

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE



For Immediate Release
Tuesday, October 13, 2015

Directed by Two-time Tony Nominee Joey McKneely, Asolo Repertory Theatre Opens its 2015-16 Season with the Groundbreaking Broadway Musical *WEST SIDE STORY*

(SARASOTA, October 13, 2015) — Asolo Repertory Theatre kicks off its highly anticipated 2015-16 season with the electrifying Tony Award®-winning musical *WEST SIDE STORY*. One of the greatest musicals ever written, Asolo Rep's production will open **Friday, November 13 at 8pm** and run through Sunday, December 27, with previews November 10 - 12 at 8pm in the Mertz Theatre located in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts. This American masterpiece was crafted by some of the most legendary artists of all time, with a book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, and choreography by Jerome Robbins. Two-time Tony Award nominee Joey McKneely, who reproduced the choreography for the celebrated 2009 Broadway revival, will direct and reproduce Robbins' timeless choreography for Asolo Rep's production.

The gritty streets of mid-1950s Upper West Side Manhattan come to life in this unforgettable story of star-crossed lovers entangled in the rivalry of culturally divided street gangs. As the Jets and the Sharks rumble for their turf, Tony and Maria long for their very own place far from the intolerance that surrounds them. The original Broadway production premiered in 1957 and was nominated for six Tony Awards, winning two. The 1961 film adaptation starring Natalie Wood was nominated for 11 Academy Awards®, winning 10. Featuring such unforgettable classics as "Maria," "America," "I Feel Pretty" and "Tonight," Asolo Rep's freshly interpreted production is packed with the breathtaking choreography, thrilling songs, and unforgettable characters that have made *WEST SIDE STORY* a worldwide phenomenon for more than 50 years.

Director Joey McKneely has directed and reproduced the choreography for *WEST SIDE STORY* all over the world, including productions at London's Sadler's Wells Theatre, which received an Olivier Award nomination for Best Musical Revival, Paris's Théâtre du Châtelet and Milan's La Scala Opera. His relationship with Jerome Robbins began in 1988 when he was cast as a Jet in the Broadway production of *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*. During rehearsals, he worked intimately with the eminent choreographer for six months, having the opportunity to

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immerse himself in Robbins' groundbreaking style of choreography. McKneely will direct **WEST SIDE STORY** for the first time in the U.S. for Asolo Rep's production.

"Having given international audiences from around the world a new, exciting production of **WEST SIDE STORY** for years, this production of **WEST SIDE STORY** at Asolo Repertory Theatre will mark the first time my version will be seen in the United States," said director/choreographer Joey McKneely. "My mission has always been to bring a youthful, emotional, contemporary feel to **WEST SIDE STORY** so it makes a new generation of fans just as the 1957 production did. It has changed my life in so many ways, but most of all, it made me believe in the power of love."

WEST SIDE STORY kicks off the fourth season of Asolo Rep's American Character Project, an ambitious five-year examination and celebration of the extraordinary people, culture, history and experiences that make our country unique. Throughout the American Character Project, Asolo Rep's seasons have continued to feature productions that explore, embody, and attempt to spotlight what it truly means to be an American. **WEST SIDE STORY**'s themes of racial conflict, true love conquering all, and the pursuit of the American Dream remain just as poignant today as they did when **WEST SIDE STORY** first premiered in 1957.

"**WEST SIDE STORY** is one of the greatest works in the history of American musical theatre," said Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards. "Asolo Rep's production will be freshly reinterpreted, redesigned, and reconceived by a brilliant young creative team, helmed by director Joey McKneely, who is recognized around the world as a Jerome Robbins expert. Through its compelling songs and choreography, this musical magnifies the story of a simple turf war between two reckless groups of impulsive young people – those who see themselves as 'true' Americans and those who have just adopted this country as their new home. It is thrilling to kick off the fourth season of our American Character Project with this iconic production that artfully depicts issues that are still incredibly relevant while telling one of the greatest love stories of all time."

Each performance of **WEST SIDE STORY** will be preceded by "The Scoop," Asolo Rep's insightful pre-performance discussion series led by cast members from the production. Following each Tuesday performance, the theatre will host "Tuesday Talkbacks," intimate post-show discussions with featured actors or guests. Asolo Rep will also host a special **Family Day at WEST SIDE STORY** on Saturday December 5, where families can dance in Asolo Rep's **WEST SIDE STORY** Music Video, enjoy family-friendly activities that explore the world of the musical prior to the performance, experience the performance with tickets discounted for families, and join a post-performance discussion with the cast. Throughout Asolo Rep's run of **WEST SIDE STORY**, the theatre will also provide nearly 1,000 students access to the world-class production through student matinee performances and public performances.

CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Kenn Christopher* | Officer Krupke/Doc |
| Steven Sean Garland* | Lieutenant Schrank/Glad Hand |
| Amos Wolff* | Riff |
| Raynor Rubel | Big Deal |
| Michael Callahan* | A-Rab |
| Brett Thiele* | Action |
| Andrés Acosta* | Bernardo |
| Caleb Dicke | Jet Boy |
| Daniel Russell* | Baby John |
| Tahlia Joanna Byers | Anybody's |
| Sean Rollofson* | Diesel |
| Marc Koeck* | Tony |
| Jenna Burns* | Maria |
| Mary Antonini* | Anita |
| Virgil Matelau | Chino |
| Alejandro Fonseca | Shark Boy |
| Marilyn Caserta | Rosalia |
| Brianna Abruzzo | Jet Girl |
| Jill Gittleman | Jet Girl |
| Travante S. Baker* | Shark Boy |
| Victoria Byrd | Shark Girl |
| Kathryn Huxtable | Jet Girl /Shark Girl |
| James Gregory Jeffery | Shark Boy |
| Isabelle McCalla* | Shark Girl |
| Anthony Raimondi+ | Shark Boy |
| Michelle West | Shark Girl |

* = *Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.*

+ = *Dance Captain*

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

(In Alphabetical Order)

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Director and Choreographer | Joey McKneely |
| Music Director | Donald Chan |
| Scenic Designer | Lee Savage |
| Costume Designer | Ann Hould-Ward |
| Lighting Designer | Brian Nason |
| Sound Designer | Kevin Kennedy |
| Hair/Wig & Make-up Designer | Michelle Hart |
| Voice & Dialect Coach | Patricia Delorey |

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SELECTED ARTISTIC BIOS

(In Alphabetical Order)

ANDRÉS ACOSTA* FIRST SEASON (Bernardo) is a NYC based actor from Ft. Myers, FL. National Tours: *West Side Story* (Bernardo) *Flashdance* (Joe/ensemble) Regional: Paper Mill Playhouse, North Shore Music Theatre, Merry Go Round Playhouse, Arvada Center and Lyric Theatre of OK. Favorite professional credits: *Grease* (Danny) *A Chorus Line* (Al) and *Ragtime* (Houdini). BFA in Music Theatre from Florida State University and proud member of Actor's Equity Association. Special thanks to Joey McKneely and Paul Haardt.

MARY ANTONINI* FIRST SEASON (Anita) was part of *Jesus Christ Superstar* on Broadway, at the La Jolla Playhouse and at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. She was also in *The Flaming Lips Musical: Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots* at the La Jolla Playhouse and spent three seasons at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival where she did several shows including *Camelot*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *West Side Story*.

JENNA BURNS* FIRST SEASON (Maria) Favorite regional credits include: *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (Millie), *Into the Woods* (Cinderella), and *Legally Blonde* (Vivienne Kensington). Jenna is a proud graduate of Belmont University. www.jenna-burns.com

MARC KOECK* FIRST SEASON (Tony) recently starred as John Jasper in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* at the New London Barn Playhouse. Other recent credits include: Lancelot in *Camelot* (New Repertory Theatre), *Legally Blonde* (Ocean State Theatre), Jesus in *Jesus Christ Superstar* (The Boston Conservatory), and the workshop of the upcoming Baseball Hall of Fame musical *Stars and Strikes*. Mr. Koeck is a proud 2014 graduate of The Boston Conservatory. www.marckoeck.com

JOEY MCKNEELY FIRST SEASON (Director and Choreographer) has directed/choreographed *West Side Story* throughout the world including London's Sadler's Wells (Olivier Nom/Best Musical Revival), Paris's Théâtre du Châtelet and Milan's La Scala Opera. On Broadway, Joey's choreographic debut was *Smokey Joe's Café*, followed by *The Life, Twelfth Night* at Lincoln Center, *The Wild Party*, *The Boy From Oz* starring Hugh Jackman, and *West Side Story*. He has earned 2 Tony Award Nominations, 2 Outer Critics Circle Nominations, an NAACP Image Award and an LA Ovation Award. He has also directed/choreographed US National Tours of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Crazy For You* and *Smokey Joe's Café*. Internationally, *The Beautiful Game* in Japan; the world premiere of *Love U, Teresa*, and *Ah, Kuling!* in China; and *Evita* and *Dusty* in London.

AMOS WOLFF* FIRST SEASON (Riff) has been seen on Broadway in *Gigi*, *Chicago* and *Follies*. Other New York Credits: *Guys and Dolls* (Carnegie Hall), *Piece of My Heart* (Signature) and *Where's Charlie?* and *Little Me* (Encores). He's toured the country in First National Tours of the recent revivals of *A Chorus Line* and *South Pacific* and regionally has performed productions at Goodspeed Opera House, Williamstown Theater Festival, The MUNY in St. Louis and Pittsburgh CLO. Education: University of Michigan, BFA Musical Theater and RADA: Shakespeare in Performance. www.amoswolff.com

WEST SIDE STORY PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

Inside Asolo Rep: WEST SIDE STORY

Wednesday, November 4 at 11am
Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

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West Side Story
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Panel discussions are \$5 and free for all donors and Asolo Rep Guild Members

Get rare insights into the artistic process, hear directly from the people responsible for producing **WEST SIDE STORY**, and engage in stimulating discussion inspired by the musical's themes and issues.

Inside Asolo Rep is sponsored by Hotel Indigo and the Observer

WEST SIDE STORY IllumiNation Event

Tuesday, November 17 at 6:30pm

Pre-show cocktail reception and a post-show discussion held on the Mezzanine

Performance in the Mertz Theatre

Contact Asolo Rep's Box Office for series package information and single performance tickets.

Asolo Rep kicks off its new series of performances and events promoting cross-cultural conversations in the community with **WEST SIDE STORY**. IllumiNation evenings begin with a cocktail hour at 6:30pm, continue with that evening's performance at 7:30pm and conclude with a moderated panel discussion where audience members can further explore the topical and social issues that they have just seen played out on stage.

IllumiNation is sponsored by Morton's Gourmet Market & Catering.

OUT@AsoloRep: WEST SIDE STORY

Thursday, December 3 at 6:30pm; show starts at 7:30pm

Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Contact Asolo Rep's Box Office for subscription and ticket information

Now in its seventh season, OUT@AsoloRep is Sarasota's premier cultural event connecting local Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities with fantastic theatre. Enjoy a pre-show reception and learn about participating LGBT organizations, gain personal insight into **WEST SIDE STORY** from the creative team and cast members, and mingle with the actors and other OUT attendees after the performance.

OUT@AsoloRep is sponsored by U.S. Trust, Visit Sarasota County, Morton's Gourmet Market & Catering, Community Foundation of Sarasota County - Our Sarasota Fund and McCauley Brown Fund, and Watermark Media.

Dance in an Asolo Rep Music Video!

Saturday, December 5 at noon

Front Steps of Asolo Rep

FREE! Tickets to **WEST SIDE STORY** are not required to participate in this event.

Young and young at heart are invited to participate in Asolo Rep's **WEST SIDE STORY** Music Video. Learn simple movement to this musical's famous songs, and perform alongside members of the cast, neighbors, family and friends. Recommended for ages 10 and up.

Family Day at WEST SIDE STORY

Saturday, December 5 at 2pm; pre-show activities at 1pm

Asolo Repertory Theatre

Tickets are \$60 for a family of four; two tickets must be for patrons under the age of 18.

Additional tickets for children under age 18 are available for \$12.

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West Side Story

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A special matinee performance offers theatre-loving families an affordable way to see this classic America musical, and welcomes you to learn more about how the magic is made at Asolo Rep. With four tickets for the price of one, bring the whole family! Recommended for ages 10 and up.

WEST SIDE STORY Family Day's Lead Sponsor is Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

American Character in Concert

Sunday, December 13 at 7pm

Mertz Theatre

Tickets are \$15

Tickets are \$10 for full-time students 25 and under

This one-night-only cabaret event has become an anticipated annual tradition. **WEST SIDE STORY** artists will inform and entertain in an intimate and educational performance.

ONGOING PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

The Scoop

One hour prior to every performance of **WEST SIDE STORY**

Asolo Rep's Mertz Theatre, orchestra level

Arrive one hour before curtain to hear the ideas and inspirations that contributed to the making of **WEST SIDE STORY**.

Tuesday Talkbacks

Every Tuesday performance

Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Join us for an intimate post-show discussion with featured actors or guests following every Tuesday performance of **WEST SIDE STORY**.

Meet the Actors

Sunday, December 20 at 2pm

Asolo Rep's Mertz Theatre

Immediately following the 2pm matinee, ask questions and learn more from members of the cast at this intimate discussion.

TICKETS

New this Season: Start times for Wednesday & Thursday performances will be moved one-half hour earlier to 1:30pm and 7:30pm. All preview performances will begin at 8pm. Tickets for **WEST SIDE STORY** and the entire 2015-2016 Asolo Repertory Theatre season are on sale now. Tickets for **WEST SIDE STORY** start at \$26. **WEST SIDE STORY** is recommended for ages 10 and up.

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To purchase tickets, call 941.351.8000 or 800.361.8388, visit www.asolorep.org, or visit the Asolo Repertory Theatre Box Office, located in the lobby of the theatre. Asolo Repertory Theatre is located at 5555 North Tamiami Trail in the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts. The box office is currently open Monday – Friday, 10am – 5pm. Box office hours in season, beginning November 2, are Monday 10am – 4pm, Tuesday – Thursday 10am - 7:30pm, Friday – Saturday 10am – 8pm, and Sunday 10am – 2pm. The box office closes at 5pm when there are no evening performances and phone lines close one hour prior to the start of any performance. Season subscription packages are also available online and by visiting or calling the box office.

SPONSORS

Asolo Rep is able to present **WEST SIDE STORY** because of the generosity of its sponsors. Corporate sponsors for **WEST SIDE STORY** are Cool Today, Sarasota Magazine, Herald Tribune, SNN, Hyatt Place, Michael's on East, and 107.9 WSRQ. Asolo Rep 2015-2016 Major Season Sponsors are Florida State University, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, The Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, Designing Women Boutique, Woman's Exchange, Inc., and Sunset Cadillac of Bradenton. Asolo Rep's artistic programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues. Asolo Rep is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

WEST SIDE STORY Youth and Family Programs Major Sponsors are: Lead Sponsor Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Publix Super Markets Charities, Charles Henry Leach II Fund, Harry Leopold Arts Fund of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Koski Family Fund for New Audiences, Cordelia Lee Beattie Foundation, Linnie E. Dalbeck Memorial Foundation Trust, Mandell and Madeleine Berman Foundation, Andrew R. Ferrell Foundation, The Huisking Foundation, and Asolo Repertory Theatre Guild. Community Foundation of Sarasota County support is made possible through the Lola G. Hanna Fund, John and Tana Sandefur Foundation, John and Dorothy Brennan Charitable Fund, Walter Haskins Fund in memory of Stacey K. Haskins, and Cyril and Dorothy Veinott Memorial Fund.

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