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For Immediate Release:

A Bard Walks Into A Bar: Taffety Punk Revamps Beowulf as a Barroom Tale

Absolute minimalism yields epic depth in the retelling of our oldest surviving English story.

Beowulf, A Retelling

adapted and performed by **Marcus Kyd**

directed by **Chris Curtis**

Where: Capitol Hill Arts Workshop (545 7th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003)

When: April 4 - 19, 2025

Price: \$20 tickets available at www.taffetypunk.com

Fresh from their Helen Hayes Awards nominations for last fall's *The Tragedie of Macbeth*, Taffety Punk makes the old new again — unearthing the original English epic to examine the idea of the hero. In a bar.

The company — known for highly stylized movement and ensemble devised works, usually with lots of amplified music — takes a decided turn towards minimalism to embrace the storyteller quality of the original poem. Transforming their home space, in the black box at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop, into a bar-like environment provides an intimate setting for the work at hand. Hoping to capture the compelling quality of the “bards of old” Marcus Kyd returns to the stage in this fresh adaptation equipped with only his own voice and a guitar.

Directed by fellow company member Chris Curtis, and inspired by a multitude of sources, *Beowulf, A Retelling* catapults the imaginations of the audience to an epic saga version of 5th century Scandinavia. The story opens with the Danes celebrating a long awaited peace by building a resplendent hall called Heorot. This place of beauty and community is near immediately beset by a monster devoid of anything but appetite which swiftly brings the kingdom to ruin. For twelve years the Danes suffer these attacks. Across the waves in Geatland, a young warrior named Beowulf hears of the trouble and chooses to do something about it. We follow the adventures of Beowulf in Denmark, and his journey back to the Geats, ultimately to the last fight of his long adventurous life.

Director **Chris Curtis** offers an insight into his motivation when he says: “It occurs to me that modern audiences hear myths through a sheen of fiction. We say ‘the monster represents evil’ or whatever, and that makes it easy to be detached from it. But to the original audiences, that arguably wasn’t true at all. To be sure, there’s always been a degree of myth *making*—valorizing heroes, exaggerating perils, and such. But the thing is, those people knew: monsters are real. And they hurt and kill people for real.”

Persuaded by the recent translation of *Beowulf* by Maria Dahvana Headley who endorses the original poem as a barroom tale, in addition to Seamus Heaney’s version in which he tries to capture the sound of the “big voiced Scullions” of his Irish family, Kyd and Curtis have been tackling how to re-craft the story for modern listeners. Kyd says, “The challenge in adapting it is to make this epic understandable without losing the epic qualities therein.” He says he originally imagined a show where he recited all 3,182 lines of poem from start to finish and laughs now when he reflects on this: “I think by the end of that, I might have been the only one left in the room.”

The Beowulf epic often takes an abrupt turn into other sagas popular among its first millennium listeners. So along the way, Kyd dives into other tales closer to our lives — notably stories of the famed Hawaiian surfer and lifeguard **Eddie Aikau**, and the **Oversteegen sisters** in Holland. The ballad of “**John Henry vs the Steam Drill**” also makes an appearance. Beowulf’s story is here, intact, and all three monsters he faces. Meanwhile, the show looks to capture and contextualize the original impulses of the story for a modern audience, and like the original asks the bigger question, “What makes someone a hero?”

The format of the show is inspired by Lisa Peterson and Denis O'Hare's famed adaptation of Homer's epic, *An Iliad*. Chris Curtis witnessed this intimate production on two separate occasions and it was Curtis who brought the script to Taffety Punk's attention which led to the company's production in 2016, directed by company member Dan Crane. Additionally Kyd cites international performer Xanthe Gresham as a critical inspiration for how a modern storyteller can tackle an ancient text and make it riveting for the audience. With an expansive repertoire, Gresham has brought her adaptations of ancient Persian epics to stages at the Smithsonian, and appears again this year at the Nowruz festival, thrilling audiences with tales of heroes and their trials.

"Chris is right," Kyd offers. "Monsters are real. We would do well to remember that."

Taffety Punk Theatre Company as always is committed to making the best possible theatre for the best possible price. Tickets for this show will not exceed \$20. In a first for Taffety Punk, there will be reserved seats. Seats at tables will be \$20, with barstools and some standing room available at lower prices.

Beowulf, A Retelling opens at the **Capitol Hill Arts Workshop** (545 7th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003 – two blocks from Metro's Orange/Blue Line stop at Eastern Market) on Saturday, April 5th at 8:00pm and runs on Wednesdays through Saturdays through Saturday, April 19th. All evening performances are at 8:00pm. There is a half-price preview on April 4th. There is an additional "industry night" performance on April 14th, and one Saturday Matinee at 2:00pm on April 19th.

This show is estimated to run 75 minutes in length. Give or take.

Featuring company member and artistic director Marcus Kyd, and directed by company member Chris Curtis, with light design by Elijah Thomas.

Taffety Punk Theatre Company is the resident company at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop.

For hi-res photos, go to: www.taffetypunk.com/press

- **Marcus Kyd** (adapter and performer) is an actor, director, and musician based in Washington, DC. He is the Artistic Director and co-founder of Taffety Punk Theatre Company where he has directed original works including *Enter Ophelia, distracted* (co-created with Kimberly Gilbert), *Fragments of Sappho, suicide.chat.room*, and adaptations of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece*, and *The Phoenix and Turtle*, and new plays *Phaeton*, and *Our Black Death*. Other directing credits include Adirondack Theatre Festival: *The Last Wide Open*, and *Dial M for Murder*; Contradiction Dance Company's *Fashion Victim*, in collaboration with choreographer Kelly King; *Devised Macbeth* at the Shakespeare Theatre Academy, co-directed with Emma Jaster; and Part 3 of *Nicholas Nickleby* (a reading) at the Theatre Lab. For three years he directed the Folger Shakespeare Library's touring educational troupe "Bill's Buddies" who brought Shakespeare to life for hundreds of students every year with a live performance and interactive workshops. As an actor Marcus has performed in his original play *The Devil in His Own Words* for Taffety Punk, directed by company member and co-founder Lise Bruneau. He has also been on stage at the the Kennedy Center, The Lincoln Center, The Folger Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Round House Theatre, Theater J, Devil's Isle Shakespeare Company, Center Stage, Olney Theatre Center, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Arena Stage, The Shakespeare Theatre, Anti-Social Music/WPAS, Nebraska Shakespeare Festival, Happenstance Theater Company, and many more. He played guitar and sang for The Most Secret Method.
- **Chris Curtis** (*Macbeth*) is a DC-based director, lighting designer, experimental musician/sound designer, and company member at Taffety Punk. Recent work with the Punks includes *Venus and Adonis, This Inherent Echo, Our Black Death, Pramkicker, Mom Baby God, She Rode Horses Like The Stock Exchange, Hamlet Q1, Enter Ophelia, distracted* (lights), *Phaeton* (asst. dir/lights); *Oxygen* (co-dir.); and many Bootleg Shakespeare shows. Other recent work includes *Merchant of Venice* with Faction of Fools (lights) and *NOW, Objects of Hope*, and *Code Switch* with Contradiction Dance (lights).

- **Taffety Punk Theatre Company** is the resident company at Capitol Hill Arts Workshop. Founded to establish an actively collaborative company of actors, dancers, and musicians, the company has been at the forefront of theatre innovation, presenting groundbreaking productions that inspire audiences and introducing new playwrights and stories to the stage, new works of choreography, and new compositions of original music. Through its artist-nurturing Generator program Taffety Punk has a rich history of developing original works that challenge theatre norms. Generator projects that have realized full production include the widely celebrated dance plays *suicide.chat.room*, *Fragments of Sappho*, and *Enter Ophelia, distracted*; as well as the world premieres of Liz Maestri's *Inheritance Canyon*, and Kelsey Mesa's *La Salpêtrière* (nominated for five Helen Hayes Awards in 2024 including Outstanding New Play, and winner of two of those nominations: Outstanding Production, and Outstanding Supporting Actor - company member Kimberly Gilbert). Over the years, Taffety Punk has garnered numerous accolades and recognition for its work and, in fact, won the very first John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company from the Helen Hayes Awards. The Washington Post declared the company "The most vital of the city's small troupes." The company's all-female ensemble, the Riot Grrrls, have repeatedly delighted audiences delivering impassioned productions of classical plays while empowering women in theatre. The recent Riot Grrrls production of *The Tragedie of Macbeth* garnered two Helen Hayes Award nominations: Lise Bruneau for Lead Performer, and Marcus Kyd for Sound Design. The Bootleg Shakespeare is a widely celebrated event the company hosts with the partnership of the Folger Theatre providing the most exciting night of theatre anyone could ask for: an entire Shakespeare play rehearsed and performed in a single day. The company has released albums by its company members and their tangential bands, most notably the indie rock sensation Beauty Pill, the musical home for two Taffety Punk Company Members: composer Chad Clark and singer Erin Mitchell Nelson. Taffety Punk's music catalog is available on all streaming platforms and via taffetypunk.bandcamp.com where LPs and singles can be ordered. Taffety Punk is thrilled to add company member Teresa Spencer's book of poetry and short stories to the company's media catalog. *Too Like the Lightning* is available at bookstores everywhere. As Taffety Punk Theatre Company moves forward, it remains committed to its mission to ignite a public passion for theatre by making the classical and the contemporary exciting, meaningful, and affordable. The company is excited to continue its legacy of excellence and making the greatest theatre for the lowest price. www.taffetypunk.com

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