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**"Cootie Shots" celebrates children through songs and skits**

*Summary:*

(April 1, 2005)-For the past 35 years, the University of Minnesota, Morris has been annually bringing children's theater to approximately 2,500 elementary school children and adults from all across west central Minnesota. This year, the theatre discipline is producing a new and exciting performance piece called "Cootie Shots" as part of this cherished UMM tradition. Unlike the fairy tales or mythological adventures of recent years, director and UMM Assistant Theatre Professor Ray Schultz explains that "Cootie Shots" is "a series of skits, poems, and songs performed in a revue format -- a style that to my knowledge the UMM theatre discipline has never attempted as a children's theater production in its 36 years."

Originally developed and produced by a California theater company, Schultz describes the UMM version of "Cootie Shots" as "a family show in the best sense of the word." Through humor and gentle affirmation, the collection weaves skits and songs into remarkable stories about children that promote "messages of tolerance and aspirations for a better, more compassionate world." It encourages children to explore the differences and similarities that people of diverse backgrounds share. "Cootie Shots" addresses differences in race, class, gender, religion, age, and appearance that children face in their daily lives. Most importantly, it reminds audience members of all ages that these very differences are what make each individual special and unique. As Schultz puts it, theater like "Cootie Shots" is "the best kind of theater: its purpose is both to entertain and to teach."

Schultz admits that one of the challenges with a collection like "Cootie Shots" was in choosing what particular skits and songs to perform. The skits he decided upon "engage children of a variety of ages with themes that are appropriate to their age range." One skit Schultz includes in his production is called "The Parable of the Stimples." This story explores what happens when someone who is "different" turns out to be someone you care for. It also poses the idea that certain "differences" are never as large as we sometimes make them out to be. Other skits include: "Mother Nature," who shares her special recipe for each person "Liberty," Lady Liberty's celebration of America and all of its people and "At Your Age," a story that shows that hobbies and interests are not limited by how old or young you are.

Nine actors form the ensemble cast for "Cootie Shots." Each actor portrays numerous characters throughout this collection of skits and songs. The cast of "Cootie Shots" presents both fresh and familiar faces, including Jenny Brown (Wells), Phillip Burgraff (Fairmont), Alex Carlson (Cottage Grove), Estella Claymore (Rapid City, S.D.), Margaret Dobie (Mapleton), Molly Kuether (Milwaukee, Wis.), Justin Navratil (Chanhassen), Victoria Pyan (St. Paul), and Peter Ray (Barrett).

UMM Visiting Assistant Professor Adam Parboosingh designed the lights and "playful" set, which includes giant models of popular children's games and toys such as an Etch-a-Sketch, Twister, and building blocks. Senior Margaret Dobie, in addition to acting, designed costumes for "Cootie Shots" for her Senior Theatre Project. Dobie's costumes reflect a "box of crayons, where all the actors are dressed differently in a variety of colors, but are also similar because they wear the same base costume of T-shirts and jeans." The creative production team supporting Schultz, Parboosingh,

and Dobie include the Assistant Director and Stage Manager Andrea Pletsch (Belle Plaine), who is also completing her Senior Project with "Cootie Shots" Assistant Stage Managers Laurel Cutright (Saukville, Wis.) and Andy Brown-Thomas Sound Designer David Wilson (Brainerd) and Prop Master Andy Nygren (Finlayson),

The Proscenium Theatre in the Humanities Fine Arts building on the Morris campus opens its doors to one and all for the public performances of "Cootie Shots" on April 23 at 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Invited student matinees are April 21-22 and April 27-29. Admission is \$2 per person. For more information about tickets and student matinees, please contact the Theatre Publicity Office at (320) 589-6249 or email inquiries to [threpub@morris.umn.edu](mailto:threpub@morris.umn.edu).

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