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Alley Theatre Brings WORLD PREMIERE of Thornton Wilder's *The Emporium to the Stage*

Completed from the Pulitzer Prize Winner's Unfinished Full-length Script

HOUSTON, TX - Tony Award®-winning Alley Theatre and Artistic Director **Rob Melrose** announces the cast of **Thornton Wilder's *The Emporium***. Directed by **Melrose** and completed by **Kirk Lynn**, this existential play asks the question - if life is a job interview, do we qualify for our existence?

While Thornton Wilder wrote many of the most revered novels in the American literary canon, Wilder only wrote two full-length plays: *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Both plays won Pulitzer Prizes. Thornton Wilder spent two decades writing a third full-length play called *The Emporium* that was never completed... until now. *The Emporium* was an "unfinished" play but not for a lack of material. The play has nine scenes and Wilder wrote multiple versions of each scene. The Wilder estate permitted Lynn to create a "finished" version of the script for production but only after Lynn thoroughly studied Wilder's papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

Lynn shared his insights, "In 2018, I decided to read everything by Thornton Wilder. I finished his plays and novels and was working my way through his journals when I came across two scenes from an unfinished play: *The Emporium*. The journals described years and years of work, so I knew more scenes existed somewhere. At Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, there were more than 300 pages of his unfinished script in Wilder's papers. Working on *The Emporium* gifted me access to Wilder's methods and his spirit."

This world premiere work follows the journey of a young man from an orphanage who is adopted by a farmer but runs away to the big city only to discover all this is only a metaphor.

In writing *The Emporium*, Wilder was inspired by Kafka's novel *The Castle*, in which a land surveyor attempts to gain access to a castle sitting at the center of town, only to be blocked at every turn. Wilder changed the central metaphor from a land surveyor to the runaway son of a farmer and a castle to a grand department store.

This will be the second time the Alley premieres a completed posthumous work of a Pulitzer Prize winner. In 1998, the Alley produced the world premiere of a lost Tennessee Williams play, *Not About Nightingales*, which went on to a successful Broadway run.

"I'm extremely proud to be carrying the torch of the Alley's legacy by doing the world premiere of a play by another great American playwright," remarked **Melrose**. "We did a workshop of *The Emporium* in the 2022 Alley All New Festival. Watching audiences delight in Wilder's inventiveness, language, and metaphors was so exciting. It was like watching audiences discover the brilliance of *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth* for the first time. We knew we had to share this with our audiences and do a full production of it. This play is charming and delightful and will be remembered for a long time."

Thornton Wilder's *The Emporium* cast includes Resident Acting Company members **Elizabeth Bunch** as Miss Coley, **Shawn Hamilton** as Mr. Benjamin, **David Rainey** as Mr. Foster, and **Christopher Salazar** as John.

Rounding out the cast is **Shawn Sides** as Mrs. Frisbee, **Raven Justine Troup** as Laurencia, and **Sally Wingert** as Bernice. All actors are reprising their roles from the Alley All New Festival workshop in 2022.

The creative team includes Scenic Designer **Michael Locher**, Costume Designer **Raquel Barreto**, Lighting Designer **Cat Tate Starmer**, Sound Designer **Yezminne Zepeda**, Stage Manager **Jocelyn A. Tompson**, and Assistant Stage Manager **Brandon Clark**.

SPONSORS: Thornton Wilder's *The Emporium* is generously sponsored by Angela and Craig Jarchow (Honorary Producer), Connie and Roger Plank, and SLB (Associate Producers). Alley Theatre is supported by the 2023-24 Season sponsor United Airlines, the official airline of Alley Theatre, and Hampton Inn and Homewood Suites Downtown Houston, the official hotels of Alley Theatre.

TICKETS: Performances of Thornton Wilder's *The Emporium* begin **Friday, May 10 and run through Sunday, June 2** in the Neuhaus Theatre. Tickets are now on sale, starting at \$51. Discounted tickets are available for military, seniors, educators and any student, regardless of age, with a valid ID for designated performances in designated sections. Tickets can be ordered online (alleytheatre.org) or by phone (713.220.5700).

PHOTOS: [Click here for photos from the 2022 Alley All New Festival Workshop](#)

ALLEY CHAT: The Alley will host pre-show chats prior to performances on Sunday, May 12 at 2:00 PM with the Design Team, and Wednesday, May 15 at 7:30 PM with **Tappan Wilder, Thornton Wilder's Nephew**. The Alley will host post-show Alley Chats following performances on Tuesday, May 21 at 7:30 PM and Thursday, May 23 at 7:30 PM. Pre-Show Alley Chats start at 1:00 PM for matinee performances

and 6:30 PM for evening performances and post-show Alley Chats start immediately after the performance. All Alley Chats are free with a ticket to its accompanying performance.

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ABOUT ALLEY THEATRE:

Alley Theatre, one of America's leading nonprofit theatres, is a nationally recognized performing arts company led by Artistic Director Rob Melrose and Managing Director Dean R. Gladden. The Alley is committed to developing and producing theatre that is as diverse as the Houston community. The Alley produces up to 11 plays and nearly 400 performances each season, ranging from the best current work and classic plays to new plays by contemporary writers. Home to a full-time resident company of actors and expert artisans in all theatre crafts, the Alley engages theatre artists of every discipline – actors, directors, designers, composers, playwrights – who work on individual productions throughout each season as visiting artists.

Alley Theatre performs at the Meredith J. Long Theatre Center which is comprised of two state-of-the-art theatres: the 774-seat Hubbard Theatre and the 296-seat Neuhaus Theatre. The Alley reaches over 200,000 people each year through its performance, education, and community engagement programs.

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