

sandra feinstein-



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For more information contact:

Gail Hulbert, Communications & Marketing Director  
The Gamm Theatre  
(401) 723-4266 or [gail@gammtheatre.org](mailto:gail@gammtheatre.org)

Jeannine Chartier, Executive & Artistic Director  
VSA arts of Rhode Island  
401-725-0247 or [programs@vsartsri.org](mailto:programs@vsartsri.org)

**THE GAMM THEATRE & VSA ARTS OF RHODE ISLAND  
SHINE SPOTLIGHT ON DISABILITY WITH *ELEPHANT MAN* EVENT**

PAWTUCKET, RI (September 10, 2007) — **The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre** (The Gamm) and **VSA arts of Rhode Island** are pleased to present a **panel discussion with experts in the fields of theater and disability on Friday October 5 at 6:30 p.m.**, followed by an **ASL-interpreted performance of Bernard Pomerance's multi-award-winning play *The Elephant Man***. "**Beyond Victims & Villains: a Discussion about Disability from the Sideshow, the Stage & the Street Corner**," will explore past and present portrayals of disability on stage and their impact on society at large. The event will take place at The Gamm Theatre, 172 Exchange St., Pawtucket, RI.

**Gamm Artistic Director Tony Estrella**, who is also the show's director, will moderate the panel discussion featuring:

- **Victoria Lewis**, pioneer in the field of theater and disability, and founder of the *Other Voices* project at L.A.'s Mark Taper Forum. (more info at: [www.redlands.edu/Victoria\\_Lewis.xml](http://www.redlands.edu/Victoria_Lewis.xml))
- **Dennis Hurley**, writer, actor and producer of *The Albino Code*, a film parody of *The DaVinci Code* giving insight into Albinism misconceptions (more info at: [www.albinocode.com](http://www.albinocode.com))
- **Judith Swift**, professor of theater and communications at the University of Rhode Island and a Gamm resident director (more info at: [www.uri.edu/artsci/com/swift](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/com/swift))

**Play Synopsis**

The **true and riveting story** of John Merrick, a Victorian Englishman doomed by his grotesquely deformed body to life as a sideshow freak until he is befriended by a famous young surgeon. Under the care of Dr. Frederick Treves, who educates Merrick and introduces him to London society, the so-called "Elephant Man" changes from a sensational object of pity to the urbane and clever darling of the rich and famous. But can Merrick's dream to be accepted as a man like any other come true? The Broadway favorite of 1979, winning both the **Tony Award and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play**, *The Elephant Man* is a **poignant and thoughtful journey to the core of human dignity**. With plainspoken yet masterful dialogue, Pomerance creates "**a moving drama**" that "**nestjs in the human heart**," says *Time Magazine*.

**Jeannine Chartier, executive director of the non-profit VSA arts**, which provides opportunities for Rhode Islanders with disabilities to participate in the arts, said she is anticipating "**a very unique experience**" for the audience.

"Theater has always been a place to explore multiple perspectives on what it means to be human. While this show is about one man with severe physical deformities, it also raises much larger questions about the ideals of beauty, justice and how society interacts not just with those of us with disabilities, but all the 'others' with marginalized voices," Chartier said.

"We all have our collective prejudices and ignorance to consider," she added. "**We expect our event to help provide insight into challenging past ideas that most often limit us to stereotypes.**"

**Estrella called it "a distinct privilege" to partner with VSA arts.**

“Both The Gamm and VSA arts share a common goal in providing context to explore socially relevant arts on a deep and direct level,” he said. “The story of the Elephant Man makes for a natural and necessary collaboration.”

A limited number of discounted “**Friend of VSA arts**” tickets are available at **\$10** each to people with disabilities, friends and family members, and service providers. Admission includes panel discussion, performance and post-show reception with the show’s actors. A limited number of regular tickets are available to the general public at **\$27**. All ticket buyers are invited to participate in both the pre-show discussion and post-show reception.

For tickets, call the Gamm box office at **401-723-4266 (v)** or **RI Relay TTY & give code words VSA ARTS**. For more information about this event, contact **VSA arts of RI at 401-725-0247** or email: [programs@vsartsri.org](mailto:programs@vsartsri.org).

Support for this event has been provided by the **Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Humanities** and the central office of **VSA arts. Rhode Island Council for the Humanities** is an independent state affiliate of the **National Endowment for the Humanities**. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

#### ***About The Gamm Theatre***

Founded in 1984 as Alias Stage, the nonprofit **Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre** performs great works of the classic and modern theater in an intimate setting that fosters the vital relationship between author, actor and audience. As the cornerstone of **The Arts Exchange** at the Pawtucket Armory, The Gamm seeks to engage and enrich the community through affordable entertainment and educational programming. The Gamm is a member of **New England Area Theatre (NEAT)**, a bargaining unit of the Actors Equity Association.

#### ***About VSA arts***

*VSA arts of Rhode Island (RI)* is a statewide nonprofit that provides opportunities for people with disabilities to actively participate in high quality programs in the visual, literary and performing arts. *VSA arts of RI* creates model programs for inclusive audiences throughout the state in partnership with the arts, cultural, disability and educational communities. Founded in 1986 on advocacy for access and artistic excellence, *VSA arts of RI* increases public awareness of the creative talents of children and adults with disabilities, integrating their achievements into Rhode Island’s mainstream community, thereby promoting arts for all.

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