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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**TICKETS ON SALE FOR THE WIZARD OF OZ AT TOUHILL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

***Directed by Tony Award Nominee Lara Teeter, Third Annual Production by Variety Children's Theatre  
Boasts Eight Equity Actors and Children of All Abilities***

***Five Performances Slated for Friday, October 21 – Sunday, October 23***

ST. LOUIS (August 15, 2011) – Who better to direct *THE WIZARD OF OZ* than the man who made a name for himself playing The Scarecrow on Broadway? With Tony Award Nominee Lara Teeter at the helm as director, Variety Children's Theatre will tell the story of Dorothy and Toto's journey to Oz this fall, featuring a cast of eight Adult Actors Equity Association performers and children of *all* abilities.

*THE WIZARD OF OZ* will take the stage of the Touhill Performing Arts Center, University of Missouri – St. Louis in late October, with performances scheduled as follows:

- Friday, Oct. 21, at 10 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. (preceded by VIP reception)
- Saturday, Oct. 22, at 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.
- Sunday, Oct. 23, at 1:30 p.m.

Tickets, ranging from \$15-\$35 for reserved seats, may be purchased by visiting [www.varietychildrenstheatre.org](http://www.varietychildrenstheatre.org) or by calling the Touhill Ticket Office at 314-516-4949. Discounts will be provided to groups of 10 or more, including significant discounts for schools to attend the Friday matinee. A study guide is also available to teachers hoping to incorporate lessons from *THE WIZARD OF OZ* into their classrooms.

"The stage is a microcosm of our society, so it's no surprise that both children and adults benefit from the inclusive setting provided by Variety Children's Theatre. In the next three months, we'll see life-long relationships develop as the cast and crew work together to bring Dorothy's story to life," said Jan Albus, executive producer of the show and executive director of Variety the Children's Charity of St. Louis. "Any differences that may have previously defined us disappear at that first rehearsal. We're all there to accomplish one common goal and the outcome is always magical."

"I have been fortunate enough to be involved with more than 160 productions in my career," added Teeter, "But my experience with Variety Children's Theatre is far and away my most rewarding experience ever."

Fifteen Variety children are part of *THE WIZARD OF OZ* cast, with disabilities ranging from spina bifida and cerebral palsy to muscular dystrophy and down syndrome. In addition to the onstage talent, eight major roles in *THE WIZARD OF OZ* production include a Variety “shadow,” allowing local children with disabilities to learn professional skills alongside the show’s production director, musical director, choreographer, stage manager, sound technician, costume designer and more.

The production boasts some of the city’s most talented professionals, both on-stage and behind-the-scenes, along with a full orchestra.

- Munny Costume Coordinator Pete Messineo
- Webster University’s Dunsie Dai managing scenic design
- Alexis Kinney as Dorothy
- Whit Reichert as the Cowardly Lion
- John Flack as the Scarecrow
- Pam Reckamp as Auntie Em
- Rich Pisarkiewicz as Uncle Henry
- Alan Knoll as Professor Marvel/The Wizard
- Spencer Milford as a Jitterbug
- Jack Sippel as Nikko
- Elise LaBarge as the Wicked Witch
- Justin Brown as the Tin Man

Last year, Variety Children’s Theatre presented *OLIVER! the Broadway Musical* to an audience of more than 6,200 people, including nearly 1,900 children whose families receive help from Variety through medical equipment, in-house programs, and/or partner agencies. Accolades for Variety’s production of *OLIVER!* in the fall of 2010 were high, and included the following comments:

“The production of *OLIVER!* by Variety Children’s Theatre reminded me a lot of the shows we see at The Muny. The adults were played by an excellent group of professional actors and the young people in the leading roles of the chorus lived up to the high standards set by their elders. Right from the start, the people on the stage moved with purpose and precision under the direction of Lara Teeter and choreography of Mark Krupinski.”

- Gerry Kowarski, *KDHX Two on the Aisle*

“For many of these kids, being onstage at all was once a distant dream. But through the Variety Children’s Theater they are accomplishing more than most kids their age. And as you watch them sing and dance you can’t help but grin, and perhaps, wipe a tear or two from your eyes. The look on these kids’ faces as they perform can only be described as pure, unadulterated joy and you walk away feeling deeply blessed and humbled realizing that you were witness to a fulfillment of hope.”

- Kelli Stuart, *Tonic.com*

Variety Children's Theatre debuted in 2009 with its presentation of *THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER*, attracting 4,093 attendees to the Touhill Performing Arts Center over the course of four performances. For more information, visit [www.varietychildrenstheatre.org](http://www.varietychildrenstheatre.org).

**About Variety the Children's Charity of St. Louis**

For nearly 80 years, **Variety the Children's Charity of St. Louis** has helped thousands of children with disabilities say "I can" by providing them with vital medical equipment, as well as educational, therapeutic and recreational programs such as the annual Adventure Camp and Variety Children's Theatre. An international leader in fundraising, Variety the Children's Charity and supports select programs of more than 80 qualified partner agencies throughout the St. Louis area to provide services that directly impact the lives of children with physical and mental disabilities. David Steward, chairman and founder of World Wide Technology, Inc., is the organization's president. For more information on Variety, including upcoming events and volunteer opportunities, visit [www.varietystl.org](http://www.varietystl.org).

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