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FOCUS GROUP WITH HUBRIS IS SUBJECT OF "GANG OF SEVEN," NEWEST COMEDY BY JIM NEU

WHERE AND WHEN:

December 4 to 21, 2008

La MaMa E.T.C. (First Floor Theater), 74A East Fourth Street, Manhattan

Presented by La MaMa E.T.C.

Thursdays through Saturdays at 8:00 pm; Sundays at 2:30 pm and 8:00 pm

\$18 tdf/v

Box office (212) 475-7710; online ticketing available at www.lamama.org

Runs one hour. Critics are invited on or after December 5.

NEW YORK, November 9 -- "**Gang of Seven**," a new comedy by **Jim Neu**, rips the lid off the dynamics, delusions, and dangers of the focus group movement sweeping across America. The play cunningly anticipates what will happen when ordinary gatherings for market research get infected with the human potential movement. Alone, this play's "Gang of Seven" are harmless normal citizens. Together, their volatile mix of personal chemistries creates an explosive brew of attitude, greed and collective identity. They are so empowered with team spirit that they begin to feel omnipotent. We see them pushing their mental envelopes, re-imagining their group as the grand information assembler, chosen to reorder reality for the country, or maybe the world.

The play is a fascinating satire of business doublespeak. The euphemistic language of marketing executives is adopted as ideology by the members of this media-saturated group, who swoon for such "future" ideas as "Facadism" and the "Mythosphere." Power is found in the reordering of information. Nostalgia, for them, is remembering their parents filling in product surveys with a ballpoint pen. They unify behind a business idea--The Reality Bowl--with a leader who boasts, "everything I've ever done has been right on the cutting edge of legitimate." Their ride into the euphoria of this value proposition is the journey of the play.

The cast is a unique mix of Neu veterans, relative newcomers, and first-timers: Mary Shultz, Tony Nunziata, Chris Maresca, John Costelloe, Byron Thomas, Kristine Lee and, of course, Jim Neu. The production is directed by Keith McDermott (his ninth Jim Neu play) and has music by Harry Mann. Sets are by David Fritz and costumes are by Meg Zeder.

Neu's last production was "La Vie Noir" (La MaMa, 2007), in which a group of star-crossed, film-smitten barflies are trapped in a rooftop lounge with a tornado is heading their way. Bracing for the collision, they escape into a collective fantasy world of lonely streetlights, smart talk, killer shadows and wet footsteps. Time Out (Robert Simonson) declared, "For a film-noir parody with some teeth to it, forget Christopher Durang's limp Adrift in Macao and try downtown ironist Jim Neu's La Vie Noir instead. Whereas Durang only gets a knowing chuckle out of the genre's stylistic contrivances, Neu knows that the world of fedoras, shady ladies and rain-swept sidewalks has been creeping into our consciousness for decades."

Jim Neu's writing has mined the rich vein of irony, contradiction, and absurdity in American popular culture since the late '70s. His gift is to make us laugh at what it's like to have your mind run by those who explain life second-hand. He wrote a whole play, "Situation Room," on how market researchers might target a group of actors to investigate leisure behavior. He has found Hollywood's hard-sold fantasies to be even more provocative, so whether it's spy films ("Undercurrent Incorporated"), westerns ("Target Audience: The Code of the Western"), detective movies ("Mondo Beyondo"), or Hollywood history ("Kiss Shot"), his comedies have shown how generations of monetized entertainment have altered our attitudes, behavior and reality.

He does it with a complex and distinctive style of language. Neu has been called "the Oscar Wilde of the Postverbal Generation." He is a master of deadpan circumlocution and the elliptical take on language. It makes for brilliant dialogue

and a minimalist comedy style that is all Neu's own.

Jim Neu began working in theater as an actor in Robert Wilson's company in the early 1970's, performing in New York, Europe, Brazil and Iran. When Wilson began employing text in his work, Neu began writing for him. He contributed to the scripts of Wilson's "Ka Mountain," "The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin" and "A Letter for Queen Victoria." Neu began writing his own plays with the Napa Valley Theater Company in California in the late '70s. Since 1992, all his new works have been presented by La MaMa, with the exception of "Aerobia," a collaboration with Douglas Dunn at PS122. In all, Neu has written 27 plays, which have been presented by leading experimental theaters in New York, Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco, Philadelphia and London. They include "Him or Me" (1979), "Basic Behavior" (1982), "Mutual Narcissism" (1984), "Duet for Spies" (1987), "An Evening with Jesse James" (1988), "Live Witness" (1992), "Dark Pocket" (1994), "The Floatones" (1995), "Mondo Beyondo" (1997), "Undercurrent Incorporated" (1999) and "Target Audience: The Code of the Western" (2003). In 1993, "Live Witness" was published by Theater Communications Group in their "Plays in Process" series. In recent years some of his earlier work has been revived by the Chain Lightning and Miranda theater companies in New York.

In addition to his own work, Neu has collaborated with theater companies Otrabanda, the Talking Band and Bloodlips and written text for dance works by David Woodberry, Yoshiko Chuma, Charles Moulton, Cathy Weis and Douglas Dunn. He also wrote the screenplays for Andrew Horn's films "Doomed Love" and "The Big Blue," which both premiered at the Berlin Film Festival. Neu is recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts. Fellowship for New Genres, New York Foundation for the Arts Playwriting Fellowship, a New Works grant by the New York State Council on the Arts and 2000 ArtsLink Collaborative Projects Award.

Reviewing Neu's "Target Audience: The Code of the Western" (2003-4), Robert Simonson wrote in Time Out, "Playwright-actor Jim Neu...may be the most unfairly uncelebrated of downtown auteurs. Neu is as adept at twisting language and meaning as Mac Wellman, has been as artistically consistent as Richard Foreman and was cleaving his texts to disorienting songs long before Richard Maxwell was old enough to drink."

Jim Neu's creative history is documented on www.JimNeu.com. The site contains insightful introductions by Ulla Dydo and Keith McDermott, overviews (with photos) of all his plays from 1985 to the present, as well as a chronology of his artistic career beginning with his early days in Robert Wilson's company (1970-75).

Jim Neu will be the featured subject of La MaMa's "Coffeehouse Chronicles" series on November 22 from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm (free event). Later that day (7 - 11pm), there will be a ten-minute segment of this play performed as part of Flip Fest at the Angel Orensanz Foundation, 172 Norfolk Street.

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