



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE January 24, 2006

## MEDIA RELEASE

Please include in JANUARY & FEBRUARY calendar listings and announcements

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### Pacific Theatre's **THE HUNGRY SEASON** Presents the Provocative Story of a Family Shattered By Higher Callings

**IN SHORT: Pacific Theatre presents the charged Canadian premiere of **THE HUNGRY SEASON** by Jennifer Morison Hendrix – a provocative story of faithfulness and betrayal, of impossible choices and a family shattered by higher callings.**

**Opens Jan 27 to Feb 25. For tickets (\$14-\$28) call 604.731.5518 or [pacifictheatre.org](http://pacifictheatre.org).**

Vancouver, BC – Opens January 27 to February 25, 2006

"What mother would sell her own child?" You might be surprised.

Pacific Theatre presents the charged Canadian premiere of **THE HUNGRY SEASON** by Jennifer Morison Hendrix — the provocative story of a family shattered by higher callings — running January 27 to February 25 at Pacific Theatre in the heart of Vancouver.

A missionary couple returns home from Nigeria for the first time in seven years — only to discover that their daughters no longer know them. A powerful story of faithfulness and betrayal, of clashing cultures and impossible choices.

Challenging notions of vocation and sacrifice, **THE HUNGRY SEASON** explores the undersides of the church's missionary glories and our culture's obsession with career advancement.

In the early twentieth century the mission field was commonly considered a higher calling, and missionaries to dangerous, isolated regions often had to send their children away. As one 'missionary kid' said about being sent to boarding school, "When your chief competition is God, you can't win — you can't get mad, either."

This unusual drama features the acting prowess of **Katharine Venour** (Jessie nomination: ST. JOAN), **Ron Reed** (together again with Venour after last season's powerful SHADOWLANDS), **Stuart Pierre** (Jessie award, ensemble: EQUUS / *The Vancouver Playhouse*) **Erin Bourke**, **Lori Kokotailo** (PT apprentice), and **Chy** (last seen at PT in CHICKENS).

**THE HUNGRY SEASON** is co-directed by **Morris Ertman** (who helmed past hits ESPRESSO, HALO and SHADOWLANDS) and **Anthony F. Ingram** (who produced and starred in Five Bob Equity Co-op's **THE ELEPHANT MAN**), with scenery & lighting design by **Kevin McAllister** (Jessie nomination: ESPRESSO), costume design by **Nicole Bach** (Jessie nomination: CHICKENS), sound design by **Luke Ertman** and stage management by **Connie Hosie** (who brilliantly ran the smash hit THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL).

This moving new play raises the question, "What does a calling require of us?" says playwright and parent Jennifer Morison Hendrix. "The play doesn't answer that question — because there is no simple answer, not for missionaries, not for artists, and not for mothers and fathers. Sometimes our boldest sacrifices hide a great deal of selfishness. And sometimes our greatest achievements look like failures."

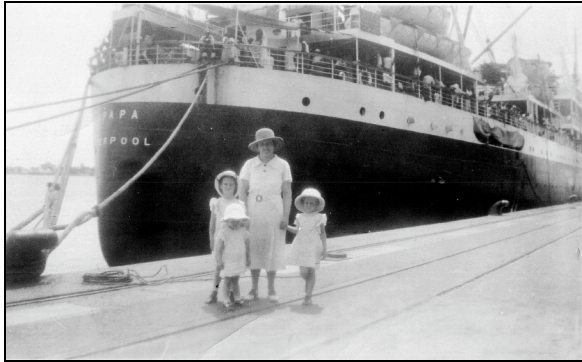
**"A unique drama... sensational." — Seattle Post-Intelligencer**

<b>Details:</b>	<b>THE HUNGRY SEASON</b> by Jennifer Morison Hendrix
<b>When:</b>	Opens January 27 to February 25 (Preview Jan 26); Wed.-Sat. at 8pm / Sat. at 2pm
<b>Where:</b>	<b>Pacific Theatre</b> , 1420 West 12 <sup>th</sup> Ave (at Hemlock St), Vancouver, BC
<b>Tickets:</b>	\$14-\$28 – To reserve call 604.731.5518, or visit <a href="http://pacifictheatre.org">pacifictheatre.org</a> , or in person.

## THE HUNGRY SEASON Playwright's Notes

In 1893 three missionaries landed in Lagos, Nigeria. The oldest was only 25. Their goal was to evangelize the interior of the country, which was known at the time as the Soudan. Two of them died within the year. The third, a native of Canada, returned, and in 1902 he established a base 500 miles inland. That was the beginning of Sudan Interior Mission's work in Nigeria.

In the 1920s and '30s scores of missionaries from North America followed. The sepia-tinted photographs capture them smiling. Their ruffled dresses and white cotton shirtsleeves flutter against the huge, shadowy landscape behind them. They have heard about the malaria, isolation, and homesickness; but all of that is still ahead of them. Right now they are smiling.



A missionary family preparing for travel, 1931.

It was popular at the time to view the Mission Field as a Higher Calling. One that required an extra measure of sacrifice for an extra degree of success. And the missionaries did make sacrifices. They lived on donations, often meager donations. They learned of the deaths of parents months after the funeral. They buried babies who did not survive fevers or accidents. And they sent their children away to be raised by other people so that they could continue the work they had started. Every season was a hungry season.



A mission hospital in Baka.

Over the years, they built hospitals, Bible schools, and colleges. They mastered more than 30 languages. They founded churches.

The mission stations, schools, and medical programs they began are still thriving today under the leadership of Nigerians. They succeeded. And in the process, they shattered hearts. Not only their children's — but ancient tribal traditions and sacraments were also broken and lost.

I started writing THE HUNGRY SEASON because I found the missionaries' choices compelling and theatrical. But as it turned out, THE HUNGRY SEASON is not about missionaries after all. It's about calling.

As George says of Tula, "Life is mostly ordinary, even out here. Boring even." Calling is what compels us to get up and keep going. To see through the ordinary. And sooner or later, most of us run into the same question: "what does this calling require of me?"

It's a terrifying question because we know from our own stories that the answer just



A young woman with Tula child.

might be "your right arm" or "your firstborn son." And even if we manage to dodge those demands, there is never a simple answer — not for missionaries, not for artists, not for parents. Especially not during our own hungry seasons, when last year's inspiration runs out before this year's vision shows itself.

I once asked a retired 80-year-old missionary why she went to Nigeria. Being young and naïve, I expected a stirring spiritual reply. She laughed at me. "I went because I wanted to," she said. She became Clara. And her defiant joy made sense: mostly we are called to what we love, rather than what we ought.

In those old photographs... they are right to be smiling.

—Jennifer Morison Hendrix

# Cast & Crew Biographies

\*Appears courtesy of Canadian Actor's Equity Association

## **Morris Ertman\***

### **Co-Director**

Credits for Pacific Theatre include the direction of *Shadowlands*, *Halo*, *Espresso*, *Master Harold...and the boys*, *Hospitality Suite*, *Sister Calling My Name*, *Holy Mo*, *St. Joan* and *Damien*. Morris has directed and/or designed for Chemainus Theatre, Brookstone Performing Arts, Mirvish Productions, The Canadian Opera Company, The Stratford Festival, The Citadel Theatre and Vancouver Opera, among others. He is also responsible for the writing (with co-author Ron Reed) and direction of the acclaimed production of *Tent Meeting*. Morris is the Artistic Director of Rosebud Theatre, where credits include *Frost at Midnight*, *The Diviners*, *Godspell*, *Cariboo Magi*, *Shadowlands* and *Cotton Patch Gospel*. He is the recipient of nine Sterling Awards and a Dora Award for the Canadian Opera Company's *Beatrice et Benedict*. Morris lives in Millet, Alberta with Joanne, his wife of 27 years, and their three children, Luke, Holly and Jesse.

## **Anthony F. Ingram\***

### **Co-Director**

Anthony performed in two of last year's most successful Equity Co-ops: *The Elephant Man* and *Cloud 9*. He's a graduate of UBC and Studio 58, and has performed in theatres across Canada, including the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, the Grand Theatre (London, Ontario), the Opera House (Rosebud, Alberta). Last year, marked his USA debut in *Brilliant!* at the San José Stage Company. Recent local credits: *The Front Page* (Ensemble Theatre Company), *Silence* (Shameless Hussies), *Halo* and *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (Pacific Theatre). He has directed two Guest Productions at Pacific Theatre: *Private Eyes* and *Beggars at the Waters of Immortality*. Visit: [www.geocities.com/afingram](http://www.geocities.com/afingram)

## **Katharine Venour\***

### **Marie Weller**

Katharine is very pleased to be back at Pacific Theatre. Past roles at PT include: Joy in *Shadowlands* and title roles in *St. Joan* (Jessie nomination), *Agnes of God*, and *Sister Calling My Name*. At Chemainus Theatre Festival: Milli in *Queen Milli of Galt*. At Theatre Calgary: Nellie in *Summer and Smoke*, Belle in *A Christmas Carol*, Katerina in *Amadeus*. At Theatre Junction: Helena in *Look Back in Anger*, Prudence in *Beyond Therapy*. Katharine made her professional debut in Robin Phillips' Young Company at the Citadel Theatre.

## **Ron Reed**

### **George Weller**

Ron founded Pacific Theatre in 1984, after graduating from CalArts with an MFA in acting. Favourite roles have included Jack in *Shadowlands*, Hugo in *God's Man in Texas*, Charlie in *The Foreigner*, Damien in guess which play, and whoever the heck he was in *Cotton Patch Gospel*. Ron is at work developing *A Bright Particular Star* for its premiere production at the end of this season, and can't wait to get back to his first book, *Soul Food Movies: A Guide to Films with a Spiritual Flavour*.

## **Chy\***

### **Martha Schmidt**

Chy's been doing this acting, singing and dancing thing in theatre and film since before she started kindergarten ... yadda yadda - whatever. Motherhood, love and rollercoasters - now those are much more interesting things to talk about. Terrifying and thrilling all at once and rarely going where you expect them to. Kind of like theatre ... and this play was no exception - a most unpredictable journey. One she hopes you enjoy. [Mandie, Keaton & Sam...min ma mulano!]

## **Stuart Pierre\***

### **Chinga**

Stuart Pierre is a member of the Sto:Lo First Nations. "I raise my hands in respect to the people of 'Tula' and all of the indigenous nations that had the courage to stay true to their traditions and ceremonies. I hope that one day we all can sit together as equals regardless of class, colour, culture or religion".

## **Erin Bourke**

### **Laura Weller**

This is Erin's first stint on the West Coast and she feels honored to be working on the PT stage with such a dynamic crew on such an important story. Erin graduated from Rosebud School of the Arts in 2004 and has been working in SK for the past year. She will be returning to Alberta for a tour in the Spring. Favorite credits include *The Foreigner*, *Diviners* and *Godspell* (Rosebud Theatre) and most recently *Aunt Gladys* for SNTC. Erin wishes to thank Morris, RR, Chy, Fam, CH and The Big Guy.

## **Lori Kokotailo**

### **Tina Weller**

PT's newest/oldest apprentice, Lori comes here via UBC and AADA (NYC). FYI- she's grateful to RR & ME for this opportunity and for the support of CH and AFI. Past favorite shows include: *Beggar's Opera*, *As You Like It*, *Bonjour la, Bonjour* (Theatre At UBC) and *Richard III* (BFA Studio Project; she got to play Buckingham). Fave role (other than Tina, of course) was the "Cheshire Cat" (AADA's *Alice in Wonderland*). Thanks to God for life and everyone in it - especially my m.o.m.

## **Jennifer Morison Hendrix**

### **Playwright**

Jennifer studied playwriting with as an undergraduate in the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Returning to the northwest, she met Ron Reed shortly after he formed Pacific Theatre. Jennifer shared her first play (*Daddy's Amen*) with Ron and went on to work with Pacific Theatre on two Christmas shows, *Into an Empty Room* and the first production of *Dreams of Kings and Carpenters*. In 1992 she received an MFA in playwriting from the University of Washington School of Drama. Other productions from those days include *Min Ma Mulano* at Taproot Theater (an earlier version of *Hungry Season*); *The Hunger Artists* with a King County Arts grant; and *The Reckoning* at Annex Theatre in Seattle. She is married to a playwright/director and has two daughters. Jennifer and her husband left theatre for a number of years to focus on family endeavors, but Jennifer has returned to playwriting within the last two years. She is currently editing a collection of her father's sermons, writing nonfiction and liturgical drama, and launching into a new play based loosely on the parable of the prodigal son.

## **Director's Notes**

In the process of preparing for and rehearsing this play, I have come to realize that it has resonances for a host of people connected in one way or another to stories about missions. We live in a world where there is so much need, and our awareness of that need is as present as the evening news. There is something wonderful in the human spirit that tries to make the world a better place by giving of oneself to causes that take us far from those we know and love to places where there are needs to be met. And there are also the complications of cultural exchange that happen when we set out to help a neighbour whose life and language bears little resemblance to our own.

It is true that cultures have been altered by well-meaning missionaries. It is true that those alterations have brought both good and bad, the balance of which may be interpreted differently by any of the participants.

THE HUNGRY SEASON is a play about adopted sons and daughters, both at home in America and overseas in Africa. It is a play about love and how it is invested. It is a play about hopes and dreams that cannot possibly come to fruition, and how grace manifests itself in the middle of disappointment. It is about a humanity that crosses cultures despite the inevitable clash of those cultures. I think the play offers an immense hope through a very simple idea. We love. We reach for love. And in the reach, we can find a measure of love that sustains physical and cultural distances.

I'd like to dedicate my part in this production to my mother Arlene Ertman, who embodied in life the best parts of the spirits of both Marie and Martha in this story.

—**Morris Ertman**, *Co-Director*

## Helpful Hints for THE HUNGRY SEASON

**"Da luma sulo"** - a farewell meaning "goodbye" or "till we meet again".

**"Dan dan"** - a greeting translated as "hello" or "hiya".

**"Ne Mi"** - "mom" or "mother".



**Tula** - A West African village located in northeast Nigeria.

**Fulani** - The Fulani are mainly nomadic herders and traders. The routes they established in western Africa provided extensive links throughout the region that fostered economic and political ties between otherwise isolated ethnic groups. They were also responsible for introducing and spreading Islam throughout much of western Africa.

**Hausa Traders** - The Hausa (HOUS-uh) inhabited the plateau and plains areas of northern Nigeria and southern Niger. Prominent in trade it has been said, "If you can't find in the market what you are looking for, all you have to do is tell a Hausa trader and come back in an hour." Their presence in West Africa has a strong impact on the region through providing needed items including: woven cloth, pottery, leather goods and metals.

**The Spur from Gombe to Jos** - A railroad line which connected these two Nigerian cities. Gombe was the departure point for travel to Tula.

**Revival Meetings and Doves** - It was common for American evangelists of this era to hold revival meetings as means of spreading the message of the Christian gospel. As a finale to some of these meetings doves were released to symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit.

**Talking Drum** - Talking drums are part of a

family of hourglass shaped pressure drums. One of the unique features of the instrument is its ability to closely imitate the rhythms and intonations of spoken language. In the hands of skilled performers, it can reproduce the sounds of proverbs or praise songs through a specialized "drum language". A knowledgeable audience can easily understand a drum dialogue. Whether accompanying dances or sending messages, the sound of these instruments can carry many miles. Specific talking drum patterns and rhythms are also closely linked with *ogun*, or spiritual beings associated with the traditional tribal belief systems originally celebrated in Nigeria and parts of Ghana.

**Baptism** - An important sacrament in the Christian tradition representing the forgiveness of sins through symbolic immersion in water. For believers it serves as a visible reflection of having been born again by the Holy Spirit to a new life in Christ.

**Harmattans** - Strong, sometimes violent, winds that originate in the Sahara and blow across central Africa. The harmattans are very dry and dust filled. As a result dryland farming is virtually impossible during this period, so farmers in the regions affected by this weather phenomena are often able to produce only one small crop per year.

**Tribal Initiation rites** - The initiation rites portrayed in THE HUNGRY SEASON are an



amalgam of rites gleaned from researching many West African cultures. Often puberty rites—for boys approximately 12-13 years old—include circumcision,

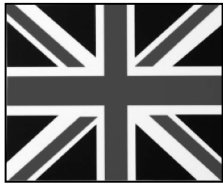
tribal scarring, wilderness journeys with a tribal elder, fasting, dancing, and communing with ancestral spirits. In some cultures boys receive a new name to signify that they are no longer children but adult members of the tribe.



**Gimbels, Wanamakers, Snellenburgs** - All were important Philadelphia department stores boasting single destination shopping for the urban consumer of

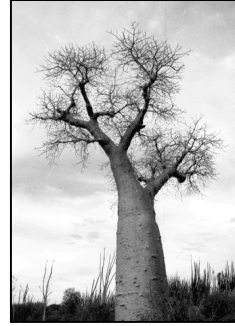
the 1950s and 60's. At one time Gimbels was the most discussed department store in the nation with the other two following close behind in popularity.

**Cocoa/Seed Yams** - These important crops are perennial climbing plants with edible underground tubers. They can be planted when the soil is dry and labor demand low. More than 95% of the world's yams are currently grown in sub-Saharan Africa. The yam is a preferred staple food crop in West Africa, and also has a prominent socio-cultural role.



**Tribal Unrest and Britain's withdraw-** Beginning in the mid 1800s up through the 1960s British colonial authorities sought to define, protect and realize imperial interest

in this portion of West Africa and to achieve economic and strategic goals. However, on October 1, 1960, the Federation of Nigeria achieved independence, initially as a constitutional monarchy. During this process of emancipation ethnic, regional, and religious tensions in Nigeria were greatly magnified by disparities in economic and educational development.



**The Baobab Tree** - The baobab is found in the savannas of African and India, mostly around the equator. It can grow up to 25 meters tall and can live for several thousand years. The baobab also has a distinct physical appearance. Some experts describe it as looking as though it was

"picked out of the ground and stuffed back in upside-down." Uniquely, the baobab bears the distinction of standing leafless for nine months of the year. In the wet months water is stored in its thick, corky, fire-resistant trunk for the nine dry months ahead. In African culture all parts of the baobab tree have a practical use. The bark is used for cloth and rope, the leaves for condiments and medicines, while the fruit, called "monkey bread", is eaten.



**Kola nut charm** - The kola nut has special significance in Nigeria. It is used as a gesture of peace, friendship and hospitality. It was offered to guests when they entered a house. The use of kola nuts

symbolized everything that was civilized and peaceful. As a charm it would have meant good luck and health for the wearer.

## PACIFIC THEATRE – About Us

Pacific Theatre was founded in Vancouver in 1984 as a professional theatre company which aims to delight, provoke, entertain and engage its audience by presenting stories that explore the spiritual aspects of human experience in a non-propagandist way that respects all faith orientations, and which strives to operate with artistic, spiritual, relational and financial integrity.

We're a member of the Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance, the Alliance For Arts & Culture and a supporting member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres. To date we've produced 58 shows, including 19 premieres, such as ESPRESSO by Lucia Frangione, and received over 50 Jessie Award nominations. And in June, 2004, Pacific Theatre was voted "ONE OF VANCOUVER'S FAVOURITE LIVE THEATRES" in the Stars of Vancouver Readers' Choice Awards, Vancouver Courier (along with the Arts Club and The Vancouver Playhouse).