



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
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## ORIGINAL SET DESIGN AN HOMAGE TO PLAY'S 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

*Phoenix presents Panych's contemporary Canadian classic "7 Stories"*

2018-19 Season

### 7 Stories

March 14 – 23, 2019

By Morris Panych

Directed by Fran Gebhard  
Set Design Ken MacDonald  
Design Adaptation Conor Farrell  
Costume Design Bryce Butkiewicz  
Lighting Design Harry Zhe Lin  
Sound Design Olivia Wheeler  
Stage Manager Kelsey Ward

*Fast-paced and full of eccentric characters, this dark comedy takes place on a seventh story window ledge where a man is contemplating jumping. Endlessly interrupted by the building's quirky residents, he becomes drawn into the absurdity of their lives – making him question his choices*

#### Seven Stories about 7 Stories

March 15, 2019 at 7pm

*A free pre-show lecture with award-winning playwright Mark Leiren-Young*

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Premiering thirty years ago at Vancouver's Arts Club Theatre, Morris Panych's existential comedy **7 Stories** garnered six Jessie Awards. It was Panych's first major play and has since been called one of his best, becoming a contemporary Canadian classic. In honour of its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, UVic Theatre professor Fran Gebhard directs a new production of **7 Stories** using the original set design. It runs at the Phoenix Theatre from March 14 – 23, 2019.

*"Ken MacDonald's original set – inspired by the fabulous art of René Magritte – is iconic and adds an important layer to the meaning of the play, with the surreal elements of Magritte's work perfectly underscoring Panych's existential themes. I really couldn't see the play with any other design,"* says Gebhard, who is also long-time friends with Panych and MacDonald. *"I've waited thirty years to direct this play!"* **7 Stories** was also lauded at its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary (remounted in Toronto and Calgary) when the Globe and Mail called it *"funny, philosophical, often poetic and shows no sign of dating."*

The play takes place on a seventh storey window ledge where a man is in the midst of a life crisis. While reflecting on his life, he is interrupted by the quirky residents and their hilarious, self-absorbed problems. Through their interactions, the Man finds the courage to take the next step. This quick-witted, fast-paced comedy philosophizes about life and death, right up to its existential conclusion.

Canadian playwright Morris Panych's long history of successful plays have been performed across Canada, Britain, the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand in a dozen languages. He now counts thirty plays to his name, including: *Benevolence*, *The Ends of the Earth*, *Girl in the Goldfish Bowl*, *Lawrence and Holloman*, *The Trespassers*, *What Lies Before Us*, and *Vigil* (which premiered at the Belfry Theatre in 1995). His plays often explore the meaning of life through a theatre of the absurd style and sensibility, posing philosophical questions on human interactions, the nature of good and evil, and the relationship between fantasy and reality. Interviewed about his approach to theatre Panych said: *"To look at a play and say – 'This is a pretence invented out of nothing. These characters are trapped inside problems that don't even exist,' – and yet to remain committed to that reality for a time, just for the hell of it, is to begin to understand what the power of theatre is."* (Canadian Theatre Review)

*"It's an important play for our students to study,"* says Gebhard who teaches acting and regularly includes **7 Stories** in her curriculum. She loves the play's ability to offer perspective on the trials of daily life. *"I want people to look at this play, see themselves in these characters, and understand that it is OK to laugh at ourselves!"*

Other than MacDonald, Gebhard is working with an all-student creative team, including fourth-year student Conor Farrell, who adapted MacDonald's original designs to fit into the specifications of the Phoenix's Roger Bishop Theatre (including making a portion flexible to allow for the theatre's fire curtain). The over-23-foot tall building set shoots up from below the stage's edge and melds into a sky of clouds. The building's architectural details appear and disappear and are as existential as the play itself. Playful and colourful costumes by Bryce Butkiewicz bring the play into the just-recent past, giving a contemporary reading of the story. Lighting by MFA student Harry Zhe Lin takes us through the afternoon and evenings' events, as the colours of dusk reflect off the building's exterior. Sound design by fourth-year student Olivia Wheeler underscores the inner rhythm of the Man's mindset as well as his environment. Fourth-year student Kelsey Ward is the Stage Manager.

The public is invited to a free **Preshow Lecture, Friday, March 15 at 7pm** with award-winning playwright, Mark Leiren-Young, an instructor in the Writing department, who will discuss the significance, history and secret origins of Morris Panych's modern masterpiece. Performances for **7 Stories** are as follows:

**Public Previews @8pm:** Tuesday and Wednesday, March 12 & 13

**Opening Night @8pm:** Thursday, March 14

**Evenings @8pm:** (Tuesday-Saturday) March 14 (opening), 15 (lecture), 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23

**Matinees @2pm:** Saturdays, March 16 (with sign language interpretation) & March 23

**Preshow Lecture @7pm:** Friday, Friday, March 15 with Mark Leiren-Young, Instructor, Department of Writing

**Tickets:** Weekends@8pm: \$26 | Weekdays: \$26 Adult, \$21 Senior, \$16 Student, (Previews: \$8.00 available after 5pm)

**Phoenix Box Office Opens:** March 5: Monday through Saturday from 12:00 to 8:30pm.

In person or charge by phone at (250) 721-8000.