PROVIDENCE, RI: The Wilbury Theatre Group’s Founding Artistic Director Josh Short has announced the Group’s 2015-16 season, including a new drama from one of New York’s most promising young playwrights, the world premiere of a new play by Wilbury playwright-in-residence Ben Jolivet, two of the most acclaimed off-Broadway musicals of the last few years, an irreverent new adaptation of Anton Chekhov’s The Seagull, and the New England premiere of Jez Butterworth’s Jerusalem.

The Wilbury Group’s 2015-2016 season starts in September with the New England premiere of Dry Land, a new play by 21 year-old rising star and undergraduate at Yale, Ruby Rae Spiegel. A recent nominee for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in Drama, Dry Land takes place inside a high school girls’ locker room. “I was sent this play last fall by one of the bigger theaters in town who felt that it was more ‘Wilbury’ than anything else and I fell in love with it immediately,” says Short. “I’ve spent the last 6 months going back and forth with the powers that be trying to secure the rights to do it, and today we have them. It’s a beautiful piece of work, and easily one of the most exciting and heartbreaking new plays that I’ve read in years. After its successful New York run we’re extremely lucky to be one of the first theaters in the country to produce it, and I think Providence audiences will respond to its incredibly human story.”

Following Dry Land The Wilbury Group’s New Works program will produce the world premiere of Cain + Abel, a new play by the Wilbury’s Playwright-in-Residence Ben Jolivet directed by Susie Schutt. “We presented Cain & Abel as a staged-reading last fall and audience reaction was huge. It’s the edgy, contemporary reimagining of a tale that we all think we know so well, and Ben’s brought these characters to life in such a way that for the first time the underlying themes of jealousy, love, and seduction ring loud and clear.”

2015 ends with the Rhode Island premiere of one of the most exciting rock musicals of the last 20 years, Passing Strange by Stew and Heidi Rodewald, directed by Brien Lang. “Passing Strange has been on my wish list of great plays I’d like to produce since the Wilbury Group was founded,” says Short. “As a jazz-blues style musical that’s outside anything we’ve done, every year for the past few years I’ve included it in drafts of the season lineup and then taken it out. This year though, with Brien at the helm, we’re finally ready to give it the production it deserves.”

In January 2016 the Wilbury Group kicks off the New Year with the Rhode Island premiere of Aaron Posner’s Stupid Fucking Bird, originally developed by Posner at The Woolly Mammoth Theater in D.C. and ‘sort of adapted from The Seagull by Anton Chekhov.’ “I think it’s a real challenge for theatres to produce Chekhov sans the preciousness that can keep audiences from relating to it. Posner’s adaptation stays true to the story of one of Chekhov’s greatest works, while giving it the bite and verve that it warrants in a 21st century production.”

Coming out of the Winter into Spring is the New England premiere of the off-Broadway rock musical by Julia Jordan and indie rock singer/songwriter Juliana Nash, Murder Ballad. Directed by Wendy Overly, Murder Ballad is an immersive tale of sex, betrayal, and love in a rock and roll style. “It’s smart, sexy, and it’s a hell of a lot of fun. It’s a play that’s written to be experienced so viscerally by its audience, and under Wendy’s direction it won’t disappoint.”

To close the season The Wilbury Group goes out with a bang by presenting the New England premiere of Jez Butterworth’s Tony Award nominated play, Jerusalem. “Jerusalem is the quintessential Wilbury play to me; it demands excellent ensemble work, it’s as gritty as anything, and it balances comedy and pathos beautifully. And like many of the plays that have been my favorite over the years, it’s a huge challenge for a small company like ours to do with a great emotional payoff.”
In addition to its mainstage season, The Wilbury Group is responsible for producing the Providence Fringe Festival, FringePVD, and a New Works program which will be presenting workshops of 2 new plays during the 2015-16 season, and 5 staged-readings from its New Play Reading Series. New Works programming for the 2015-16 season to be announced in July.

Memberships for the 2015-16 season start at just $95 and are available for purchase online at www.TheWilburyGroup.org/membership, or by calling the box office at (401) 400-7100. Discounts are also available for seniors, students, artists, and military personnel.

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**2015-16 SEASON PLAY SYNOPSES**

**DRY LAND**

by Ruby Rae Spiegel  
Directed by Josh Short  
SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER | NEW ENGLAND PREMIERE

Ester is a swimmer trying to stay afloat. Amy is curled up on the locker room floor. Victor hates jocks but not girls. Reba just wants to party. A play about girls, abortion, bath salts, bathing suits, rashes, love, and what happens in one high school locker room after everybody's left. A finalist for the 2014 *Susan Smith Blackburn Prize* for Drama, this heartfelt, hilarious, and gut-wrenching new play by one of the America's most promising young playwrights will leave audiences gasping for air. "Remarkable...this portrait of an unlikely friendship under uncommon pressure is tender, caustic, funny and harrowing, often all at the same time." -The New York Times

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**CAIN + ABEL**

by Ben Jolivet  
Directed by Susie Schutt  
OCTOBER - NOVEMBER| A WORLD PREMIERE FROM OUR NEW WORKS PROGRAM

From The Wilbury Group's Playwright-in-Residence Ben Jolivet comes *Cain + Abel*, a fresh, contemporary take on a classic tale. In the shadow of the deserted garden, two brothers wrestle with faith and desire in the face of uncertainty and fear; two women struggle to find a place beyond the grossest instincts of men; and a lonely traveler grapples with his creation. Fighting their way into the unknown will demand everything from them and result in the ultimate sacrifice. In the beginning, nothing became something and nobody knew what to do.
PASSING STRANGE
by Stew & Heidi Rodewald
Directed by Brien Lang
NOVEMBER - DECEMBER | RHODE ISLAND PREMIERE

From Los Angeles to Amsterdam to Berlin and back, Passing Strange takes musical theater on a whole new trip. From singer-songwriter and performance artist Stew comes Passing Strange, a daring new musical that takes you on a journey across boundaries of place, identity and theatrical convention. Stew, a popular performer at Joe's Pub, was commissioned by The Public Theater of New York to develop this heartfelt and hilarious story of a young bohemian who charts a course for “the real” through sex, drugs and rock and roll. Loaded with soulful lyrics and overflowing with passion, the show takes us from black, middle-class America to Amsterdam, Berlin and beyond on a journey towards personal and artistic authenticity. "Fresh, exuberant, bracingly inventive, bitingly funny, and full of heart." —The New York Times. "With excellent songs and a vulnerable heart, PASSING STRANGE could join Hedwig and the Angry Inch as a punk musical milestone." —Variety.

STUPID FUCKING BIRD
by Aaron Posner, adapted from The Seagull by Anton Chekhov
JANUARY - FEBRUARY | RHODE ISLAND PREMIERE

In this irreverent remix of Chekhov's The Seagull, an aspiring young director rails against art created by his mother's generation, a nubile young actress wrestles with an aging Hollywood star for the affections of a renowned novelist, and everyone discovers just how disappointing life, art, and growing up can be. Chekhov's characters still ruminate on love, revolution and the pursuit of happiness, but this time with a lot more snark as the subtext bubbles to the surface. With music, meta-theatricality, and mad humor, playwright Aaron Posner beats The Seagull to a bloody pulp. “Posner’s new play is less an adaptation of Chekhov’s landmark drama than a funny, moving slugfest, a ripe mashup of mock and awe.” -The Washington Post. "The Best Chekhov Adaptation in Two Decades: Stupid Fucking Bird is the most authentic, self-aware, playful, pathos-filled, unassuming and world-wise adaptation of Chekhov since Louis Malle’s 1992 film, Vanya on 42nd Street. How does one have Chekhov speak to 21st-century America? See this play." -LA Weekly

MURDER BALLAD
conceived and with book by Julia Jordan, music and lyrics by Juliana Nash
directed by Wendy Overly
MARCH - APRIL | NEW ENGLAND PREMIERE
A love triangle gone wrong, *Murder Ballad* centers on Sara, an Upper West Sider who seems to have it all, but whose downtown past lingers enticingly and dangerously in front of her. Direct from a sold-out run at MTC’s Studio at Stage II, this sexy, explosive, new rock musical explores the complications of love, the compromises we make, and the betrayals that can ultimately undo us. *Murder Ballad* is conceived by Jonathan Larson Award winner and two-time Susan Smith Blackburn Prize finalist Julia Jordan with book and lyrics by Jordan and music and lyrics by indie rock singer/songwriter Juliana Nash. "This steamy show is a love triangle with a razor’s edges. The show features taut, tart, and pungent lyrics by Julia Jordan and Juliana Nash." -The New York Times. "A hot night of theatre! With an energy that is electric, this show is going to get young people to the theater in reams." -Backstage Magazine.

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**JERUSALEM**

*by Jez Butterworth*

directed by Josh Short

**MAY - JUNE | NEW ENGLAND PREMIERE**

On the morning of the local county fair, Johnny Byron is a wanted man. Local officials want to serve him an eviction notice, his son wants his full attention, and his motley crew of friends wants his ample supply of booze... Premiered in 2009 at the Royal Court Theatre, London, *Jerusalem* won the *Evening Standard Award for Best Play* in 2009, and transferred to the West End in 2010. It opened on Broadway in April 2011 at the Music Box Theatre. “An instant modern classic” – Daily Telegraph; “One of the most exciting new plays in ages” – New York Times; “Jez Butterworth’s gorgeous, expansive new play keeps coming at its audience in unpredictable gusts, rolling from comic to furious, from winsome to bawdy” – Observer

*all plays and dates are subject to change.

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