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History Theatre Presents the return of History Theatre classic COURTING HARRY

SAINT PAUL, MN – History Theatre is proud to announce the cast of ***Courting Harry***, a smart, funny, and intriguing look at a 70-year-long friendship between Justice Harry Blackmun and Chief Justice Warren Burger that began in the streets of St. Paul and dissolved in the halls of the Supreme Court. Written by Lee Blessing, the History Theatre classic will run May 14-June 7. All tickets are on sale now at historytheatre.com

Trace the journey of Minnesota natives from their roots in the Dayton’s Bluff neighborhood to the pinnacle of the nation’s highest court. Two lifelong friends, their unbreakable bond now confronted with history-making decisions that will define their future. Dive into the dynamic tensions of the Supreme Court, where Nixon’s appointees grapple with conflicting ideologies in the arena of America’s most contentious legal battles. It’s an insightful exploration of friendship, authority, and justice.

When both were appointed to the Supreme Court, they were known as the “Minnesota Twins,” but the bond of their friendship began to fray as they presided over some of the most influential and controversial cases of modern American history. In ***Courting Harry***, the two men come together again to look back over their lives and careers together, including the case that remains one of the most passionately disputed decisions of all time: *Roe v. Wade*.

“The relationship between Harry Blackmun and Warren Burger was complex, multilayered, encrusted with a lifetime of shared experiences and mutual expectations,” wrote Linda Greenhouse in “Becoming Justice Blackmun: Harry Blackmun’s Supreme Court Journey,” her 2005 account of the Minnesota jurist. “And its dissolution was equally complex.” Greenhouse’s book is the basis for ***Courting Harry***.

Blackmun’s mother was 85 when her son was nominated to the Supreme Court. She warned her son that his relationship with Burger would inevitably change. Harry responded, “Mother, it just can’t. We’ve been friends for a long time.” She replied, “Well, you wait and see.” —from *Becoming Justice Blackmun*

“Their relationship was one of the longest friendships I’ve ever heard of,” said Blessing. “But as grown men, they had always worked at a distance, and there was not a lot of pressure. The court became a crucible to test their friendship, and it pushed them apart.”

The cast of ***Courting Harry*** features **Pearce Bunting** as Chief Justice Warren Burger and **John Middleton** as Justice Harry Blackmun. They are joined by an ensemble that includes **EJ Subkoviak**, **Jonathan Feld**, **Bonni Allen** and **Eva Gemlo**. The creative team includes **Lee Blessing** (Playwright), **Joel Sass** (Director, also directed 2013 production), **Kirby Moore** (Properties Designer), **Meghan Kent** (Costume Designer), **C Andrew Mayer** (Sound Designer), **Samantha Fairchild** (Stage Manager), and **Elijah Virgil Hughes** (Assistant Stage Manager).

Courting Harry was commissioned by the Weissberger Group and received its first full production at History Theatre in 2013.

About the Playwright: Lee Blessing

Blessing was born in Minneapolis and graduated from Minnetonka High School in 1967. He began his college education at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, but later transferred to Reed College in Oregon, where he earned a B.A. in English in 1971. After Blessing earned his degree, his parents offered the young graduate the choice between a used car or a trip to Russia. Blessing chose Russia, where he found inspiration to write his best-known work, the award-winning *A Walk in the Woods*. According to interviews with Blessing, the play, which depicts the developing relationship between a Russian and an American arms limitation negotiator, is based on fact. Apparently, during the 1982 talks in Geneva, Switzerland, Soviet Yuli Kvitsinsky and American Paul Nitze left the formal discussions to literally take a walk in the woods. Following its premiere in Waterford, Connecticut, *A Walk in the Woods* was nominated for both a Tony Award and a Pulitzer Prize. Though the production won neither award, it was reprised and produced in Moscow in 1989 and later adapted for television.

Upon returning from his tenure abroad, Blessing went on to study playwriting at the University of Iowa, where he received MFA degrees in English and Speech and Theater. He would later return to teach at the Iowa's Playwrights Workshop and the Iowa Writers' Workshop in addition to his time as an instructor at the Playwright's Center in Minneapolis. He currently serves as Head of the graduate playwriting program at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University.

Blessing's most recent plays include *A Body of Water*, *Whores*, *The Scottish Play*, *Black Sheep*, *Fortinbras*, and many others. He has also written one-act plays including *The Roads That Lead Here* and *Eleemosynary*. Eight of his plays have been staged at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, Connecticut, during the prestigious National Playwrights Conference. Several of his most recent works produced in New York City, including *Thief River*, *Cobb*, and *Chesapeake*, received Drama Desk nominations and an award, plus nominations from the Outer Critics Circle.

Courting Harry

Opens: Saturday, May 16, 2026

Through: Sunday, June 7, 2026

Previews May 14-15, 2026

Thursdays 10 am; Thursdays, Fridays & Saturdays 7:30 pm; Saturdays & Sundays 2 pm

Performing at History Theatre, 30 East Tenth Street, St. Paul, MN 55101

Ticket Information

Tiers 1-5: \$25-60. Students: \$15. Additional discounts are available for seniors (available online), patrons under 30, and veterans (must call to purchase). Call 651-292-4323 or visit historytheatre.com. Discount rates for groups of 8 or more. Call 651-292-4320 or email groups@historytheatre.com to book a group.

Accessibility at History Theatre

History Theatre strives to make all events accessible to all patrons. When purchasing tickets, please alert the box office of any accommodation or assistance needed. Accessibility offerings include hearing enhancement receivers, seating for patrons with wheelchairs and their companions, accessible restrooms, an entrance on Cedar St., and an elevator right to the theater level for easy access. Contact the box office at 651-292-4323 for more information, visit www.historytheatre.com/box-office/accessibility

- **Audio Description/ASL:** Saturday, May 31, 2 pm
- **Open Caption:** Saturday, June 6, 2 pm, and Sunday, June 7, 2 pm

Special Events

Beyond the Bench: Conversations That Bring *Courting Harry* to Life

A Unique Conversation: *Courting Harry* and the Evolution of Constitutional Law

Saturday, May 16, 4:30 pm

Come before the show for a lively conversation about the real-world ideas behind *Courting Harry*. From the power of the Supreme Court to why the rule of law matters today, hear from an extraordinary panel including Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Linda Greenhouse, Federal Judge John Tunheim, and award-winning playwright Lee Blessing. Moderated by constitutional law professor Peter Larsen at Mitchell Hamline.

Abortion Law: From Roe and Dobbs to the State

Thursday, May 21 at 11:30 am

After the presentation of *Courting Harry*, stay for a CLE program that traces the history of abortion law in the United States, from the nineteenth century to today. It explores key Supreme Court decisions—including *Roe v. Wade*, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, and *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*—and examines how constitutional interpretation has evolved alongside expanding state authority. Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the shifting balance between federal protections and state regulation in reproductive law. Conversation facilitated by Peter Larsen, Professor of Constitutional Law at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

Tickets (includes performance and CLE credit)

Adult: \$60-75; Senior: \$55-65

1.0 Standard CLE credit

The Rule of Law Today

Saturday, June 6, 3:45 pm

After the presentation of *Courting Harry*, stay for a CLE program that examines what does “the rule of law” really mean—and why does it matter now? Join us after the performance for an engaging, accessible discussion on how our legal system shapes everyday life and the role courts and citizens play in upholding it. Featuring Judge John Tunheim and legal scholar Morgan Holcomb, Vice Dean of Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

Tickets (includes performance and CLE credit)

Adult: \$60-75; Senior: \$55-65

1.0 Standard CLE credit

Afterthoughts (Post-Show Discussion)

Sundays at 3:45 pm; *FREE* to ticketed patrons

History Theatre will host a discussion following every Sunday matinee featuring special guests.

Sun, May 17: Playwright Lee Blessing

Sun, May 24: TBA, visit historytheatre.com for updates

Sun, May 31: TBA

Sun, June 7: TBA

About the Source Material

Harry Blackmun made lists—concerts and movies he attended, books read, a daily log of significant events that occurred during his 24 years on the Supreme Court. He also saved things—high school autograph books, diaries, law school notes, honeymoon hotel receipts, as well as his official papers.

Blackmun left this massive collection of papers to the Library of Congress. His will stipulated that the collection would be open to the public five years after his death, which occurred in 1999. This was an unusually short span for a public figure of his stature. More typical is the term for Warren Burger's papers, which will not be open until 2026. (Burger died in 1995.)

All told, Blackmun's papers consist of half a million items, contained in 1,585 boxes that take up 600 feet on the shelves of the Library of Congress's Manuscript Division. A 38-hour oral history he recorded with a former law clerk, former Yale Law School dean Harold Koh, was included. Curators spent more than a year organizing the papers. The index to the collection numbers 300 pages.

This is the raw material that Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times Supreme Court reporter Linda Greenhouse used to write her 2005 book, *Becoming Justice Blackmun: Harry Blackmun's Supreme Court Journey*, a primary source for the play ***Courting Harry***.

Blackmun's family gave Greenhouse two months alone with the papers before the opening day of access. From the moment they were opened, Library of Congress staff told Greenhouse, the Blackmun papers have been the most intensively used of the 11,000 collections housed in the Manuscript Collection.

About History Theatre

Mission

History Theatre entertains, educates, and engages through creating, developing, and producing new and existing works that explore Minnesota's past and the diverse American experience. Its work provides a unique lens which links our past to the present, explores our common heritage, and illuminates our understanding of what it means to be American. www.historytheatre.com

Land Acknowledgement

History Theatre sits on the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary land of the Dakota people, for whom the land holds historical, spiritual, and political significance. We recognize and honor the Dakota people, ancestors, and descendants, as well as the land itself, and all the sovereign Native nations in Minnesota and beyond. We recognize that this acknowledgement itself is not enough and only serves as a first step towards decolonization.