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MEDIA RELEASE

January 10, 2012

Skylight Opera Theatre presents

Gershwin and Friends

Starring CYNTHIA COBB, PARRISH COLLIER and PAUL HELM
Stage Directed by BILL THEISEN

January 27 – February 12, 2012

Cabot Theatre at the Broadway Theatre Center

Milwaukee, WI – On January 27, 2012, the hit musical revue *Gershwin and Friends* will be returning to Skylight Opera Theatre. Last season, the critically acclaimed show had a sold out run at Skylight, and this year the entire cast from that successful show will reprise their 2010 roles. The show, which has been expanded from the Studio Theatre to the larger Cabot Theatre, will run through February 12, 2012 at the Broadway Theatre Center located at 158 N. Broadway, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Gershwin and Friends first takes place at the New York City home of George Gershwin in the midst of the Jazz Age. *I Got Rhythm*, *Summertime* and *Rhapsody in Blue* can be heard wafting through the air. We join a young couple from Mr. Gershwin's party staff, down to earth Cynthia, and free-wheeling, spontaneous Parrish, as they celebrate Gershwin's music behind the scenes. After their work is done at the Gershwin estate they head home to Harlem in their own high-style with the music of Gershwin's "friends" Fats Waller, Duke Ellington and Harold Arlen. This dynamic and innovative new revue of classic tunes from the 20's, 30's and 40's received rave reviews from its 2010 run:

"The three-person show weaves 36 classic songs from the Great American Songbook into a delightful evening of music that simply gets under one's skin... Everything on the stage, including the performers, points to the music - a strategy that works like a charm." says Elaine Schmidt, Entertainment Review of *Gershwin and Friends*. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, December 31, 2010.

The expansion of the show brings some exciting new changes. In addition to a brand new set, there are six new songs added to the production, as well as four extended songs from the original run. These tunes include classics such as *Over the Rainbow*, *Lady Be Good*, *Stairway to Paradise* and many more recognizable jazz hits. On-stage musicians, including a string bass player and drummer, have been added to the show to bring the music to life.

Gershwin and Friends features the work of four American composers. **George Gershwin** had a string of Broadway successes from 1924 through 1933 that could not be matched, all leading up to his most ambitious and renowned work, *Porgy and Bess* which premiered in 1935. **Duke Ellington** wrote some of his best loved tunes during the 1930s- *Mood Indigo*, *It Don't Mean A Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing*, *Solitude* and *Sophisticated Lady*. **Fats Waller's** string of hits included *After You've Gone*, *This Joint Is Jumpin'*, *Honeysuckle Rose*, *Keeping Out Of Mischief Now* and *Ain't Misbehavin'*. **Harold Arlen** may be the most underrated American composer of all time. *Get Happy*, *Stormy Weather*, *It's Only A Paper Moon*, *That Old Black Magic*, *Blues In The Night* and *One For My Baby* are just a few of his brilliant creations. But biggest of all was his unforgettable score for one of Hollywood's most important movie musicals, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Skylight's Artistic Director **Bill Theisen** will be returning to stage direct the show. **Cynthia Cobb** returns as Cynthia, the role in which she was last seen at Skylight. Past Skylight performances of hers include both Charlaire and Armelia in *Ain't Misbehavin'*, and Susannah in *Tintypes*. Additionally, **Parrish Collier** will be returning to play Parrish; his past performances include roles in *RENT*, *Smokey Joe's Café*, and *The All Night Strut!* Seasoned Skylight performer **Paul Helm** will be returning as the pianist and musical director of the show.

"It was a tremendous pleasure working with these talented individuals to develop and produce this show and I am very excited to be bringing it back to life on the Skylight stage once again. Having the opportunity to bring this show to the Cabot Theatre stage not only gives us the opportunity to perfect and add to what was already a great show, but to really highlight the grandness of Gershwin and his contemporaries in this beautiful space that is the Cabot." says Bill Theisen, Artistic Director

KEY BIOGRAPHIES:

Cynthia Cobb – Cynthia is excited to be back at Skylight as part of the creative team for this remount of *Gershwin and Friends*. Other roles at the Skylight have included both Armelia and Charlaire in *Ain't Misbehavin'*, BJ in *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, Susannah in *Tintypes*, The Lady in *Blues in the Night*, and Woman 2 in *The All Night Strut*. Other favorite roles have included Carrie Pipperidge in *Carousel* at Candlelight Dinner Playhouse, Mary Kenny in *Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?* at Drury Lane Evergreen Park, Epatha in *Elmer Gantry* at Marriott Lincolnshire, Lee in *Cowgirls* at Northlight Theater and Queenie in *Showboat* at Gateway Playhouse. She has also been seen out on the ocean traveling the world as a featured singer with Royal Caribbean.

Parrish Collier - Parrish returns to Skylight where he was last seen in last year's production of *Gershwin and Friends*. Other Skylight credits include *RENT*, *Smokey Joe's Café* and *The All Night Strut!* His Chicago credits include Andre in *Ain't Misbehavin'* and Don in *A Chorus Line*, and Four-Eyed Moe in *Five Guys Named Moe* at Drury Lane Evergreen Park; Simon Zealotes in *Jesus Christ Superstar* and Paul in *Kiss Me Kate* at Drury Lane Oakbrook; Peaseblossom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre; Zooter in *Zoot Suit* and Andre in *Ain't Misbehavin'* at the Goodman Theatre; *Evita* and *The King and I* at Marriott Theatre; *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* at the Rosemont Theatre. Other credits include Bernardo in *West Side Story* (European tour), *Swing for Elektra*, *Rockies and Components* in *Starlight Express* (Germany) and *Four-Eyed Moe* in *Five Guys Named Moe* (UK National Tour).

Paul Helm (Music Director) - Paul is thrilled to return to the Skylight for more “fascinating rhythm!” Skylight credits include *The Music Man*, *Plaid Tidings*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Midnight Angel*, *Patience*, *South Pacific*, *The Mikado*, and *Iolanthe*. He has also performed, directed, and music directed with the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, First Stage Children’s Theater, Florentine Opera Company, American Folklore Theatre, Greenbrier Valley Theatre, Circa ’21 Dinner Playhouse, and the UW-Platteville Heartland Festival. Recent credits include *Seussical*, *Grease*, *Ragtime*, *U: Bug: Me!*, *My Son Pinocchio*, *Laurel and Hardy*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *The Producers*. Next, you can catch Paul tickling the ivories at the Milwaukee Rep for *Always...Patsy Cline* before he battles evil Space Bears in *Packer Fans from Outer Space* at the Marcus Center. www.paulhelm.net

Bill Theisen (Stage Director) - Bill Theisen made his professional theatre debut as a performer at the Skylight Opera Theatre in 1981 and began his tenure as Artistic Director in 2004. He has directed over 100 productions for theatre and opera companies from coast to coast. Recent directing credits include *The Pirates of Penzance* for Santa Fe Opera, *Showboat* with Gateway Playhouse, *H.M.S. Pinafore* at Lyric Opera of Kansas City, *Sweeney Todd* with Cleveland Opera, *The Fourth Wall* at Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, *The Magic Flute* for Virginia Opera, *A Little Night Music* with Seaside Music Theater, *The Mikado* with Opera Carolina, *Seussical* at First Stage Children’s Theatre and *Into The Woods* at the Capitol Center for the Performing Arts. Skylight Directing credits include *The Figaro Story*, *La Boheme*, *Souvenir*, *South Pacific*, *The Tragedy of Carmen*, *Animal Crackers*, *The Spitfire Grill*, *La Cenerentola*, *The Mikado*, *Patience*, *The Pirates of Penzance* and the world premiere of *Over the Moon with Gilbert and Sullivan*. Mr. Theisen works frequently on the university level as a Guest Director and Lecturer. He served as Director of Opera at the University of Iowa and has continued that relationship for the past 12 years. Other university credits include Carnegie Mellon University, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, Florida State University, Portland State University, Manhattan School of Music, Utah State University, Northwestern University, NYU and St. Ambrose University where he is also serves on the advisory committee to the theatre department. Bill was the Artistic Director of the Capitol Center for the Performing Arts in Upstate New York and is an adjudicator for arts programming on PBS.

FULL CAST

Cynthia.....Cynthia Cobb
ParrishParrish Collier
Pianist.....Paul Helm

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Director.....Bill Theisen
 Music Director.....Paul Helm
 Choreographer.....Pam Krieger
 Set Designer.....Rick Rasmussen
 Lighting Designer.....Holly Blomquist
 Sound Designer.....Gary Ellis
 Costume Coordinator.....Shima Orans
 Stage Manager.....Kimberly Ann McCann
 Asst. Stage Manager.....Jennifer Anderson

MUSICAL NUMBERS

Shall We Dance?	George Gershwin
Strike Up The Band.....	George Gershwin
Let's Call The Whole Thing Off.....	George Gershwin
I'll Build A Stairway To Paradise.....	George Gershwin
Just Another Rhumba	George Gershwin
Embraceable You	George Gershwin
Someone To Watch Over Me.....	George Gershwin
Nice Work If You Can Get It	George Gershwin
Fascinating Rhythm/I Got Rhythm.....	George Gershwin
Bidin' My Time	George Gershwin
Oh, Lady Be Good!	George Gershwin
My Cousin in Milwaukee.....	George Gershwin
I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'	George Gershwin
Summertime	George Gershwin
Bess, You Is My Woman Now	George Gershwin
There's A Boat Dat's Leavin' Soon For New York.....	George Gershwin
But Not For Me	George Gershwin
Blah, Blah, Blah	George Gershwin
Love is Here To Stay	George Gershwin
Clap Yo' Hands	George Gershwin
Entr'acte/Take The "A" Train.....	Duke Ellington
Drop Me Off in Harlem	Duke Ellington
The Joint Is Jumpin'	Fats Waller
It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing).....	Duke Ellington
Hit Me With A Hot Note And Watch Me Bounce	Duke Ellington
Slap That Bass	George Gershwin
Satin Doll	Duke Ellington
Ain't Misbehavin'	Fats Waller
That Old Black Magic	Harold Arlen
Mood Indigo.....	Duke Ellington
Stormy Weather.....	Harold Arlen
Sophisticated Lady	Duke Ellington
Solitude	Duke Ellington
Over The Rainbow.....	Harold Arlen
Get Happy	Harold Arlen
I Love To Sing-A.....	Harold Arlen
Don't Get Around Much Anymore.....	Duke Ellington
It's a Sin to Tell a Lie.....	Fats Waller
It's Only a Paper Moon	Harold Arlen
They All Laughed	George Gershwin

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

January 27 – February 12, 2012

Wed	Thurs	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
January				
		27 7:30 pm	28c 7:30 pm	29si 2:00 pm
February				
1si 2:00pm 7:30pm	2 7:30 pm	3c 7:30 pm	4c 7:30pm	5si 2:00pm 7:30pm
8si 7:30 pm	9 7:30 pm	10c 7:30 pm	11c 7:30	12si 2:00 pm

si = Skylight Insights are an engaging opportunity to learn more about the production. They are presented before every Wednesday and Sunday performance in the Salon.

Performances of *Gershwin and Friends* will take place January 27 – February 12, 2012 in the Cabot Theatre at the Broadway Theatre Center, 158 N. Broadway in the Historic Third Ward of Milwaukee. **Tickets are \$22.50 - \$65.50 (plus tax)** and can be purchased in person at the **Broadway Theatre Center Box Office** or by calling **(414) 291-7800** Monday – Sunday from noon – 6:00 p.m. Tickets may be purchased online at **www.skylightopera.com**. Group, student, senior and other discounts are available.