



Main Phone: 404.523.1477 • Box Office: 404.584.7450 • Fax: 404.584.8815
PO Box 5376 • Atlanta, GA 31107 • horizontheatre.com • marketing@horizontheatre.com

May 5, 2016

For further information contact:
Amanda Cantrell 404.523.1477 x111
Marketing@horizontheatre.com
Horizon Box Office: 404.584.7450

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The City of Conversation
Atlanta Premiere of the Off-Broadway Smash Hit
May 20--June 26' 2016

ATLANTA – The Off-Broadway smash hit *The City of Conversation*, a rousing story of a political family over three decades of change by Anthony Giardina, makes its Atlanta premiere at Horizon Theatre Company with an all-star Atlanta cast, opening on May 20th. Washington DC was once a place where people actually talked to each other... savvy maven Hester Ferris opens her home for political foes to lay down arms and raise a glass. But that is all about the change. Colin, her beloved son, brings home a Reaganite girlfriend and a shocking new conservative world view rocking Hester's world. Follow the Ferris family from the end of the Carter presidency through the Reagan era and into Obama's game-changing inauguration. Hailed as "juicy...smart, literate, and funny," (*The New York Times*) and "pointed and provocative...stirring and entertaining (*Entertainment Weekly*), and featuring headliners Tess Kincaid, Chris Kayser and Carolyn Cook, Horizon's *The City of Conversation* runs May 20 through June 26, 2016.

"Timely, funny and uncannily relevant, *The City of Conversation* seems ripped-from-the-headlines and is the perfect pairing with this volatile presidential campaign year," says Horizon Co-Artistic Director Lisa Adler. "It's hard today to imagine a time when conservatives and liberals came together to work things out after hours over dinner, drinks, cigars and jokes. When, how and why did it change? What has the cost been? By looking at one extraordinary family over three decades, Giardina is able to dig deep into where we are today as a country. It's the kind of terrific, literate play that actors sink their teeth into with gusto, and audiences leaving arguing about, ready to continue the conversation over drinks and coffee long into the night."

Performances are Wed., Thurs. and Fri. at 8 PM, Sat. at 3 PM and 8:30 PM, and Sun. at 5 PM at Horizon Theatre in Little Five Points/Inman Park (1083 Austin Avenue NE Atlanta, GA 30307). Tickets, starting at \$25, and information are available at www.horizontheatre.com or 404.584.7450.

More About *City of Conversation*

“No matter your political persuasion, you're very likely to feel flashes of rage and frustration, Giardina has created a microcosm of American society in one family: He brutally shows how that family is ripped apart and, more hopefully, how it could be sewn back together.”
(*Theatremania*)

“‘The City of Conversation’ achieves something that eludes many other plays about Washington: a savvy depiction of social skill as political art, in a city that’s defined by political science... Giardina’s handiwork presents to the world one of the most fair-minded, even compassionate views of the partisan struggles of the city’s political classes you’re likely to encounter these days.” (*The Washington Post*)

Hester Ferris is the matriarch of not only her family, but of parlor politics, and her home is a critical player in decisions on the hill. In 1979, on the eve of a crucial meeting with an opposing Kentucky senator, her beloved son Colin arrives home early from grad school in London sporting long hair, a changed worldview and a new a beautiful girlfriend, Anna. As dinner progresses, Hester discovers that Anna is a passionate young conservative and a snake who has cunningly infiltrated her liberal enclave. Anna has converted Colin to her right-facing agenda and is out to begin her political climb by winning the favor of the conservative senatorial guest with her bright, new ideas. Hester sees clearly that Anna is not simply an innocuous girlfriend from Minnesota, but rather a match for her ambition and drive in the political world and the heart and mind of her son.

Fast forward eight years. It is 1987 and Regan is in office. While Colin and Anna are in the trenches with Republican politics on the hill, Hester cares for her grandson Ethan and works with fervor on her current cause – the liberalization of the Supreme Court - with her long-time paramour, Senator Chandler. Hester has promised Colin to stay in the background of politics, but the possibility of a confirmation for Robert Bork is too dangerous to keep her sidelined. When Hester’s activism is discovered by Anna and Colin, Hester must choose between preserving her family and defending the causes she’s spent her whole life fighting for.

22 years later, it is Obama’s inauguration night. As two young men wait to call on a much older Hester in her parlor, this final act reveals how deep a cut politics can make. Ethan, now grown and openly gay, along with his African-American professor partner, meets his grandmother for the first time since his boyhood. **This powerful piece on family dynamics asks what is the personal price of political change, and when does it become too expensive?**

“Mr. Giardina’s stimulating play illuminates the emotional toll that living in such a house divided (and a country divided) can take on its inhabitants.” (*The New York Times*)

Playwright and Director

Anthony Giardina is a novelist and playwright whose works have been produced in New York, Washington DC, Seattle, New Haven and Cleveland. *City of Conversation* was **nominated for the Outer Critics Circle Award, as well as the Drama Desk Award for Best Play of the 2014-15 season.** It premiered at Lincoln Center in New York, went on to Arena Stage in Washington,

D.C. and is currently being produced in regional theatres across the country, as well as being developed for a miniseries for F/X. When asked about what makes this show interesting and pertinent without seeming preachy, Mr. Giardina notes, "What bound these Georgetown people was not just a cultural or religious background but a set of shared ideas. **It's important that the political battles in the story take place over personal issues - a mother competing with her prospective daughter-in-law over a son, a grandmother competing for the affection of a grandchild.**"

"All politics are personal," adds **director Justin Anderson**. "Relationships are the currency and expenditure of political ideology. And that is never truer than when it comes to how that shakes out within family relationships, especially--as in the case of the play--when politics are the family business." Justin returns to Horizon for this powerful drama after his success last year with *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, a Horizon co-production with Aurora Theatre where he is Associate Artistic Director. "If a conversation is the ability to communicate with a balance of head and heart, what does it take to get to that point? **'You fight for things, but you don't lose people,'** says Ethan to Hester near the end of the play. What a challenge and an aspiration! **Was there a time that was ever possible in our country? Can we ever find our way back to such civility?** "

Cast and Designers

A powerhouse cast of Atlanta professionals is lead by Tess Malis Kincaid, reigning as Hester, the liberal social lioness of Washington, welcoming power players from both sides of the aisle to her legendary dinner parties. Audiences will remember her hilarious performance of Masha in last summer's hit *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* as well as her many Alliance Theatre productions, including *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *August: Osage County*, which won her a Suzi Bass Award. **Carolyn Cook** will be playing her sister and dedicated partner in politicking, Jean. Along with her many Horizon credits, most recently *Detroit* and *Time Stands Still*, she has graced the stages of Alliance Theatre (*August Osage County*), Theatrical Outfit (*Silent Sky*), and Georgia Shakespeare, among others. Joining these strong women, **Chris Kayser** will be playing Hester's long-time lover and partner, the liberal Senator Chandler. Last seen at Horizon in *Time Stands Still* (with Carolyn) and *Superior Donuts*, audiences will recognize him as Scrooge in the Alliance Theatre's *A Christmas Carol*, and he is a veteran of Georgia Shakespeare, Actor's Express, and Theatre in the Square. All of these have led to his twelve Suzi Bass nominations as well as his recognize as "Best Actor" from the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Creative Loafing*, and *Atlanta Magazine*.

Returning as the amiable and smart Kentucky Senator George is **Allan Edwards**, a Horizon audience favorite from his roles in *The Waffle Palace* and *Grand Concourse*. Allan is a regular with Georgia Ensemble Theatre, Theater Emory, the former Georgia Shakespeare, and Serenbe Playhouse. Completing the Southern couple will be **Deborah Bowman**, most recently from *Sweeney Todd* at Actor's Express. Along with this recent success, audiences will remember her from *The Book Club Play* and *Every Tongue Confess* at Horizon as well as *Chicago* (Atlanta Lyric), and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Serenbe Playhouse) to name a few.

Rounding out this cast of A-listers, there will be new-to-Horizon faces. **Rachel Garner** will be playing the ambitious Reaganite girlfriend Anna. Hot off of *Charley's Aunt* at Georgia Ensemble Theatre, she has also performed at Stage Door Players (*Private Lives*), Aurora Theatre (*Lark*

Eden), and Synchronicity Theatre (1:23) to name a few. The duo roles of Hester's Collin and her grown-up grandson Ethan will be played by **Justin Walker**, most recently seen in *Wit* (Aurora Theatre) as well as the Atlanta Shakespeare school tour, Serenebe Playhouse, and True Colors. **Joshua Mitchell**, will be making his Atlanta debut in the role of Donald. Most recently, Joshua performed Off-Broadway in *Play or Be Played*, and *Play It Again*. The role of 6-year-old Ethan will be played by **Vinny Montague**, a home schooler who has performed with The Front Porch Players, as well as in his church choir. Horizon is thrilled to be able to nurture all of this up and coming talent in Atlanta.

The elegant Georgetown home of Hester will be created by Horizon's resident set designers, the multiple Suzi Award winning **Moriah and Isabel Curley-Clay**. Resident lighting designer **Mary Parker** and Horizon and Aurora sound design regular **Thom Jenkins**, also both Suzi Award winners, will shape the world of the play. New-to-Horizon, costume designer **Jordan Jaked Carrier** takes on the three decades of costume styles for the play; she is a recent UGA grad with an MFA in Costume Design who is currently manning the Alliance's busy costume shop and recently costumed *Sotto Voce* at Aurora. Veteran props designer at Horizon, Aurora and Georgia Ensemble, **MC Park** fills out this creative team.

Tickets and More

The City of Conversation runs May 20th through June 26th, Wed, Thurs and Fri at 8 PM, Saturday at 3 PM and 8:30 PM and Sunday at 5 PM at the Horizon Theatre in Little Five Points/Inman Park. (1083 Austin Avenue NE, Atlanta, GA 30307, corner of Euclid and Austin Avenues). There are no Sat matinees May 21 and June 4.

Tickets start as low as \$25 (plus 8% sales tax) and are on sale now. Prices change based on availability and demand, so buy early for the best prices! Three play subscriptions also available to get your tickets for as little as \$15 each. Tickets and information are available at or 404-584-7450 or www.horizontheatre.com.

#####

THE SUMMARY

The City of Conversation

Washington DC was once a place where people actually talked to each other...where adversaries fought on the Senate floor and then smoothed things out over drinks and hors d'oeuvres. But it was all about to change and Hester Ferris has a front row seat as she hosts the Georgetown dinner parties that can change the course of Washington's politics. When her beloved son Colin suddenly turns up with an ambitious Reaganite girlfriend and a shocking new conservative world view, Hester must choose between preserving her family and defending the causes she's spent her whole life fighting for. Follow the Ferris family from the end of Carter's presidency through the Reagan era and into Obama's game-changing inauguration.

Length & Content

The City of Conversation runs **about 2 ½ hours with an intermission**

Contains adult language.

PLAYWRIGHT

Anthony Giardina

CAST (order of appearance)

Jean Swift-Carolyn Cook*
Colin Ferris/Ethan Ferris (Age 27)-Justin Walker
Anna Fitzgerald- Rachel Garner
Hester Ferris- Tess Malis Kincaid*
George Malonee- Allan Edwards*
Chandler Harris-Chris Kayser*
Carolyn Malonee-Deborah Bowman*
Ethan Ferris (Age 6)- Vinny Montague
Donald Logan- Joshua Mitchell

Alternate:

Anna Fitzgerald/Carolyn Malone- Amelia Fischer

*Member of Actors Equity Association

CREATIVE TEAM

Director- Justin Anderson
Scenic Designers-Isabel and Moriah Curley-Clay
Lighting Designer –Mary Parker
Costume Designer- Jordan Jaked Carrier
Sound Designer-Thom Jenkins
Prop Designer-MC Park
Stage Managers-Julianna Lee*, Kayla Zinke

Dates: May 20-June 26, 2016

Days and Times: Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 8 PM, Saturday at 3 PM and 8:30 PM, and Sunday at 5 PM. No Sat matinees May 21 and June 4.

Prices: Tickets start at \$25 (plus tax). Discounts for groups of 10 or more. Prices change based on availability and demand, so buy early for the best prices! Eight percent sales tax will be added to all ticket orders. Internet convenience fee added to all online orders. No refunds, exchanges allowed with 24 hours notice.

Tickets and info: www.horizontheatre.com or 404-584-7450.

Press Photos

Press photos will be available at

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/horizontheatre/albums/72157665323894154>

About Horizon Theatre Company

Horizon Theatre Company connects people, inspires hope and promotes positive change through the stories of our times. We produce professional area and world premieres of smart, funny and provocative contemporary plays. We also develop the next generation of diverse artists and audiences. For more information about tickets, group sales, or to receive a season brochure, call 404.584.7450 or visit horizontheatre.com.

Major funding is provided by the City of Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, the Metropolitan Atlanta Arts Fund, and The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta. This program is supported in part by the Georgia Council for the Arts through the appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly. GCA also receives support from its partner agency - the National Endowment for the Arts. We are grateful for our play and program corporate sponsors: the Turner Voices initiative of Turner Broadcasting and Macy's.

###