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26 States, 120 Cities and 600 Theatres present over 1,000 performances as part of *Free Night of Theater*

Theatre Communications Group's Fourth Annual National Event Continues Momentum

"Free Night of Theater has thrown the doors of our theatres open wide."

---Brad Erickson, executive director, Theatre Bay Area

New York, October 2008 - Theatre Communications Group (TCG) is pleased to announce that the fourth annual ***Free Night of Theater*** will open across the country on Thursday, October 16, 2008. The successful audience development program was designed to attract new patrons to live theatre and give existing patrons access to venues they might not be familiar with. This fall, theatre-goers from coast to coast will be given the opportunity to attend 1,000+ performances presented by over 600 theatres, in more than 120 cities, completely free of charge.

"This program began in three cities three years ago and has now grown into a giant collaboration between service organizations, theaters and their communities," said Teresa Eyring, TCG executive director. "One of the most important things we do for this program is to give each city and its ***Free Night*** managing partners the flexibility to make the program work in a way that may be unique to their market. It is at the grass roots level that theatres need to engage and as a national organization, we are proud to be able to give that opportunity to our participants."

Continuing the program's tradition of national expansion, Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, New York City and several smaller communities across the country, have joined the 2008 program making it a truly national initiative. Introduced as a three-city pilot program in 2005, the program was designed to raise general awareness of America's not-for-profit theatres and attract new and non-traditional audiences.

A complete list of participating cities and theatres is available at www.freenightoftheater.net. To view the theatres and performances in a specific city or state, go to the **Find a Show page, click on the city/state you are looking for and then view the complete list of performances being offered.**

"Since the campaign's pilot year here three years ago, we have seen an extraordinary response from theatres, audiences and the whole community," said Brad Erickson, executive director of Theatre Bay Area and *Free Night of Theater* participant since the program's inception in 2005. "The demand for live theatre—when it's made accessible to all—is overwhelming. We're bringing in new audiences—young people, people of color, people from

all walks of life—and the research tells us they are going back for more. ***Free Night of Theater*** has thrown the doors of our theatres open wide."

The 2007 program research -- gathered by Shugoll Research of Bethesda, MD -- reports that of those patrons who attended a theatre they had never been to before, 41% returned to that theater and purchased a ticket (with 49% of those attendees buying a full price ticket), and 89% say they are very likely to participate in Free Night again in 2008. For the full Shugoll Research report, please contact Phillip Matthews at pmatthews@tcg.org.

In addition, ***Free Night*** also has a proven track record of attracting non-traditional theatre audiences including infrequent theatre attendees, young people, the less educated, non-white and those with lower household incomes. Specifically, within each category, 65% attended a theatre they had never been to before, 28% are under the age of 35, 21% have less than a college degree, 28% are non-white, and 35% have combined household incomes under \$50,000.

The program has also been a great success for participating theatre companies. According to Molly Smith, artistic director of Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., "Arena is proud to include TCG's ***Free Night of Theater*** program in our repertoire of community outreach programs. It provides the opportunity for a broader audience - one that may not attend theatre on a regular basis - to be introduced to the excitement of live theatre. ***Free Night*** has been a foot-in-the-door for many new audience members, and that's something that benefits us all!"

Tickets to ***Free Night of Theater*** became available October 1 and most performances will take place from October 16 – October 30, 2008. For tickets and more information on the ***Free Night*** program, please visit the national website, www.freenightoftheater.net.

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Theatre Communications Group's (TCG) mission is to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional, not-for-profit American theatre. TCG initiatives include a variety of artistic, management, international and advocacy programs. Its many publications offer a national resource for reference, opinion and debate on theatre and the performing arts today. TCG serves nearly 500 member theatres nationwide and serves 17,000 individual members and university, business and trustee affiliates. More information about TCG is available at www.tcg.org.