigrants in Chicago, homesick for their motherland during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Families and kids of all ages will be touched by this heartwarming musical that reveals the real meaning of Christmas.

Audiences will be treated to original music and lyrics encompassing popular holiday themes written by Julie Shannon, such as *We All Have Songs*, *When I Look at You* and *The Blessings of the Branch* – “May this branch bring you love. Take it, and pass it on.”

“We are thrilled to bring this beloved musical that has been charming audiences for 25 years to central Ohio for the first time this holiday season,” said Joe Bishara, CATCO associate producing director and co-director of *The Christmas Schooner*, with Kirsten Upchurch, CATCO’s production stage manager. Bishara also performs the role of Peter Stossel, the father of the Stossel family, and captain of a Great Lakes schooner, which makes a dangerous journey across Lake Michigan to make a special holiday delivery.

*The Christmas Schooner*, book by John Reeger, has been a holiday favorite in Chicago for many years. It was first produced at Northwestern University in 1993 and subsequently at Bailiwick Repertory Theatre, where it was a holiday staple for several seasons, as well as Mercury Theatre Chicago. Bishara performed in the production previously in Virginia.

The cast, comprised of adult and youth actors, will perform *The Christmas Schooner* in the Shedd Theatre, Columbus Performing Arts Center, 549 Franklin Ave., Nov. 28-Dec. 16, 2018.

Performing the roles of the Stossel family, in addition to Bishara, are Liz Wheeler (Alma Stossel) Dennis Kohler (Gustav Stossel), Oscar Humbert (young Karl Stossel) and Colin Sproule (teen Karl Stossel).

Bishara has worked at regional theatres in Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and Florida as an actor, director, producer, and administrator. At CATCO, he directed *Breaking the Code* (co-production with Evolution Theatre Co.), *Sex with Strangers*, *The Realistic Joneses*, *Master Class*, [title of show], *I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change*, *Forbidden Broadway’s Greatest Hits, Vol. 1*, and *A Christmas Carol*, and appeared in *Daddy Long Legs*, *I Do! I Do!*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *Forbidden Broadway*, *The Story of My Life* and *Evil Dead: The Musical*. Other acting credits include *Titanic*, *The Rocky Horror Show* and *The Last Five Years*. Additional directing credits include *Corpus Christi*, *The Spitfire Grill*, *Bat Boy: The Musical*, *Sticks and Stones*, and *Ferguson: Truth Matters*.

Wheeler, who teaches theatre at Columbus School for Girls, is an Equity actor, professional director and choreographer, has worked at theaters throughout Ohio, including the Human Race in Dayton, and regionally. She appeared in *I Do! I Do! Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Evil Dead: The Musical*, and *Forbidden Broadway's Greatest Hits: Vol. I* at CATCO and CATCO is Kids' production of *If You Give a Mouse A Cookie*. Directing credits at CATCO is Kids include *Knuffle Bunny*, *The Hobbit*, *The Neverending Story* and *School House Rock Live!* She was the choreographer for CATCO is Kids' productions of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *Elephant and Piggie's "We are in a Play!"* and *Go, Dog. Go!* She also co-directed CATCO is Kids/CSG's co-production of *Anne of Green Gables*.

Kohler has been involved in more than 400 productions in and around the Newark area since 1971 with theatres such as Licking County Players (Welsh Hills Players), Weathervane Playhouse, The Black Box, OSU Newark, and The Central Ohio Youth Ballet. His favorite roles are Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Herr Drosselmeyer in *The Nutcracker*, Fagin in *Oliver!* and Ben Franklin in *1776*.

Humbert has been acting for three years. He has performed in several productions of CATCO is Kids Saturday Morning Musicals, including the recent *The Lion King Kids*. In the spring of 2018 he performed the role of Tippetarius in CATCO is Kids' world premiere of *Throne of Oz*.

Sproule, a recent graduate of New Albany High School, performed in CATCO is Kids' production of *Madeline's Christmas* last holiday season and was the music director for *Mary Poppins* this summer.

Other members of the cast are:

- Nicolas Brunet (Storyteller), who is making his CATCO debut. Previous acting credits include Edmund (*The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*), Artful Dodger (*Oliver!*), Rum Tum Tugger (*CATS*) and Richard, Duke of York (*Richard III*).
- William J. Darby IV (Steve et al.), who recently appeared in CATCO/Evolution Theatre's co-production of *Breaking the Code*. He also performed in CATCO is Kids' productions of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *The Jungle Book* and *Isabella e la Bestia*; SRO's production of *The Sound of Music*; and CATCO's production of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*.
- Ben Hartwig (Rudy, et al.), who recently performed as Garfield in CATCO is Kids' production of *Garfield: The Musical With Cattitude*. He also has performed with Evolution Theatre Company, Weathervane Playhouse and Actors Theatre.
- Katherine (Katie) Hjortsberg (Mary Claire/Storyteller), who is making her CATCO debut. Acting credits include Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*, Annie in *Annie* and Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*.
- Kenneth Hjortsberg (Hans et al.), who also is making his CATCO debut with his daughter, Katherine; the two have performed together in numerous shows. His acting credits include Pickering in *My Fair Lady*.

- Lexi Kepling (Storyteller), an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at New Albany Middle School, who has performed various roles with CATCO since May 2015, most recently *Madagascar – A Musical Adventure JR*. She has also performed in shows at her school.
- Julie Russell (Kate et al.), who was last seen at CATCO is Kids as Bullfrog in *Honk!* Favorite roles include Auntie Em (*Dorothy and the Prince of Oz*), Scuttle (*The Little Mermaid*), Bird Woman (*Mary Poppins*), Mrs. Beaver (*Lion, Witch, Wardrobe*), Amy (*Company*), Mrs. Potts (*B & B*), and Glinda (*Wizard of Oz*).
- Hannah Sayre (Enid and Storyteller), a sophomore at New Albany High School, who is making her CATCO debut. Acting credits include performances in school productions.
- Natalie Szczerba (Olive et al.), who has performed as Rapunzel and Princess Aurora in mainstage productions aboard the Disney Fantasy. Other favorite credits include Marian Paroo (*The Music Man*), Luisa (*The Fantasticks*) and Emma Carew (*Jekyll & Hyde*).
- Evelyn Strayer (Storyteller), an 8th grade at Heritage Middle School, who has performed in many CATCO is Kids' productions, such as *Honk!*, *Elephant & Piggie's "We Are In A Play!"*, and *Madagascar – A Musical Adventure JR*.
- Lisa Thoma (Martha et al.), who previously performed in *Shipwrecked! An Entertainment* at CATCO during the 2013-14 season. Other acting credits include *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* and *Huck Finn's American Song*.
- Nick Van Atta (Oskar et al.), a recent Denison University graduate, who is making his CATCO debut. Acting credits include *Little Shop of Horrors* (Seymour), *Sweeney Todd* (Toby), *Pirates of Penzance* (Frederic), and *Titanic* (Bride).

Co-director Upchurch worked at Parker Playhouse, Aventura Arts and Culture Center, Palm Beach Drama Works and The Women's Theatre Project after earning her MFA from Florida Atlantic University. For more than 10 years she spent her summers with Weathervane Playhouse in Newark as production manager, stage manager, general manager, theatre education director and actor. Originally from Newark, she worked as a production stage manager for the Broadway National Tours of *Jekyll & Hyde* and *Flashdance*, and worked with Mandy Patinkin on *Let Go* in 2012.

Other members of the creative team include Que Jones, music director; Amy Sue Hazel, scenic designer; Marcia Hain, costume designer; and Brendan Michna, lighting designer.

#### Preview (Discounted Tickets)/Opening Night Performances

There are two previews for *A Christmas Schooner*, Wednesday, Nov. 28, at 11:00 a.m., and Thursday, Nov. 29, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for the 11 a.m. performance, and \$30 for the 7:30 p.m. show. The opening performance is Friday, Nov. 30, at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$40.

#### Wednesday Morning Matinees

For *A Christmas Schooner*, there will be three 11 a.m. matinee performances: Wednesday, Nov. 28, Dec. 5 and Dec. 12. Tickets are \$20.

#### Ticket Information

Ticket prices are Wednesdays, \$20; Thursdays, \$30; Sunday, \$35; and Fridays and Saturdays, \$40. Student tickets can be purchased for \$15 for any performance based on availability and valid I.D. All tickets can be purchased at the box office at 39 E. State St. next to the Ohio theatre, by calling 614.469.0939, visiting [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com) or calling or visiting any central Ohio Ticketmaster location.

All performances are in the Shedd Theatre, Columbus Performing Arts Center, 549 Franklin Ave.

*The Christmas Schooner* was made possible by presenting sponsor Timbuk Farms and supporting sponsor Old Trail Printing.

CATCO and CATCO is Kids' 34<sup>th</sup> season sponsor is L Brands; season partner is the Columbus Metropolitan Library; and media sponsor is WOSU public media. CATCO is Kids' presenting partner is The City of Columbus Recreation and Parks.

CATCO and CATCO is Kids' are also sponsored by support from The Ohio Arts Council, which helps fund the theatre with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, education excellence, and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans, and supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

CATCO also appreciates the support of the Helen E. Sandfort Arts-in-Education and Florence E.K. Hurd Funds of The Columbus Foundation, assisting donors and others in strengthening our community for the benefit of all of its citizens, and the Greater Columbus Arts Council, supporting the city's artists and arts organizations since 1973. Other supporters include The Shubert Foundation Inc. and Nationwide Insurance Foundation.

For more information, visit [catcoistheatre.org](http://catcoistheatre.org).

CATCO's remaining shows for the 2018-19 season are:

- ***Every Brilliant Thing***  
By Duncan Macmillan with Jonny Donahoe  
Jan. 23-Feb. 10, 2019  
Studio Two, Riffe Center  
77 S. High St.
- ***Life Sucks.***  
By Aaron Posner  
Adapted (sort of) from Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*  
March 20-April 7, 2019  
Studio One, Riffe Center  
77 S. High St.
- ***Holmes and Watson***  
By Jeffrey Hatcher  
May 29-June 16, 2019  
Van Fleet Theatre, CPAC

CATCO is Kids remaining shows for the 2018-19 season are:

- ***Sunshine***  
Book by Jennifer Draganski and Sean Hartley  
Lyrics by John O'Neil and Sean Hartley  
Music by John O'Neil  
Based on the book by Ludwig Bemelmans  
Jan. 11-20, 2019  
Shedd Theatre, CPAC  
549 Franklin Ave.
- ***Babe The Sheep Pig***  
By David Wood  
Based on the book by Dick King-Smith  
March 1-10, 2019  
Shedd Theatre, CPAC  
549 Franklin Ave.
- ***Seussical Kids***  
Book by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty  
Music by Stephen Flaherty, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens  
March 23-24, 2019  
Shedd Theatre, CPAC  
549 Franklin Ave.
- ***Haroun and the Sea of Stories***  
Co-production with Columbus School for Girls  
Adapted by David Tushingham and Tim Supple  
Based on the book by Salman Rushdie  
May 3-12, 2019  
Agnes Jeffrey Shedd Theater, Columbus School for Girls  
56 S. Columbus Ave.

### **About CATCO**

CATCO is central Ohio's professional Equity theatre company, providing quality theatre and educational programs for all ages. The theatre organization has adopted an innovative strategy, building creative alliances that can sustain growth and development. For more information, visit [catcoistheatre.org](http://catcoistheatre.org). Together, CATCO and CATCO is Kids provide quality theatre and educational programs for all ages. The theatres have adopted an innovative strategy, building creative alliances that can sustain growth and development.

### **CATCO Mission Statement**

Theatre is a shared experience that illuminates the mysteries of our humanity. Its magic has the power to transform us whether on stage, in the classroom or in our diverse communities. CATCO creates theatre that delights, challenges, and transports.