

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

# **ASF**

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## ***ASF Set to Blast Off with World Premiere of Rocket City!***

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

MONTGOMERY, AL (Wednesday, March 26, 2008) The Alabama Shakespeare Festival will debut another home-grown tale April 18 – May 18, 2008 with *Rocket City*, a World Premiere set in Huntsville, Alabama in the early days of the space program. This new work was workshopped in the 2007 Southern Writers' Project Festival of New Plays and received an enthusiastic response from the many Alabamians and theatre industry insiders who were present.

As the U.S. enters the Cold War, Hamilton Pike, Jr., a brash Army major moves famed German rocket scientist Wernher Von Braun and his team to Huntsville, Alabama. Sparks fly when Amy Lubin, the young Jewish fiancée of local war hero Jed Kessler, becomes aware of Von Braun's Nazi past and attempts to lead public outcry against the weapons project. *Rocket City* presents the questions that emerge after war when enemies become allies, with humor and music provided by the colorful characters in the playwright's picture of early 1950s Huntsville, Alabama.

Playwright Mark Saltzman was intrigued by the long-existing Jewish community in Huntsville, Alabama. By creating the characters of Amy, Major Pike and Jed, he presents the various aspects of Huntsville's, and more broadly, America's response to the complex issues of retribution, redemption and forgiveness that come to bear after war. A timely theme, as many Americans hope to enter a new post-war period in the near future.

Saltzman started his career writing for Jim Henson's Muppets, with his *Sesame Street* songs and sketches (including *Caribbean Amphibian*) earning him seven Emmy Awards. Saltzman also co-wrote the long-running revue *A, My Name is Alice*. For network television, he wrote *Mrs. Santa Claus*, the holiday musical starring Angela Lansbury with songs by Jerry Herman. For the movies, he wrote *The Adventures of Milo and Otis* and his TV movie, *The Red Sneakers*, directed by and starring Gregory Hines, was nominated for a Writers Guild Award. In 2007, Mark served as writer-producer of the Disney Channel TV show "Johnny and the Sprites" starring John Tartaglia.

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*Rocket City* will be directed by David Ellenstein who directed *Honky Tonk Angels* at ASF in 2006. Ellenstein connected Saltzman with Alabama Shakespeare Festival. “The play was originally sent to me by Arnold Mittelman, formerly of the Coconut Grove playhouse. He knew Mark and knew that he was working on several plays, one of which was *Rocket City*. I read it and immediately thought of ASF and the Southern Writers’ Project. Mark and I talked, hit it off, and as we began talking about the play, ASF seemed like the perfect place for it, being located in the state where all of this took place,” Ellenstein explains.

The cast features Lori Prince (*212, Law & Order*, Manhattan Theatre Club, Denver Center Theatre Company) as Amy Lubin, Fletcher McTaggart (*Law & Order*, La Mama, Utah Shakespeare Festival) as Major Hamilton Pike, Jr., Daniel Cameron Talbott (*Law & Order*, Classical Theatre of Harlem, The Goodman Theatre, Dallas Theatre Center) as Jed Kessler, Matt Bradford Sullivan (*Frasier*, Dallas Theatre Center, St. Louis Repertory Theatre, The Shakespeare Theatre in Washington D.C.) as Von Braun, Ralph Elias as General Barklee and Rabbi Benjamin, Suzanna Hay (Dramalogue Award Recipient, *Dance of Death* with David Strathairn and Sir Ian McKellen, *Law & Order: CI, Fool for Love* directed by Sam Shephard) as multiple members of the Huntsville community. With James Bowen (*Crowns* at ASF) as Israel Watkins, Paul Hopper (*Henry VI part A and B* at ASF) and Greta Lambert (*Death of a Salesman* at ASF, *Doubt* at Pioneer Theatre) playing Huntsville columnist Susanna Pruitt.

*Rocket City* begins performances with previews on Friday, April 18 and Saturday, April 19 at 7:30 PM. The Opening Matinee on Sunday April 20 at 2:00 PM and will be followed by a reception with the cast. *Rocket City* will run in conjunction with the Southern Writers’ Project Festival of New Plays May 16 – 18. Tickets are \$19 - \$42. For more information call the ASF box office at 1-800-841-4ASF or go to [www.ASF.net](http://www.ASF.net).

*The Alabama Shakespeare Festival is among the largest Shakespeare theatres in the world. Designated as The State Theatre of Alabama, ASF has been located in Montgomery since 1985 when it moved from Anniston as a result of Mr. and Mrs. Wynton M. Blount’s gift of a performing arts complex set in the 250-acre Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park.*

*This program/project has been made possible by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.*

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## Fact Sheet

### *Rocket City*

by Mark Saltzman

### A Southern Writers' Project World Premiere

2007-2008 Season

Produced by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival

**Dates:** **Previews:** Fri., April 18, Sat. April 19, 2008 **Opening:** Sun., April 20, 2008  
**Regular Performances:** April 22 – May 18, 2008  
Curtain 7:30 p.m. Tues. – Sat.; 2 p.m. matinees on Sat. and Sun.

**Prices:** Preview Performances only \$19! Regular Performance Tickets range from \$19 - \$42. Group discounts are available. To purchase, call the ASF Box Office at (334) 271-5353 or toll-free at 1-800-841-4ASF.

**Website:** [www.asf.net](http://www.asf.net);

**Location:** The Octagon Stage in the Carolyn Blount Theatre, home of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, located in the Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park, on Woodmere Boulevard just off East Boulevard.

<b>Production Staff:</b>	<i>Director</i>	David Ellenstein
	<i>Scenic Designer</i>	Michael Schweikardt
	<i>Costume Designer</i>	Susan Branch
	<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Mike Post
	<i>Sound Designer</i>	Richelle Thompson
	<i>Dramaturg</i>	Susan Willis
	<i>Stage Manager</i>	Sarah Lee Howell*
	<i>Production Assistant</i>	Kerrie Riber

<b>Cast:</b>	<i>Amy Lubin</i>	Lori Prince*
	<i>Major Hamilton Pike, Jr.</i>	Fletcher McTaggart*
	<i>Jed Kessler</i>	Daniel Cameron Talbott*
	<i>Wernher Von Braun</i>	Matt Bradford Sullivan*
	<i>Israel Watkins</i>	James Bowen*
	<i>Harry S. Truman, Benjy, Lemuel</i>	
	<i>Decatur, Lester Pruitt, Rocket Voice</i>	Paul Hopper*
	<i>General Barklee, Heinz Klaube,</i>	
	<i>Rabbi Benjamin, Announcer</i>	Ralph Elias*
	<i>Susanna Pruitt, Sarah,</i>	Greta Lambert*
	<i>Bertina Dupray, Euvella, Polly,</i>	
	<i>Baroness Von Braun</i>	Suzanna Hay*

\*Member Actors' Equity Association

**Audience:** All patrons must have a ticket, regardless of age. Children under the age of six are not admitted to the theatre. Recommended for Ages 13+.

**Synopsis:** As the U.S. enters the Cold War, a brash Army major moves famed German rocket scientist Wernher Von Braun and his team to Huntsville, Alabama. Sparks fly when a young Jewish woman becomes aware of Von Braun's Nazi past and attempts to lead public outcry against the project. A Southern Writers' Project World Premiere inspired by true events.

**Setting:** Huntsville, Alabama.

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