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Press Release

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SOCIETY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS LAUNCHES SPA DIGITAL IN RE-IMAGINED 20/21 PERFORMANCE SEASON

HOUSTON (NOVEMBER 5, 2020) – Pivoting during a year of cancelled performances and events, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, Society for the Performing Arts (SPA) has turned from the stages of Houston’s Theater District, classrooms and community centers to the new stage of online streaming with the launch of ***SPA Digital***.

Performing arts presenters, along with the entire industry, are facing a historic challenge as social distancing and the health and safety of audiences, artists and staff take priority and touring artists stay at a near standstill. Much as SPA would like to return to normal operations, the reality remains that live performances, for the time being, must stay paused. Embracing the challenges then, and exploring the opportunities of digital media, SPA continues to bring audiences and artists together.

SPA Digital delivers the same range of experiences that Society for the Performing Arts is known for—**Choir of Man**, singing Brits sharing joy in an English pub, a conversation with comedy legends **Chevy Chase and Beverly D’Angelo**, **Manual Cinema’s** world-premiere take on Dickens’s **Christmas Carol**, and DJ’s Spooky’s powerful cinematic remix, **Rebirth of a Nation**. Additional performances will be added on a rolling basis.

Augmenting the ticketed programs of **SPA Digital** are the six virtual premieres of the **Houston Artist Commissioning Project** (HACP). Launched in July 2020, HACP supports the creation of new works by local Houston artists. The project’s first phase of digital works, and the accompanying **Westwood Creative Chats** featuring the artists, will remain permanently free and on view at SPA’s website and social channels. Applications are being accepted through

December for phase two of the project which will award three commissions for longer, live performances to premiere next year. We all need to stay connected and inspired—these timely and powerful new works by Houston’s creators give us the perfect opportunity to do so.

SPA CEO **Meg Booth** shares why the organization shifted to digital programming: “We all miss the energy of a live performance, but artists’ creativity can still inspire us, conveniently in our own homes. SPA is adapting to our current reality. We launched SPA’s *Houston Artist Commissioning Project* which supports creation of new work by Houston artists, and we’ve pivoted our in-school arts education curriculum *Collaborative Arts Project* to the digital platform. SPA is happy to continue bringing terrific artists and audiences together while socially distanced, keeping us safe and inspired.”

These events represent a wide range of arts disciplines, subject matter, and in the background of the artists themselves. But what these programs have in common is so important: they’re all made for the virtual space, to be seen on a screen and shared with family, friends and countless others watching along online.

It may be some time before we can return to in-person shows. Until then, through initiatives like **SPA Digital** and the *Houston Artist Commissioning Project*, Society for the Performing Arts will continue to move forward through the crisis, and with programming that inspires.

SPA DIGITAL PERFORMANCES

Choir of Man

Saturday, NOV 21

7:30 pm CST

Raise your glass! Handsome British blokes sing some of your favorite songs and pour joy by the pint.

Known across the globe as “the ultimate-feel good show,” the Choir of Man offers up an evening of indisputable joy. It’s a party. It’s a show. It’s a pint-filled good time set in a real working pub that combines hair-raising harmonies, high-energy dance, and live percussion with foot-stomping choreography. The multi-talented cast of handsome blokes sings everything – pub tunes, folk, Broadway, classic rock – all to roof-raising heights. It’s the best singing, dancing, stomping, pub crawl of a show you’ll ever see!

An Evening with Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo

Saturday, NOV 28

7 pm CST

Light up your holidays and join Christmas' favorite couple, Ellen and Clark Griswold for this virtual salute to the holiday classic, National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation!

Chevy Chase (Clark) and **Beverly D'Angelo** (Ellen) lead audiences through this live event as they share fan-favorite clips from the movie, reveal their favorite memories from the making of the Vacation franchise and answer your questions in a live-audience Q&A.

Manual Cinema's Christmas Carol

DEC 5, 12 & 19

7 pm CST

In this world premiere online event created for audiences of all ages, interdisciplinary performance collective Manual Cinema takes on Charles Dickens's holiday classic with a visually inventive adaptation made to broadcast directly to your home.

An avowed holiday skeptic, Aunt Trudy has been recruited to channel her late husband Joe's famous Christmas cheer. From the isolation of her Chicago apartment, she reconstructs his annual Christmas Carol puppet show – over a Zoom call while the family celebrates Christmas Eve under lockdown. But as Trudy becomes more absorbed in her own version of the story, the puppets take on a life of their own, and the family's call transforms into a stunning cinematic adaptation of Dickens's classic ghost story.

DJ Spooky's Rebirth of a Nation

Saturday, FEB 6

7:30 pm CST

DJ Spooky examines D.W. Griffith's 1915 silent, controversial film *The Birth of a Nation*, which is set during and after the American Civil War and provoked controversy for its treatment of white supremacy and its positive portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan.

Rebirth of a Nation is Miller's retelling of *The Birth of a Nation* as a DJ remix of Griffith's original work. Using his skills as a music producer and composer to mash music and film techniques, he recontextualizes Griffith's achievement and places the original film in a moral framework, drawing striking parallels between socio-political conflicts in America during

Griffith's era and today. The film features Miller's original score, performed and recorded by the Kronos Quartet.

SPA HOUSTON ARTIST COMMISSIONING PROJECT PREMIERES

Westwood Trust Creative Chats, conversations between these winning artists and Claire Williamson, SPA's Director of Education & Community Engagement, go live a few days prior to each new work premiere.

These chats, plus all new works, can be found on our website or on our [YouTube channel](#). All will remain freely available to the public.

Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton

(OCT 15)

Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton is an internationally known writer, educator, activist, and the first Black Poet Laureate of Houston. Her work has appeared in *Houston Noir* by Akashic Press (2019), *Black Girl Magic* by Haymarket Books (2019), *Fjords Journal*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and on such platforms as NPR, BBC, ABC, Apple News, Blavity, Upworthy, and across the TedX circuit. Her latest digital work, *Hold the Light*, premiered on SPA Digital on October 15, 2020.

Tazeen Zahida

(OCT 29)

Working under the banner of her company Tee Zee Productions, playwright Tazeen Zahida shared her newest satirical comedy, *Trouble in the Melting Pot*.

Jacquelyne Boe & David Janesko

Thursday, NOV 12

7 pm

Collaborators Jacquelyne Boe & David Janesko have created a new dance work, compiled from five consecutive live streams.

Boe and Janesko have an ongoing collaboration as part of their 2019 to 2021 residency at the Lawndale Art Center in Houston, Texas. Boe is Houston based professional choreographer,

dancer, and educator interested in collaboration and experimentation. Janesko is an artist exploring the emergence of complexity using an experimental approach that encompasses a wide array of mediums, technology and subject matter. Together they are exploring movement and drawing through sets of rule-based actions in multiple media types.

Christopher Thomas

Thursday, NOV 19

7 pm

Houston dancer Christopher Thomas's motto is: "God gave you a talent. Use it. That is your gift to the world." His latest work features a collaboration with videographer/editor Joel Martinez.

Taking a break during his teen years to focus on sports and college, Thomas returned to his true love, dance, and in 2007 began traveling the world. Thomas has visited 25 countries as a teacher, competitor, choreographer, and performer. Through dance and entertainment, Thomas has performed alongside Steven Tyler, Keith Urban, Sugar Ray, Life House, Natasha Bedingfield, 69 Boyz, Flo Rida, Kendrick Lamar, Erykah Badu and more.

Felipe Lopez

Thursday, DEC 3

7 pm

Felipe Lopez, a multidimensional visual artist based in Houston, collaborates with Meghan Hendley and Emanuelee Outspoken Bean on a work that incorporates visual art, music and poetry.

Felipe Lopez is a multidimensional self-taught visual artist based in Houston, Texas. Born in New York, Lopez's career began with his mixed media drawings & paintings.

In 2019, Mayor Sylvester Turner and the City of Houston approved Houston Arts Alliance recommendation to award Lopez a Support for Artists and Creative Individuals grant which has helped fund his largest bulb work. Early 2019 also brought another major solo exhibition entitled *The Liquidity of a Right* with Forma 110 with another solo exhibition in May at Deborah Colton Gallery, *The Want In My Nature*. Felipe was also selected to be on the city-wide committee for Disaster Relief with Houston Arts Alliance and the City of Houston.

WindSync

Thursday, DEC 17

7 pm

One of the nation's leading woodwind quintets and based in Houston, WindSync performs a new work by composer and dancer Akshaya Avril Tucker.

Since the ensemble's founding in 2009, **WindSync** has built a reputation as one of the finest North American wind quintets, backed by national and international-level prizes in chamber music performance from the Concert Artists Guild, Fischhoff, and M-Prize Chamber Arts competitions. WindSync has appeared in recital at the Library of Congress, Shanghai Oriental Arts Center, Ravinia, and Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, and they have been named three times to the touring roster of the Texas Commission on the Arts.

FURTHER PERFORMANCE UPDATES

The following spring 2021 performances have been canceled due to the ongoing limitations of the pandemic. Ticket holders will be notified over the next week.

The Brubeck Brothers, scheduled for January 29, 2021 (previously rescheduled from May 16, 2020) and **Samin Nastrat: *Salt Fat Acid Heat***, scheduled for January 30, 2021 (previously rescheduled from June 12, 2020).

THE ARTS FORWARD: RELIEF & RESPONSE FUND

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, SPA has launched the **Arts Forward, Relief & Response fund**, to address the devastation of the crisis and support growth initiatives that will sustain the organization for years to come. As of November 5, 2020, the campaign has raised \$907,183 to a goal of \$1.5 million.

We ask all who support our programs and performances to give today at spahouston.org/support. To those who've helped moved this fund forward, you have our deepest thanks.

ABOUT SOCIETY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Society for the Performing Arts (SPA) is the largest non-profit arts presenter in the Southwest. Founded in 1966 as a resident organization of Jones Hall for the Performing Arts, SPA has sponsored more than 1,000 performances of the world's most remarkable artists, featuring a huge range of arts disciplines. In addition to performances at Houston's Theater District venues, SPA provides learning experiences for all ages through master classes, lectures and special performances, as builds strong supportive relationships with schools and community organizations throughout the region. More at spahouston.org/

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