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The Chance Celebrates Its 10th Anniversary of award-winning theater in Orange County

**"Without a doubt the best stage company in north Orange County."
- Paul Hodgins, *Orange County Register* (2008)**

Anaheim Hills, CA (February 27, 2008) – In ten short years, The Chance Theater has grown from coffeehouse obscurity to a nationally recognized theater company. In 1998, founders Oanh Nguyen, Erika C. Miller, Jeff Hellebrand, and others set out to found a theatre company that would provide an alternative theatrical experience for the residents of Orange County. Ten years later, the company has produced over 100 plays and musicals including 36 world premieres, 5 West Coast premieres, 2 Southern California premieres, and 13 Orange County premieres. The theatre has received numerous institutional and individual artist awards, countless "Critic's Pick" designations, and tremendous support from its ever-growing patron base for its high level of artistry and world-class educational programs.

"We wanted to see intimate quality theatre in our community," says Founding Artistic Director Oanh Nguyen. "So we set out to make it happen."

The first few years of the theatre's life consisted of exciting, fresh productions, almost all of which were world premieres by local writers and writing teams. The theatre's first hit came in January of 2000, when it received national attention for the daring world premiere production of Robert Preston Jones' ***The Stroop Report*** - the story of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising during World War II. Audience members flew in from as far away as New York City to see this exciting staging by Nguyen. In 2001, The Chance Theater production of Amanda DeMaio's ***Unrelenting Relaxation*** was recognized by the *Orange County Register* as one of the best shows of 2001, and received a "Best Ensemble" Theater Award from the *OC Weekly*. The show would also participate in the Los Angeles Edge of the World Theater Festival, performing at the Stella Adler Theatre.

"These were important steps in our growth as a company," says Erika C. Miller, Founder and Outreach Director. "We were all learning by doing - taking risks, fine-tuning our craft and figuring out how to run an organization. We weren't 'just kids goofing around' anymore – It was a bit unnerving, but incredibly exciting."

In April of 2003, The Chance was commissioned by The Getty Museum to produce the world premiere of Antony Penrose's ***Lee Miller: The Angel and The Fiend***. After its run at The Getty, The Chance moved the production to Orange County. The *OC Weekly* gave The Chance the "Muchos Huevos" Award for undertaking such an ambitious project. Later that year, The Chance officially became a not-for-profit organization, and by year's end, moved into its current space, almost doubling its square footage. The Chance also turned its focus to building up its resident company.

"Since we were all friends, the Chance had always been an ensemble organization," says Oanh Nguyen, the Chance's award-winning Artistic Director. "It was just time we started including our new friends and opening our process to more ideas and different perspectives."

Over the next several years, The Chance would receive even more awards including the *OC Weekly's* "Best Ensemble-Oriented Theatre Troupe" Award, an Arts Orange County Award for "Outstanding Arts Organization" and "Outstanding Individual Artist" for Nguyen, numerous Garland Award Honorable

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Mentions from *Back Stage West*, and the prestigious Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle (LADCC) Polly Warfield Award for Excellence.

But the awards only tell a part of the story. While producing many successful productions, The Chance's reputation beyond Orange County continued to grow.

In March of 2005, The Chance presented the Orange County premiere of Chay Yew's *Porcelain*, directed by Nguyen. The production received many accolades, the most important of which was a nomination for the nationally televised Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Media Awards, in the category of "Outstanding Los Angeles Theater." That production was up against the Pulitzer and Tony Award-winning production of *I Am My Own Wife*.

"We were at the Kodak Theatre and being asked to walk the red carpet through three rooms of photographers and reporters," recalls Nguyen. "Although most of them were just passing time until the Project Runway cast showed up, we felt honored to be the ones they were placating to."

In 2006, The Chance's world premiere adaptation of *The Rover* was filmed live as the premiere production of the KOCE television program "Storefront Theatre Live." Later that year, The Chance served as the sole Orange County participant in the national *365 Days/365 Plays* project, presenting seven world premieres by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Suzan Lori-Parks.

In coming years, The Chance would grow its Board of Directors to an impassioned group of twelve, create the Sustaining Membership program – a groundbreaking theatre association that combines a traditional season subscription with regular charitable donations - and take its place among the major arts organizations in the region with regards to community involvement. The first annual *Speak Up - Take a 'Chance'* Youth Educational Program (which mentors Anaheim Unified High School students as they write, direct, design, act, and produce their own show) was born in this period – a program that has become a hallmark of the Chance's success.

"We have developed our educational programs to cultivate artistic expression in the youth in this county," says Managing Director Casey Long. "Theater is a powerful medium for exploring important issues and a beautiful way of expressing yourself. What more could be important to demonstrate to high school kids?"

Last year, The Chance Theater was voted by the readers of the Orange County Register as the #2 Live-Theater Group in Orange County (between LORT theatres South Coast Repertory and Laguna Playhouse). In 2008, it looks to be another year of exciting plays, community involvement and banner growth for the ever-growing theatre company.

"This theatre company prides itself in theatrical diversity and has worked hard to create a producing model that will support a season that ranges from Broadway musicals to edgy two-person plays about rape," says Literary Director Jonathan Josephson, the Chance's newest staff member. "There isn't another theatre on the West Coast in our budget category that can boast the quality, range of titles and styles, and sheer number of shows that we produce."

For its 10th Anniversary Season in 2008, The Chance is excited to be participating in The Festival of New American Musicals, a state-wide two-month celebration of musical theatre, with its Orange County premiere production of *The Brain From Planet X*. The 2007 Pulitzer Prize-winner *Rabbit Hole*, the California premiere of *Talk About The Passion*, the West Coast premiere of *Jesus Hates Me*, dynamic re-envisionings of the musicals *Assassins* and *Evita*, and two off-beat looks at "A Christmas Carol" round out the year of shows.

Chance Theater Timeline:

1998-1999 – Oanh Nguyen, Erika C. Miller and Jeff Hellebrand and others found The Chance Theater. *Wasted Wishes* kicks off a full season of original works by local playwrights.

2000 – Received national attention for its daring world premiere production of Robert Preston Jones' *The*

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Stroop Report - the story of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising during World War II. Audience members flew in from around the country to see this exciting production, directed by Nguyen.

2001-2003 Participated in the Los Angeles Edge of the World Theater Festival with its production of Amanda DeMaio's **Unrelenting Relaxation**, named one of the best shows of 2001 by the Orange County Register and received a "Best Ensemble" Theater Award from the OC Weekly. Commissioned by The Getty Museum to produce the world premiere of Antony Penrose's **Lee Miller: The Angel and The Fiend**.

2004 – Won multiple *OC Weekly* Theater Awards including "Best Ensemble-Oriented Theatre Troupe;" became one of the flagship Orange County theatres to join the Los Angeles Stage Alliance (LASA); held annual fundraiser - **A Class Act** – at the historic Old Yorba Estate, home of long-time arts supporters, Anaheim City Council Member Harry Sidhu and his family.

2005 – Won Arts Orange County Award for "Outstanding Arts Organization;" produced a world premiere adaptation of **The Rover** which was filmed as part of the KOCE television program "Storefront Theatre Live;" four productions are named in the "The Year's Best Productions" by the Orange County Register headed by Chay Yew's **Porcelain**, numerous "Critic's Pick" designations by *The Los Angeles Times* and others; numerous awards.

2006 – Created first non-Founders Board of Directors; produced first annual **Speak Up - Take a 'Chance'** Youth Educational Program; served as the sole Orange County participant in the national 365 Days/365 Plays project, won numerous awards including the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle (LADCC) Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and 11 Honorable Mentions for the *Back Stage West* Garland Awards.

2007 – Created Sustaining Membership program; voted by the readers of the *Orange County Register* as the #2 Live-Theater Group in Orange County; **I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change** becomes the #1 selling show in Chance Theater history.

What's ahead in 2008: participation in The Festival of New American Musicals (along with The Old Globe in San Diego and South Coast Rep); the Orange County premiere of last year's Pulitzer Prize-winner **Rabbit Hole**, and numerous stellar, intimate productions of plays and musicals that run the gamut of theatrical styles and themes.

Full production history, review quotes, photos, and interviews are all available upon request.

Theater Information

The Chance Theater
5552 E. La Palma Ave. Anaheim Hills, CA 92807
(714) 777-3033
www.chancetheater.com

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