

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**MEDIA CONTACTS:**

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29 April 2014**Monterey Peninsula College Theatre Company presents****THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE****Conceived by Rebecca Feldman, Additional material by Jay Reiss
Book by Rachel Sheinkin, Music & Lyrics by William Finn****Director: Gary Bolen****Preview Thursday May 8****Opens (Press Night) Friday May 9 through Sun May 25, 2014**

MONTEREY, CA – MPC Theatre Company's 2014 season continues with the Tony award-winning Broadway hit musical comedy, **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE**, the hilarious tale of six overachieving middle school outsiders, competing in the spelling championship of a lifetime. In addition to all the usual adolescent angst and awkwardness, these tenacious 'tweens must also cope with the so-called 'grown-ups' overseeing them. The show even manages to take a tongue-in-cheek look at a variety of social issues, such as absentee parents, bullying, gender discrimination, and marriage equality, but it's all in good fun. In the end, the oddball spelling champions of *Putnam County* and their amazing collection of quirky songs will have audiences laughing with delight, while they teach us that winning isn't everything, and that not coming in first doesn't necessarily make you a loser.

The MPC Production

Having done improvisation in Los Angeles before moving to Monterey, **Gary Bolen**, the director of the MPC Theatre Company's upcoming production of **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE**, knew exactly how to set up the improvisational elements of the show. "Each performance has four volunteers culled from the audience who join the cast onstage and compete in the Bee," Bolen explained. "Being very smart, I arranged for some 'volunteer volunteers' to assist us in rehearsal so we could learn how to orchestrate the outcome of each performance. I got information from each of the volunteers on the evening of rehearsal, relayed it to the two performers (**Megan Root** and **Matthew Pavellas**) who play the characters who control the sequence of spelling events. Together we decided which of the volunteers we wanted to eliminate first and which to hold on to the longest. It worked perfectly – *not ONE single time did it come out the way we tried to orchestrate it!!*"

That lesson in futility worked to the show's advantage in that the cast (as well as musical director **Barney Hulse**) had to stay on their toes to adapt to whatever happened because it affected the next sequence of music and dialog. "It was hysterical the first time it happened," laughed Bolen, "Well, it was hysterical to *ME*. I'm not sure the cast shared in my enjoyment so much. But it taught them *VERY* quickly to adapt and go along with the premise of the show which is that *ANYONE* can win the Bee." Bolen quickly noted that it doesn't matter whether or not the volunteers can spell at "championship" level. "The idea is to have fun with it, not humiliate anyone, so it's all very deftly handled no matter what level of speller they may be."

That wouldn't be the case without an outstanding cast which Bolen feels blessed to have. It's a blend of new (to the Peninsula) talent, MPC Theatre Arts students and recent grads and some veteran performers who are a combination of all of the above. In addition to the previously mentioned Root and Pavellas the cast includes **Victor Velasquez** ("Chip"), **Derek Demarco** (Barfee), **Tara Lucido** (Logainne), **Amanda Schemmel** (Olive), **Matt Pardue** (Leaf), **Savanah Brewer** (Marcy) and **John Radley** (Mitch) as well as **Velvet Piini**, **Clark Brown** and **Sam Fife**. "They've been great at getting quickly up to speed on their characters and how they interact with the volunteers and each other."

The other improvisational element is that the show is meant to be "customized" to the area in which it is playing, so there are abundant "new" additions to the dialogue referencing everything from recent local financial events to the types of things and people one might encounter in Pacific Grove or Carmel. "I think that really helps personalize the show for the audience. They're involved on every level – as spellers and in recognizing the 'stereotypes' of the 'kids' onstage." (Though the spellers are all supposed to be between the ages of 10 and 12, they are played by adult and teen actors).

In addition to Hulse, the creative team includes Jill Miller as choreographer. She was tasked in not only creating original movement for the cast, but had the added challenge of adding movement that completely unrehearsed audience volunteers would be able to pick up and do along with the regular cast members. "It was a hoot to come up with something fun yet simple enough for our 'civilians' to pick up quickly. In each rehearsal they nailed it!"

As for the outcome of the Bee? Bolen feels assured that it will be the same every night. "Every audience member, volunteer or not, will leave the show being able to spell '*F-U-N-N-Y!*'"

History of the Musical:

THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE started out as a non-musical, improvisational play entitled C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E, created by Rebecca Feldman and performed by a New-York-based comedy troupe known as "The Farm." One of the original performers was the nanny of famed playwright Wendy Wasserstein (*The Heidi Chronicles*). Wasserstein was so impressed with the show, that

she recommended it to her friend William Finn (Make Me A Song) and suggested he take the show to the next level. Finn, his former student Rachel Sheinkin, and C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E creator Rebecca Feldman all worked together to develop the piece into a full-length musical. In the winter of 2004, THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE was work-shopped at Barrington Stage Company in Sheffield, Massachusetts. By the following summer, the first full production took place in a cafeteria turned theatre.

From there, **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE** went to Off-Broadway's Second Stage Theatre. The original run sold out, and the show was extended thanks to rave reviews and powerful word of mouth. After breaking box office records at Second Stage, the show moved to Broadway's Circle in the Square on April 15, 2005, with an official opening on May 2nd. It again received glowing reviews and ended up winning two 2005 Tony Awards for Best Book of a Musical and Best Featured Actor.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Gary Bolen, Chairman of the Theatre Arts Department at MPC, holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in Theatre from Cal State University Fullerton and an M.F.A. in Acting from UCLA. A member of the Screen Actors Guild, Actors' Equity and AFTRA as well as the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, Mr. Bolen appeared in dozens of television dramas, sit-coms, soaps and national commercials prior to his employment at MPC. Mr. Bolen has performed on stage in MPC productions such as CHAPTER TWO (2009) and THE PRODUCERS (2009) as Max Bailystock. Most recently, Gary appeared in the September 11th themed Studio production of THE GUYS (2013). Recent directorial efforts include THE MUSICAL OF MUSICALS (THE MUSICAL!), ONCE UPON A MATTRESS, RENT, COMPANY, BEYOND THERAPY, and last year's highly acclaimed MPC production of the hit musical LES MISERABLES.

ABOUT THE DESIGN TEAM

The creative team includes **Gary Bolen** (*Director*), **Jill Miller** (*Choreographer*), **Barney Hulse** (*Musical Director*), **D. Thomas Beck** (*Technical Director*), **Steve Retsky** (*Lighting Design*), **Gloria C. Mattos Hughes** (*Costume Design*), and **Julie Johnson-Philips** (*Props Design*).

Tickets on sale at the MPC Box Office (646-4213) and online at MPCTheatre.com

Preview performance on Thursday May 8 at 7:30 PM. Regular performances are Friday & Saturday at 7:30 PM (May 9, 10, 16, 17, 23, 24) and Sunday at 2:00 PM (May 11, 18, 25) On the Morgan Stock Stage located on the MPC Campus at 980 Fremont, downtown Monterey. The MPC Box Office is located at 980 Fremont Street, downtown Monterey. Tickets are \$25 Adults, \$22 Seniors; \$15 Young Adults (16-21) & Military, and \$10 Children 15 & under; 24-hr Advance Purchase \$20; Online \$18 for Adults & Seniors.



Tickets may be purchased from the MPC Box Office (831-646-4213) which is open Wednesday through Friday from 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM, and 2 hours prior to performances, or online at www.TicketGuys.com

Please Note: Parking Fees are required on Thursday evenings on the MPC Campus.

Thursday	May 8 - 7:30 PM – <i>Preview</i> - All Seats \$12.50
Friday	May 9 - 7:30 PM - <i>Opening</i>
Saturday	May 10 - 7:30 PM
Sunday	May 11 - 2:00 PM
Friday	May 16 - 7:30 PM
Saturday	May 17 - 7:30 PM
Sunday	May 18 - 2:00 PM
Friday	May 23 - 7:30 PM
Saturday	May 24 - 7:30 PM
Sunday	May 25 - 2:00 PM – <i>Closing</i>

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