

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Strawberry Theatre Workshop debates
gun control in a “living newspaper” production
at Town Hall Seattle**

SIX PERFORMANCES ONLY
PLAYS MAY 9- MAY 18, 2014

Gun violence is the Puget Sound region’s #1 health emergency—causing more preventable death in Washington State than car accidents or smoking. The current national debate obscures fundamental human issues—like freedom and safety—and emphasizes fear.

Produced with Town Hall Seattle, Strawshop presents a “living newspaper” production: a dramatic examination of the stories and opinions that shape this uniquely American debate. Called ***Control***, the play is inspired by an innovation of the Federal Theatre Project during The Great Depression, the six-person ensemble will activate perspectives on the issue of gun control by taking the audience to investigate where our laws were written and where the hyperbole is most absurd.

[FOR BACKGROUND ON THE LIVING NEWSPAPER PLEASE SEE END]

Artistic Director **Greg Carter** has imagined reviving the living newspaper concept for years. “Immediate, investigative drama on a topical issue is the purest realization of Strawshop’s mission.” Carter, who directs *Control* and adapted over four dozen media sources for the script, was nominated for a TPS Gregory Award for *The Laramie Project* in 2009. He says that *Control* will look very much like that investigation of a Wyoming community—a play that was created from interviews conducted by a company of actors after the murder of Matthew Sheppard.

The performers in *Control* include Strawshop regulars **MJ Sieber** (*Accidental Death of an Anarchist, The Elephant Man*), **Galen Joseph Osier** (*The Bells, Breaking the Code*), and **Rob Burgess** (*The Normal Heart, Inherit the Wind*), as well as **Jessie Underhill** and **Lisa Carswell**. Local musician **Rick Miller** (who performed in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* for Strawshop) accompanies.

There are only six performances of *Control*, performed in the downstairs space at Town Hall Seattle.

Control is made possible by a major grant from the **Lucky Seven Foundation**.

About Strawberry Theatre Workshop

Founded in 2004 by Greg Carter, Strawberry Theatre Workshop is a professional theatre company dedicated to socially engaged work of the highest caliber. Strawshop is a Stranger Genius Award winner, a four-time Seattle Times Footlight Award winner, and the only company to be nominated for a TPS Gregory Award for Outstanding Production four years in a row. Known for its critically acclaimed productions of *The Normal Heart*, *Breaking the Code*, *The Elephant Man*, and *The Laramie Project*, Strawshop is anchored in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood. Strawshop is one of three companies selected to operate the new 12th Avenue Arts, a center for theatre slated to open in October 2014.

Mission

Strawberry Theatre Workshop is committed to the idea that the theatre is the people's place of *aspiration*, and that any voice from the stage is translated exponentially into conversations at coffee shops, bus stops, classrooms, and play fields. Strawshop is dedicated to the idea of *ensemble*, in the broadest sense of the word. Our *ensemble* does not only mean a resident company of workers, but a collective that includes our work, our audience, and our neighborhood. This is an activist stance. To be a good neighbor is to be a relevant neighbor, a responsible neighbor, and a vocal neighbor.

LISTING INFORMATION:

Control

Opens: **Friday, May 9, 2014**

Plays: **Fri-Sat at 7:30p and Sun at 1:00p**

Venue: **Town Hall Seattle**

Address: **1119 Eighth Avenue, Seattle, WA 98101, Seattle**

Ticket Prices: **\$10-\$15**

Phone Sales: **(206) 652-4255**

Online Sales: **strangertickets.com**

READ MORE AT: **www.strawshop.org**

BACKGROUND ON THE LIVING NEWSPAPER IN AMERICA

The Living Newspaper is the **dramatization of a problem**, using events pulled from the pages of the news, and presented by actors as dramatic journalism. In the United States, Living Newspapers were the most effective new theatre developed by the **Federal Theatre Project** during the Great Depression. The Project organized the Living Newspaper by forming a staff of artists set-up like a large city daily—with an editor-in-chief, managing editor, city editor, reporters, and copyreaders. Episodes would be drawn from newspaper stories, committee reports, and eyewitness observations.

Many of the original Living Newspapers were political pieces, which supported aspects of President Roosevelt's New Deal. *Triple-A Plowed Under* (1936) dealt with agricultural reform, *Power* (1937) dealt with rural electrification, and *One-Third of a Nation* (1938) dealt with public housing. **Hallie**

Flanagan, the national director of the Federal Theatre, said the Living Newspaper sought “to make [theatre] out of everyday factual material. To dramatize a new struggle—the search of the average American today for knowledge about his world; to turn the great natural and economic and social forces of our time toward a better life for more people.”

Under the aegis of the **Works Progress Administration**, the Federal Theater Project was the most influential and controversial effort by the US government to provide relief for the unemployed during the Great Depression. Unlike the more long-lasting work-relief programs, which built roads, schools, and public spaces, the FTP and other arts projects harnessed the power of the arts to dramatize and expose social issues. It epitomized what William Stott called “the documentary impulse” of the 1930's: the urge to “record and clarify for the American people aspects of their experience, past or present, main-current or side-stream.”

One manner of accommodating the plethora of amateur talent at FTP's disposal was to develop a form of drama that dealt with the stylized representation of masses of people and social trends. Rather than having one actor carry the play with a few well-delivered monologues, Living Newspapers presented short scenes in rapid-fire succession to make the news come alive.

An essential piece of American history, the Living Newspaper had international antecedents as well. The technique was used for propaganda in the Soviet Union from the time of the Revolution in 1917. It became part of the Epic theatre tradition initiated by Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht in Germany in the 1920s. One of its major supporters in the United States was Elmer Rice, a dramatist and producer who believed in the value of drama as an instrument of social change.

In a typical Living Newspaper scene (from *Power*), a character named Buttoncooper walks in follow-spot. He is shopping for tomatoes, but price at the first store is too expensive. He goes to another place and buys them for less. Later, when Buttoncooper has to pay his electric bill, he has no place to go for a less expensive rate.

The FTP plays were all similarly episodic. There were twenty-six short scenes in *Triple-A Plowed Under*. The major character was the narrator—the Voice of the Living Newspaper (or simply: **Loudspeaker**)—an amplified voice, which guided the audience through the background material, pointed out the human consequences, and suggested possible solutions. The Loudspeaker would also get information from the actors—a device that also allowed a play to feel like an open forum, even though it was tightly scripted.

Because realistic sets required weeks of construction time that would hurt the immediacy of the Living Newspaper, each play's period and location were primarily established through costumes, props, and lighting. This was enhanced by a pioneering use of multimedia—projected newsreels, still photographs, live and recorded music—interacting with live actors. Blackouts and staccato interchanges—techniques borrowed from vaudeville—punctuated each series of swift scenes, and made the structure comfortable and familiar. With a top admission charge of 85¢, the Living Newspaper brought people to the theatre who had never seen a live performance. When scenes touched a nerve, audiences would talk back to actors on stage making Living Newspaper an exciting, dangerous theatre—years before Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* tore down the fourth wall forever.

Hallie Flanagan: “Facts are high explosives, and hence any plays based on fact must be carefully documented and handled with judicious restraint.”