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"The Why Overhead" by Adam Szymkowicz **While the boss is away, the workers will escape, fall in love, feud and play.**

WHERE AND WHEN:

September 6 to 23 (previews Sept. 6-8; opens Sept. 9)
Access Theater, 380 Broadway (at White St.), 4th Fl.
Presented by Zootopia Theatre Company, (www.zootopiatheatre.org)
Tickets \$15 in advance, \$18 at the door.
Box office: Brown Paper Tickets, 800-838-3006, www.brownpapertickets.com.
Running time: 90 minutes. Critics are invited on or after September 6.

NEW YORK, July 30 -- **Adam Szymkowicz** (www.adamszymkowicz.com) has been carving a niche for himself among our best young crop of comedy writers with "fabulously weird and weirdly fabulous" plays, (NY Times) describing love affairs of many kinds with an admirable simplicity. His latest work, "The Why Overhead," will have its premiere run **September 6 to 23**, presented by **Zootopia Theatre Company** (www.zootopiatheatre.org) at **Access Theater**, 380 Broadway. The piece imagines what happens in the office while the boss is away. **Matthew J. Nichols** directs a cast of 12, which includes **Susan Louise O'Connor**, a Theatre World Award winner for "Blythe Spirit" on Broadway.

While the boss is away, the workers will play. At a call center, all the employees are desperate to connect with each other, seek greater meaning in their lives and take their desires to extremes. The results are shocking and funny. Sam is in love with Violet, a customer who called once with a warranty question, and he smashes all barriers to rendezvous with her. Alan and Sid are blinded in their rivalry for Jessica and together, build a decorative glass window over her cubicle to worship her under. Annie (Susan Louise O'Connor) and Nigel have a hate-hate relationship and plotting each others' demise. Karen, the department head, plays hookey, hiding at home and making plans with her talking dog to abandon the working world for the hobo's life. Donald, the office manager, is home too, plotting revenge for being canned. By the end of the day, the business is in tatters and everyone is desperate for the CEO to sweep in and make everything right, because that's what CEO's do, right?

Adam Szymkowicz's comedies exhibit a wacky humor that is grounded in the compulsive honesty of their characters. Everyone seems to lack an emotional filter, as if they were voicing their thoughts, unaware that others could hear them. Their dialogue is spare, earnest and very dry. Szymkowicz says most of his plays are about romantic relationships and he relishes writing about them in different contexts, referring to his "Hearts Likes Fists," which opened July 28 at Theater of Note in Los Angeles, as a "comic book relationship play" (since it deals with comic book characters) and "The Why Overhead" as an "office relationship play."

Szymkowicz's better known plays include "Nerve," "Food for Fish" and "Deflowering Waldo," published by Dramatists Play Service and "Pretty Theft," published by Samuel French. His work has been presented or developed at MCC Theater, Ars Nova, South Coast Rep, Playwrights Horizons, LAByrinth Theater Company and Primary Stages, among others. The Baltimore City Paper declared, "Szymkowicz is a gifted young playwright with an imagination on overdrive." The New York Times has reviewed three of his plays since 2006. "Nerve" (14th Street Y Theater, 2006) was characterized as "a sweet, sexy, neurotic-friendly date comedy." "Food for Fish" (Kraime Theater, 2006), a play loosely inspired by Chekhov's "Three Sisters," was described as a "fabulously weird and weirdly fabulous new comedy." On "Pretty Theft" (Flux Theater Ensemble at Access Theater, 2009), the Times wrote, "Mr. Szymkowicz writes quirky plays about contemporary topics like online dating and gender roles, but there always seems to be something--a knife, a rope, a dead body--in an

unexpected place." All three reviews were by Anita Gates.

"The Why Overhead" was inspired by some crazy temp jobs Szymkowicz had after the crash in 2008. In one, he answered phones in a Minneapolis call center and was entranced by his fellow employees' impulses to "check out" while on the job, their reactions to being forced out and their determination to make career choices in some other direction. He was "blessedly delivered" from the job when he got a TV writing gig and moved to Atlanta for five months, which will probably be the subject of another play some day.

Mr. Szymkowicz (the name is pronounced "Simkowitz") now lives in Brooklyn with his wife, playwright Kristen Palmer. He grew up in Colchester, CT, near East Haddam, where he attended Bacon Academy, a public school that dates back to 1803. He graduated from UMass Dartmouth and subsequently earned a Playwright's Diploma from The Juilliard School's Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program and an MFA from Columbia, where he was the Dean's Fellow. He is a two-time Lecomte du Nouy Prize winner, a member of the Dramatists Guild, WGA, Primary Stages' Dorothy Strelsin New American Writer's Group, the MCC Playwright's Coalition and was a founding member of the Ars Nova Play Group. He has been a Playwright in Residence at the William Inge Center, received a grant from the CT Commission on Culture & Tourism, and was commissioned by South Coast Rep. He was the premiere Resident Playwright at The Chance Theater in Anaheim, CA and the first playwright to participate in Bloomington Playwrights Projects' Square One Series. His website is www.adamszymkowicz.com. On his blog (www.aszym.blogspot.com), he has interviewed 479 playwrights over three-and-a-half years.

Zootopia Theatre Company (www.zootopiatheatre.org) made an auspicious debut in 2007 with "Professional Skepticism" by James Rasheed, presented at the Abingdon Theatre Complex. The play was a dark comedy about an accounting scandal set in a Big Five CPA firm in Charleston. The New York Times (Ginia Bellafante) called it "[A] dark comedy of corporate immorality" adding, "Matthew J. Nichols plays [Paul] as a first-rate disgruntled sycophant." Nytheatre.com (Robert Buckwalter) called it "an enjoyable evening of darkness....In fact, it is as solid a production as one could hope to find in the world of independent theater." Backstage (A.J. Mell) wrote, "playwright James Rasheed has somehow turned the world's most eye-glazingly dull profession into an entertaining, stiletto-sharp satire of office politics and macho head games. As enacted by an offbeat and very funny cast, it is flat-out terrific." The Village Voice (Andy Propst) stated, "the play often crackles with rich dialogue and keen detail."

In 2008, the troupe presented "Still the River Runs" by Barton Bishop at Center Stage, NY in Chelsea. The play is a hilarious and moving portrait of two estranged brothers in rural Florida who heist their deceased grandfather's body and put him to rest in the wilds of their old hunting grounds. The New York Times (Neil Genzlinger) wrote, "Perhaps you're one of those people who have long lamented, 'If only Weekend at Bernie's had been funnier and had starred actors with some chemistry.' Your wait is over....the two actors are a treat to watch. And the lighting designer, Andrew Lu, and set designer, Tim McMath, both put on clinics on what can be done with modest means in a small space."

In 2009, the troupe mounted "Eminene" by Barton Bishop in the NY International Fringe Festival, a harrowing science fiction tale. With "The Why Overhead," the company returns to comedy, which seems to be its forte.

Matthew J. Nichols (Director) is founder and Co-Artistic Director of Zootopia Theatre Company and has an MFA in Acting from Brandeis University. As a director, he has overseen productions of "The House of Blue Leaves," "The Zoo Story," "Of Mice and Men" and "Without a Song," an original script he also wrote. He directed Zootopia's well-received productions of "Eminene" and "Still the River Runs" in 2008. The latter was nominated for six NYIT awards, including Outstanding Direction and Production of a Play.

The actors include **Susan Louise O'Connor** (Theatre World Award winner for "Blythe Spirit" on Broadway,

Off Broadway: Urban Stages, Lucille Lortel, Soho Playhouse), **Matthew Murumba** ("Kofi"— 2011 Cannes Film Festival, Flux Theatre Ens., The Flea) **Scott Thomas** (The Tank, Denver Center, Long Wharf) , **Jeffrey Emerson** (Theatre of Note, Ohio Theater, The Flea) , **Alexandra Hellquist** (Extant Arts, FringeNYC, La Mama ETC) **Heather Hollingsworth** (NYTW, The Kraine), **Larry Phillips**, **David Bennett** (The Flea), **Rowan Michael Meyer** (IRT, The Flea), **Cotton Wright** (Flux Theatre Ens.), **Britney Burgess** (Zootopia Theatre Co.), and **Ken Glickfeld** (Atlantic Theater Co., American Globe).

Set and Lighting design is by **Andrew Lu**.

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