



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CATCO ANNOUNCES CAST FOR THE WORLD PREMIERE OF *THE LAST SMOKER IN AMERICA*

Cast Boasts Numerous Broadway, Off-Broadway, Film, and Television Credits Including Avenue Q and "Gossip Girl"

CATCO has announced full casting for the world premiere of the musical *The Last Smoker in America* with book and lyrics by Tony Award nominee Bill Russell (*Side Show*), music by Drama Desk nominee Peter Melnick (*Adrift in Macao*), and directed by Andy Sandberg (*Hair*). The four-member cast features Natalie Venetia Belcon as Phyllis, Katy Blake as Pam, John Bolton as Ernie, and Teddy Toye as Jimmy. The creative team includes choreography by Tony Award nominee AC Ciulla (*Footloose*), music supervision by Fred Lassen, and music direction by Andrew Resnick.

The Last Smoker in America runs September 29 through October 24 at the Riffe Center, Studio One Theatre (77 S. High St.). Tickets are \$11.50-\$40 at the Ohio Theatre Ticket Office (39 E. State St.), all Ticketmaster outlets, and www.catcoistheatre.org. To purchase tickets by phone, please call (614) 469-0939 or (800) 745-3000. This is a one-act musical comedy with a live rock band. Running time is anticipated to be 90 minutes with no intermission.

"We look forward to kicking off our season with the world premiere of *The Last Smoker in America*," said CATCO Artistic Director Steven Anderson. "It is a privilege to welcome this extraordinary cast and team of Broadway veterans to Columbus. Bill Russell and Peter Melnick have written a hilarious, original, and irreverent new show. It is also very exciting to be working with Andy Sandberg, a talented, up-and-coming director and producer."

The Last Smoker in America is an original, four-character musical comedy about a dysfunctional family struggling to survive in a world where smoking has recently been outlawed. Pam, an English lit professor at a small college, is having an impossible time trying to quit smoking. Her husband Ernie dreams of being a rock star and relentlessly practices his electric guitar in the basement. Their teenage son Jimmy listens to so much rap music he's convinced he's black. Their nosy, anti-smoking zealot neighbor Phyllis lurks around trying to catch transgressors mid-puff. Will Pam kick the habit or fight for the right to light up as *The Last Smoker in America*? This limited engagement provides Ohio audiences the unique opportunity to be among the first to see this production before it opens in New York.

The musical received a developmental workshop production at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in the fall of 2009 where it extended and played to sold-out audiences.

“We are very excited to be a part of CATCO’s 2010-11 season and to be sharing the world premiere of this new musical, *The Last Smoker in America*, with Columbus and Ohio,” said director/producer Andy Sandberg.

The creative team also includes Charles Corcoran (sets), Jessica Shay (costumes), Jeff Croiter and Grant Yeager (lights), and Bart Fasbender and Dave Wallingford (sound). Roger Alan Gindi is the general manager. Cheryl Ruschau is the production stage manager.

CAST

Natalie Venetia Belcon (Phyllis)

Broadway: *Avenue Q* (Gary Coleman, original cast); *RENT* (Joanne). Off-Broadway: *Avenue Q*. Second Stage: *10 Things to Do Before I Die* (Vida). Lincoln Center: *The Glorious Ones* (Columbina). Playwrights Horizons: *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*. Tours: *Once on This Island* (1st Nat'l). Regional: *Vices: A Love Story* (Carbonell nomination). Center Stage: *Fabulation* (Dir: Jackson Gay). Philadelphia Playhouse: *Play On, Soul Possessed* (Dir: Debbie Allen). NJ Shakespeare: *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Silvia). Film/TV: *Woo, Grace of My Heart, Sugar Hill*, “Play On” (PBS Great Performances), “The Education of Max Bickford” (recurring role), “Beverly Hills 90210” (recurring role), “Fresh Prince of Bel Air,” “Martin,” “Spin City,” “Melrose Place,” “Damages,” among others. Education: Carnegie Mellon University.

Katy Blake (Pam)

Blake most recently appeared in the national tour of *Mamma Mia*. She originated the role of Sirocco in the world premiere of *Mask* (Pasadena Playhouse) directed by Tony Award winner Richard Maltby, Jr., written by Oscar winner Anna Hamilton-Phelan, with music by Grammy winners Barry Mann and Cynthia Weill. Other credits: Hollywood Bowl production of *South Pacific*, starring Reba McEntyre; world premiere of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Whistle Down the Wind*, directed by Hal Prince; Eva in the 20th anniversary tour of *Evita*; Christine in the San Francisco company of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Off-Broadway, she has performed with the York Theatre Company, the 42nd Street Workshop, the Kaufman Theatre, and the Ensemble Studio Theatre. Blake is also an accomplished country singer/songwriter. Her CD of original country music is available at www.katyblake.com.

John Bolton (Ernie)

Bolton most recently appeared on Broadway in the original cast of *Curtains*. Additional Broadway credits include original companies of *Spamalot*, *Contact*, and *Titanic*, all of which won the Tony Award for Best Musical. Additional Broadway: *How to Succeed...*, *Damn Yankees*. Off-Broadway: *Five Course Love*, *It’s Only Life*. NY concerts: *Busker Alley*, *Dreamgirls*, *Funny Girl*, *Chess*. World premieres: *Radio Girl*, *The Opposite of Sex*, *Señor Discretion Himself*, *Paper Moon*. Film: *The Savages*, *Eleven*. TV: “Gossip Girl,” “Law & Order: CI,” “Ed,” “All My Children” (recurring role), “Guiding Light,” “As the World Turns,” “Late Night with David Letterman.”

Teddy Toye (Jimmy)

Toye was recently featured on ABC’s “One Life to Live: Star X’d Lovers” musical series, as well as their performance on “The View.” Teddy has toured the US with Disney’s *High School Musical* and *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*. Regional credits include *Seven Brides for Seven*

Brothers, The Will Rogers Follies, The Music Man, Here's Love, Carousel, and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.

CREATIVE TEAM

Bill Russell (Book and lyrics) received two Tony nominations for *Side Show* (both book and score). He co-wrote the book and lyrics for Off-Broadway's *Pageant* and directed it at the King's Head Theatre in London's West End where it received two Olivier Award nominations. Russell subsequently directed *Pageant* in Chicago, Los Angeles, the University of Kansas, and Stoneham, MA. He authored the book and lyrics for *Elegies for Angels, Punks and Raging Queens*, directing it in New York, London's Fringe and West End, and many others. *Everything's Ducky* premiered with TheatreWorks and garnered the Will Glickman Award for Best Play and the "Backstage West" Garland Award for Best Score. A revised version under the new title *Lucky Duck* was produced at the Old Globe, and Russell also directed a version at the Boston Conservatory. Russell's latest creation with Henry Krieger, *Up in the Air*, premiered at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. His credits as lyricist include the *Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular* and the official theme for Gay Games. Honorary doctorates from Morningside College and the Boston Conservatory. www.BillRussell.net

Peter Melnick (Music) His musical *Adrift in Macao*, a parody of film noir written with librettist Christopher Durang, was presented Off-Broadway at Primary Stages after a successful, award-winning run at the Philadelphia Theater Company. The New York production earned Melnick a Drama Desk Award nomination for his music. Melnick also composed the score to Twyla Tharp's *Sextet* and, with Bill Russell, wrote two musical one-acts, *Patter for the Floating Lady*, based on Steve Martin's eponymous play, and *A Bad Spell*. Melnick's film scoring credits include *L.A. Story*, the Steve Martin comedy; *The Only Thrill* starring Diane Keaton and Sam Shepard; Horton Foote's *Convicts* with Robert Duvall and James Earl Jones; and Bob Saget's *Farce of the Penguins*. Melnick's television credits include the recent PBS feature-length documentary "Cinema's Exiles: From Hitler to Hollywood," "Indictment: The McMartin Trial," "Grand Avenue," and "Lily Dale." www.PeterMelnick.com

Andy Sandberg (Director) has been represented on Broadway and London's West End as a producer of the hit revival of *HAIR: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* (Tony, Drama Desk, Drama League, Outer Critics Circle Awards). Off-Broadway: *Vigil*, a dark comedy by Morris Panych, starring Tony nominees Malcolm Gets and Helen Stenborg. Other producing projects include Hal Prince's *Paradise Found* at the Menier Chocolate Factory (London) and *A Perfect Future* by David Hay. As a director, Sandberg's recent credits include *R.R.R.E.D.* (NYMF), *Bernice Bobs Her Mullet* (NYMF), and *Into the Woods* (Blue Hill Troupe). Upcoming: *Operation Epsilon*, a new play by Alan Brody; *Garbo & Me*, a new musical by Joanne Lessner and Joshua Rosenblum. In 2007, Sandberg worked with Hal Prince on the Broadway production of *LoveMusik* (SDC Fellowship). As an actor, some favorite credits include Huck in *Big River* (Mill Mountain) and Jimmy in *Hot and Sweet* (NYMF; opposite Golden Globe and Emmy nominee Lea Michele). BA Yale University. Alumnus of Yale Whiffenpoofs, Alley Cats, and Dramat. Member of AEA and SDC. www.AndySandberg.com

AC Ciulla (Choreography) Emmy Award-winning choreographer AC Ciulla has enjoyed an eclectic career spanning a wide range of work in different creative arenas. Broadway: *Footloose* (Tony, Outer Critics Award nominations) and first national tour. Off-Broadway: *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* starring LaChanze (Playwrights Horizons, Lucille Lortel & Audelco Award nominations), *Ghetto Superstar* starring Billy Porter (The Public Theater). Regional: Stephen Sondheim's *Being Alive* (Westport Country Playhouse), *Chess in Concert*

starring Matthew Morrison of *Glee* (Ford Amphitheater), *The Plexiglass Slipper* (Asolo Rep), *Footloose* (Dir/Chor, Carousel Dinner Theatre), *The Yiddish Coming* (Denver Arts), *Barrio Babies* starring Sara Ramirez (Denver Theater Center). Vegas: *Toni Braxton: Revealed* (Flamingo), *Signed Sealed Delivered* starring Chaka Khan (Venetian), *Nights on Broadway II & III* (Dir/Chor, Caesar's Atlantic City). Multiple film, television, and commercial credits including *One Life to Live* Star X'd Lovers 2010 Musical Event, *The Electric Company* 2010 (PBS), *Viva Variety* (Comedy Central), *Gray Matters* starring Heather Graham. Ciulla won the 2003 Emmy Award for "Outstanding Choreography of a Television Special" for *Stars on Ice*. In 2010, he won the Carbonell Award for his critically praised work in the world premiere of the contemporary dance musical *Vices: A Love Story*.

Fred Lassen (Music Supervisor) has just finished a year-long run as the conductor of *South Pacific* at Lincoln Center Theater. Other shows he has conducted on Broadway include: *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* with John Lithgow, *Spamalot*, *Cabaret* starring Natasha Richardson and Alan Cumming, *42nd Street*, and *Once Upon a Mattress*. Other theatrical credits include Ricky Ian Gordon's new piece *Sycamore Trees* (Signature Theatre, Washington, DC); Christopher Durang and Peter Melnick's musical *Adrift in Macao* (Off-Bway); *Judas and Me* (NYMF); *The Last Smoker in America* (NYMF); *notes to MariAnne* (O'Neill, NY Stage & Film); *Pride & Prejudice* (Eastman Theatre). Lassen is a founding member of The Freakers, a band devoted to the music of Shel Silverstein. He is active in the developmental process of new musical theater work, and in the past year, music directed readings and workshops of new pieces by Jason Robert Brown, Gabriel Kahane, and Harry Connick, Jr., among others. He has arranged and orchestrated for performers including Paulo Szot, Lauren Kennedy, Stephanie J. Block, Philip Chaffin, and Jeremy Schonfeld, and currently concertizes with Metropolitan Opera bass-baritone David Pittsinger. Lassen has a degree in Organ Performance from the Oberlin Conservatory.

Andrew Resnick (Music Director) most recently served as Associate Music Director/Pianist for the world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon's *Sycamore Trees*. He has music directed the world premiere of Paula Vogel's *A Civil War Christmas* (Long Wharf Theater), as well as the subsequent production at the Huntington Theatre. He is the current music director of Chicago City Limits in NYC. In addition, Resnick improvises with numerous musical comedy troupes, including Broadway's Next Hit Musical. Other credits include *One Night Stand: An Improvised Musical* (NYMF, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Hudson Theater) and *Twilight in Manhego* (NYMF). He is a recent graduate of Yale University, where he received a BA in music.

Charles Corcoran (Set Designer) Designs include: *Banished Children of Eve* (Upcoming), *The Emperor Jones*, *The Yeats Project*, *Sive*, *Prisoner of the Crown*, *Defender of the Faith*, *The Field*, (Irish Repertory Theatre), *The Night Watcher*, *Exits and Entrances* (Primary Stages), *The Late Christopher Bean*, *Sophistry*, *The Black Monk*, *The Bully Pulpit* (Theatre Row, Beckett Theatre), *Without Walls* (Mark Taper forum), *The Man In Room 306*, *The Dishwashers* (59 East 59th Street Theatre), *The Molly Maguires* (Kirby Center), *Rock Doves*, (Irish Arts Center), *The Last Smoker In America*, *Bernice Bobs Her Mullet* (NYMF Festival), *Shogun Macbeth*, *Tea*, *Yohen* (Pan Asian Rep), *Mercy of a Storm*, *Gravity of Honey*, *Dear Liar*, and *Mr. Dooley's America* (Chester Theatre Company). Associate Designs: *Edward Albee's Me, Myself & I* (McCarter Theatre), *Raisin In the Sun*, *The Boys From Syracuse* (Broadway), *Happiness*, *Third* (Lincoln Center), *Iphigenie En Tauride*, *Rodelinda* (Metropolitan Opera), *The Ring Cycle*, and *Amelia* (Seattle Opera). Other venues include: Arena Stage, The McCarter Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, The Goodman Theatre, The Seattle Rep, The Guthrie, Manhattan Theatre Club, Second Stage, New York Stage and Film, NY Theatre Workshop, The Play Company, Playwrights Horizons, The Public Theater, and Williamstown Theatre Festival.

Jessica Shay (Costume Designer) is a Brooklyn-based designer and stylist. Her New York theatre credits include *Oliver Parker!* and *The Gingerbread House* for StageFarm; *OohRah!* for Atlantic Theatre; *Next Fall*, *Armed & Naked in America*, *The Mistakes Madeline Made* for Naked Angels; *H.M.S. Pinafore* for the Vortex; *Dog in the Manger* for Quinnopolis, NY. Regional credits include: *Bad Dates*, *Shipwrecked!* and *Underneath the Lintel* for Long Wharf Theater; *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* for the Weston Playhouse; *Lemnation* for Mad Dog Theatre; *Haroun & the Sea of Stories* and *Cabaret & Main* for Williamstown Theatre Festival. Shay has worked extensively as an assistant on Broadway (*Spamalot*, *Shrek the Musical*), Off-Broadway (Signature Theatre, Arena Stage, MTC, Playwrights Horizons, The Public Theatre), and Live Entertainment (Disney on Ice, The Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey). She has a passion for the quirky excitement and collaborative nature of the creation of new and relevant works, and is the designer in residence for the martial arts and cult genre-based Vampire Cowboy Theatre. Shay is the recipient of a NY Innovative Theatre Award, and proudly holds an MFA from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and a BFA from James Madison University.

Jeff Croiter (Lighting Designer) Recent: *Next Fall* (Broadway), *A Lie of the Mind* (NYC), *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* (NYC), *The Liar* (Shakespeare Theatre), *Superman* (Dallas Theatre Center), *Band Geeks* (Goodspeed), *Forum* (Williamstown), *Ordinary Days* (NYC). Other NYC include: *Kiki and Herb on Broadway*, concerts including *Chess* and *On the 20th Century*, *Jerry Springer The Opera*, Rufus Wainwright's *Judy Concert at Carnegie Hall*, *Family Guy Sings!*, *Things We Want*, *Streamers*, *The Voyage Inheritance*, *Adrift in Macao*, *The Internationalist*, *Drumstruck*, *Jacques Brel*, *The Dazzle*, Jennifer Muller Works. Regional: Williamstown, McCarter Theatre, Kennedy Center, Old Globe, La Jolla, CTG, Huntington Theatre, Geffen Playhouse, George Street, Trinity Rep, Berkshire Theatre Festival, Cincinnati Playhouse, Dallas Theatre Center, Goodspeed, and NY Stage and Film.

Grant Yeager (Lighting Designer) Carnegie Hall: *An Evening with Kevin Smith*, *The Music of R.E.M.*, *The McGarrigle Christmas Hour* (starring Rufus Wainwright). Other NY: *Love Child* (Primary Stages), *Caligula* (Theatre Row), *The Voyage of the Carcass* starring Dan Fogler (Soho Playhouse), *Gay Marshall in Concert* (Zipper Theater), *Life Science* (Shetler Studios), *Between You and Me* (Kaye Playhouse). Recent favorites include *The Tempest* starring Anthony Stuart Head at The Bermuda Festival of the Arts along with numerous associate design credits at Paper Mill Playhouse, McCarter Theatre, Roundabout Theatre Company, The Joyce Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Huntington Theatre, and The Kennedy Center.

Bart Fasbender (Sound Designer) NY credits include: *Reborn*, *The Happy Sad*, and *Departure Lounge* for SPF 2009; *Next Fall* (dir. Sheryl Kaller) and *Fault Lines* (Naked Angels); *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* (Broadway/The Public); *Humor Abuse* (Manhattan Theater Club); *Body of Water* (Primary Stages); *Three Changes* and *Drunken City* (Playwrights Horizons); *Animals Out of Paper* (Second Stage); *Port Authority* (The Atlantic); *A View From 151st Street* and *UNCONDITIONAL* (LABYrinth); *Made In Poland* (The Play Company); *Democracy in America* (PS122/The Foundry). Also Juilliard, Fordham, Symphony Space, Les Freres Corbusier, Cherry Lane, Clubbed Thumb, BAM, St Ann's Warehouse. Regional: Williamstown, Berkshire Theater Festival, NY Stage & Film, Barrington Stage, Two River, The Kirk Douglas-CTG, TheaterWorks-Hartford.

Dave Wallingford (Sound Designer) Regional credits include: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Having Our Say*, *The Exonerated*, and *You're My Boy* at CATCO; *The Spitfire Grill*, *Convenience*, and *Getting to Know You* at the Human Race Theatre; *The Blue Bird*, *Red Angel*, *The Water's Edge*, and *Big Bill* at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. Wallingford is a founding

member of Available Light Theatre, where he serves as resident sound designer and production manager. In Columbus, he has also worked with BalletMet, Opera Columbus, The Wexner Center, The Phoenix Theatre for Children, The Ohio State University Departments of Dance, Music, and Sports, Red Herring Theatre, Blueforms Theatre Group, Columbus Children's Theatre, and the Columbus Symphony Orchestra.

Roger Alan Gindi (Off-Broadway General Manager) is a producer and general manager who won the 2007 Tony Award for producing the Best Special Theatrical Event, *Jay Johnson: The Two and Only!* He recently produced Billy Goda's play, *DUST*, Off-Broadway. Gindi was general manager of three plays by August Wilson—*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *King Hedley II*, and *Jitney*. He produced the Off- Broadway hit *Shakespeare's R&J*. He managed the original smash-hit productions of *Nunsense* and its many tours and sequels. Gindi produced *Crazy He Calls Me* and was the general manager of *A Small Family Business*, *Our Country's Good*, and *Mixed Emotions* on Broadway, as well as David Mamet's *Oleanna* and Larry Kramer's *The Destiny of Me*, among many others. He has also served as the theatrical manager for the past six "Victoria's Secret Fashion Shows" on CBS.

Cheryl Ruschau (Production Stage Manager) served as CATCO's Stage Management Fellow for the 2003-04 season and went on to work at Syracuse Stage in New York and Goodspeed Musicals in Connecticut. Ruschau returned to Columbus in 2007 and became CATCO's company stage manager. Education: BA in theatre from Miami University, Ohio.

www.lastsmokerinamerica.com

www.catcoistheatre.org

CALENDAR LISTING

CATCO presents *The Last Smoker in America*

September 29-October 24; Riffe Center, Studio One (77 S. High St.)

In the world premiere of this musical comedy, smoking has been outlawed in America, but Pam is finding it impossible to quit. Her struggle is complicated by husband Ernie, who dreams of being a rock star, and their teenage son Jimmy, who listens to so much rap music he's convinced he's black. Meanwhile their nosy, evangelistic, anti-smoking neighbor Phyllis lurks around every corner trying to catch Pam mid-puff. Will Pam kick the habit or fight for the right to light up as *The Last Smoker in America*? Columbus will be the first to find out in this original, raucous, irreverent musical comedy. Tickets are \$11.50-\$40 at the Ohio Theatre Ticket Office (39 E. State St.), all Ticketmaster outlets, and www.catcoistheatre.org. To purchase tickets by phone, please call (614) 469-0939 or (800) 745-3000. www.catcoistheatre.org

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About CATCO

Merged with The Phoenix Theatre for Children in 2010, CATCO is central Ohio's professional Equity theatre company. Its mission is to produce theatrical work that delights, challenges, and transports. For

more information, visit www.catcoistheatre.org.

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