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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Media Contact: Russell Bennett at 416-363-8082 or thereeferman2004@yahoo.com

See www.thereeferman.com for bios and downloadable JPEG photos.



THE REEFER MAN

is coming to town: Just say YES!

Russell Bennett is taking his new criminal comedy, *The Reefer Man* across Canada to eight Fringe Festivals this summer.

The Reefer Man is in Toronto at the
Helen Gardiner Phelan Playhouse
79A St. George Street



Toronto's Theatre Festival

www.fringetoronto.com

Call the Box Office at 416-966-1062

Thursday, July 1 @ 8:30 PM
Saturday, July 3 @ 3:00 PM
Sunday, July 4 @ 6:00 PM
Tuesday, July 6 @ 7:00 PM
Thursday, July 8 @ 5:00 PM
Saturday, July 10 @ 9:00 PM
Sunday, July 11 @ 3:30 PM

Late-comers will be rolled and smoked!!

To look at him, you might say there is nothing special about Charlie Kovacs. He practises law at his father's bankruptcy law firm, he pays his bills, lives his life. But what kind of life is Charlie really leading? Secretly, behind closed doors, Charlie dreams of freedom. It is a dream he shares with his creator: actor, filmmaker and lawyer Russell Bennett.

“*The Reefer Man* is a story about choosing your own path in life, even in the face of legal and social censure and crippling self-doubt,” Bennett says. “*The Reefer Man* came out of my desire to create an intelligent comedy with a pro-marijuana theme.”

Bennett produced and directed the documentary *STONED: Hemp Nation on Trial*, which was broadcast on CBC Newsworld in 1998. *STONED* chronicled Chris Clay's constitutional challenge of Canada's cannabis law, which went all the way to the Supreme Court in December

2003. **STONED** was nominated for Best Political Documentary at Hot Docs International Film Festival in 1999.

Bennett, who plays all of *The Reefer Man's* twenty-five characters (including some well-known Canadian lawmakers), became a lawyer in 1997. However, he practised law only briefly. "My father was very keen on putting me through law school, but he eventually encouraged me to follow my dreams," says Bennett.

Bennett won the second Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals Tour Lottery last fall, which awarded acceptance at eight Fringe Festivals: Hamilton, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Victoria and Vancouver. He saw this as a serendipitous opportunity to finish his play.

Co-writer and director Gillian Stevens-Guille met Bennett in a Toronto acting class and later as fellow students at New York's Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre. It was not until meeting in Vancouver in 2004 that the pair joined to create *The Reefer Man*.

"Russell had researched and written on marijuana prohibition for three years with many ideas, but he needed a specific direction," Stevens-Guille says. "We used our training and imaginations to craft together a story of personal discovery and political revelation. We want to touch the audience's minds and hearts in an entertaining and theatrical way."

Bennett has performed in four Fringe Festivals, one in New York in 2000 and three in Toronto (2001, 2002 and 2003). In the summer of 2003, Bennett turned his talents to comedy in Matt Toner's *Killing Time at the Crossroads of the World*, which drew critical accolades at the Toronto Fringe Festival. Both EYE Magazine and Jon Kaplan of NOW Magazine wrote that Bennett "delivers a strong performance with plenty of humour."

Bennett mounted his first solo play, *The Black Cat*, an adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe's short story, in Toronto in June, 2002. *The Reefer Man* is Bennett's second solo show, and first original play.

Bennett also teaches Meisner's acting technique in Vancouver with Stevens-Guille, where they are establishing a theatre company with other theatre professionals.

Bennett trained as an actor first with Jacqueline McClintock's Meisner technique class in Toronto, and then at the Neighborhood Playhouse.

Other Playhouse graduates include Robert Duvall, Barbara Woodward, Jon Voight, Eli Wallach, Mary Steenbergen, Leslie Neilson, Diane Keaton, Sidney Pollack, Christopher Lloyd, Dylan McDermott, Alison Janney, Steve McQueen, Jeff Goldblum, James Caan, Anne Jackson, Horton Foote, Peter Falk, Illeana Douglas and Gregory Peck.

See www.thereferman.com for bios and downloadable and printable high-resolution colour photographs (JPEGs).

For more info: email Russell Bennett at thereferman2004@yahoo.com or call 416-363-8082.