

## NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact: Andrew Flack, Buzz, Inc. 800-362-1273

WHO: The Southern Theater and Voices of Sepharad  
WHAT: *Peace in the House*  
WHERE: Southern Theater  
WHEN: Thurs-Sun, February 9-12: Thurs 8pm, Fri 10am, Sat. 8pm (plus post-show panel dialogue (“Jews in the Arab World: Shared Traditions”), Sun 7pm.  
PRICES: \$22 general admission; \$2 discount students, seniors, Southern members; \$12 group rate (10 or more); Fri matinee sliding scale \$7-22  
BOX OFFICE: (612) 340-1725

### *Peace in the House* Explores the Rich History of Coexistence Between Muslims, Jews and Christians

Theatre, music and dance performance interprets tensions and provokes dialogue

Building relationships between artists and audiences of different faiths

MINNEAPOLIS, MN (November 1, 2005)—After a sold-out run at the Southern Theater in October 2004, David Jordan Harris, artistic director of Voices of Sepharad, is remounting his theater, music and dance piece *Peace in the House*.

Taking the long view of history in the Middle East and North Africa, Harris and his multi-ethnic cast are intent on showing us that the many cultural and religious groups who have shared this region for thousands of years have, in fact, possessed a long tradition of being good neighbors.

“*Peace in the House* portrays these groups on a more personal, human scale,” says Harris. “We think in very negative terms these days about the inter-personal relationships of those living in the Middle East because it’s become such a flash point for violence and hatred. But historically, many people of different faiths have lived there together peacefully and have come to intimately know each other’s way of life.”

Working with an ensemble of actors, dancers, musicians and production team that reflect these various cultures, Harris and company are walking the talk when it comes to

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initiating a dialogue. “This production does more than just talk about intercultural dialogue. We live it and provoke dialogue with our audience,” says Harris. “Every person in the show represents some aspect of these cultures, and their stories and experience were integral to the show's creation.”

Guest artists who have collaborated on the project include Algerian-born choreographer Amel Tafsout, Saudi visual artist Hend Al-Mansour, Egyptian musician Salah Abdel Fattah, and a corps of six dancer-actors whose backgrounds encompass Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in ancestral homes ranging from Lebanon and Jordan to Turkey, Iran, and India.

The underlying premise for *Peace in the House* contends that Sephardic Jews, following their expulsion from Spain in 1492, lived in the context of the Arab world for hundreds of years and that this complex relationship was principally defined by neighborliness. Music, poetry, dance, folktale and lore bound the cultures together in a mosaic of shared expression—as significant to their history as their political contentions.

“There are all kinds of customs in Jewish life in which non-Jewish neighbors played an essential role,” Harris continues. “For instance, at the end of Passover in Morocco, Muslim neighbors would bring the first loaves of leavened bread back into the community because, of course, no Jew would have had any for eight days.”

“The view put forth in *Peace in the House* is not well known or understood by the American public,” Harris says. “While the news media thrive on images of eternal combativeness, *Voices of Sepharad* seeks to present a historically based, imaginatively conceived work of theater that presents alternative imagery to what we see all too often.”

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**Q&A with David Jordan Harris, Artistic Director of  
Voices of Sepharad and creator of *Peace in the House***

Q: *Why do you think **Peace in the House** was so well received during its initial run last year at the Southern Theater?*

A: People are hungry to see something more constructive than what they normally see on their TV screen or in their newspaper. The world right now is all about demolition. Destruction gets the headlines. But that's not the only activity deserving of attention. *Peace in the House* actually builds bridges. Bridge-building is a day-by-day activity that could use more energy and attention.

Q: *What was the audience like who attended those first performances?*

A: For the most part, the people who attended were not aware of this history of neighborliness. They simply didn't know it. People think the Arab community and the Jewish community have always hated each other--which is not true. It's been a complicated relationship, like any other, but the fact is Jewish culture would not be what it is without the many influences that were absorbed and transformed from the Arab context. And the same goes for Jewish elements that have influenced the Arab world.

Q: *How does **Peace in the House** tell its story?*

A: We do it through our cast by bringing it down to person-by-person encounters. The sweep of history is channeled through individual people with histories and relationships, passions and family. We make everything in the relationships count, and that's transferred to the audience. It becomes so freeing to get past the generalities and get down to what specifically happens to people in their individual lives. The way to get to the universal is through the specific—an individual who is embodying a larger tradition.

Q: *What have you learned about the relations between these groups?*

A: The hideous incidents in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that have been inflicted on both communities have become touchstones of fear—events that became the epicenter of excuses that one community has used against the other. *Peace in the House* allows a deepening, an opening of a door for the audience. It's also doing that for everyone on stage, and I think the audience grasps that something authentic is happening in front of them that is real and not artificial.

Q: *How has the process been a challenge?*

A: I made the decision early on that I would not present a vanilla piece that glosses over conflict. That includes conflict in the histories of the people involved or conflict in making this specific piece of theater. I wanted an outcome that mattered. I have embraced every bump that I hit because the bump meant something real was happening. If there had been no bumps, I would have known that I'd missed.

Q: *This sounds like a different kind of theater. How would you describe it?*

A: This is theatre that puts itself at the center of a community's life rather than at its fringes. Artists often feel satisfied to live on the edge of their culture, on its margins, because they believe their view is clearer from that spot. For me the edge is to step into the middle of the culture, to create a place for audiences who actually have something at stake in what takes place onstage. To create community in the midst of our fragmented society is my great adventure.

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