

# WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

## NEWS RELEASE

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### Westport Country Playhouse Presents Musical Tribute to Legendary Songwriter Irving Berlin

#### “Hershey Felder as Irving Berlin” plays July 16 through August 3

Westport Country Playhouse, in association with Hershey Felder Presents, will stage a musical tribute to Irving Berlin, one of the most successful songwriters of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with “Hershey Felder as Irving Berlin,” from July 16 – August 3. The show celebrates composer Irving Berlin and reveals the inspiration for Berlin’s countless hit songs, including “Blue Skies,” “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” “White Christmas,” and more. Irving Berlin’s uplifting immigrant story, from Czarist Russia to New York’s Lower East Side to Broadway, epitomizes the American Dream. The production’s music and lyrics are by Irving Berlin, book by Hershey Felder, and direction by Trevor Hay.

“Evergreen and never out of date, Irving Berlin’s cornucopian songbook, filled with invention, warmth, depth, and sheer joy, is without equal,” said Mark Lamos, Westport Country Playhouse artistic director. “In fact, Berlin’s songs have been interpreted and recorded by everyone from the Andrews Sisters, Frank Sinatra, and Bing Crosby, to Tony Bennett, Michael Bublé, Kelly Clarkson, and Lady Gaga.”

According to Berlin’s official website, irvingberlin.com, the composer produced a catalogue that boasted over 1,000 tunes defining American popular song for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He was equally at home writing for Broadway (“Call Me Madam,” “Annie Get Your Gun”) and Hollywood (“Top Hat,” “White Christmas”). Among his many awards are a special Tony Award in 1963; the Academy Award for Best Song for “White Christmas”; Army’s Medal of Merit from President Truman in 1945; a Congressional Gold Medal for “God Bless America” and other patriotic songs from President Eisenhower in 1954; and the Freedom Medal from President Ford in 1977. An intuitive business man, Berlin was a co-founder of ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers), founder of his own music publishing company and, with producer Sam Harris, builder of his own Broadway theater, The Music Box. An unabashed patriot, his love for, and generosity to, his country is legendary.

Lamos added, “The inspiring entertainer Hershey Felder brings Berlin to vibrant life, blending the tunes with insights and backstories on the gifted songwriter’s life and music.”

Hershey Felder, the award-winning actor-pianist-playwright who portrays Irving Berlin, has played over 5,000 performances of his self-created solo productions at some of the world’s most prestigious theaters and has broken box office records consistently. In addition to “Hershey Felder as Irving Berlin,” his shows include “George Gershwin Alone” (including Broadway and the West End), “Monsieur Chopin,” “Beethoven,” “Maestro: Leonard Bernstein,” “Franz Liszt in Musik,” “Lincoln: An American Story,” “Our Great Tchaikovsky,” and “A Paris Love Story.” Felder is the adaptor, director, and designer for the internationally performed play-with-music “The Pianist of Willesden Lane” with Steinway artist Mona Golabek which was presented at Westport Country

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Playhouse in 2017 and 2018. He has been a scholar-in-residence at Harvard University's Department of Music and is married to Kim Campbell, the first female Prime Minister of Canada.

Director Trevor Hay directed the world premieres of "An American Story for Actor and Orchestra," "Abe Lincoln's Piano," "Franz Liszt in Musik," and "Our Great Tchaikovsky." He is associate director for Mona Golabek's "The Pianist of Willesden Lane." In his 23 seasons at the Old Globe Theatre were 11 seasons of the Summer Shakespeare Festival Repertory. Hay was involved in various aspects of production on more than 80 presentations, including the Broadway productions of Jack O'Brien's "Damn Yankees," "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," and Twyla Tharpe's "The Times They Are A-Changin'."

Scenic design is by Hershey Felder, lighting design by Richard Norwood, projection design by Christopher Ash and Lawrence Siefert, sound design/production management by Erik Carstensen, and historical and biographical research by Meghan Maiya, M.A. Resident costume and scenic artist is Stacey Nezda. Producers are Eva Price, Samantha F. Voxakis, and Karen Racanelli, and consulting producer is Joel Zwick.

Production Sponsors are Barbara and John Streicker. Production Partners are Johnna G. Torsone and John McKeon. Corporate Production Partner is Cohen and Wolf, P.C.

Performance schedule is Tuesday at 7 p.m., Wednesday at 2 and 8 p.m., Thursday and Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 3 and 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. Special series feature Taste of Tuesday (July 16), LGBT Night (July 18), Post-Play Dialogues (July 18 and 25), Opening Night (July 20), Sunday Symposium (July 21), Together at the Table Family Dinner (July 23), Open Captions (July 28), Backstage Pass (July 31), Playhouse Happy Hour (August 1), and Thursday TalkBack (August 1).

Single tickets start at \$30 and are subject to change based upon availability. Buy early for best prices. Special offers are available for seniors, students, educators, and playwrights. For details, visit [westportplayhouse.org/special-offers](http://westportplayhouse.org/special-offers).

Upcoming at Westport Country Playhouse are "Mlima's Tale," October 1 through October 19, written by Lynn Nottage and directed by Mark Lamos; and Molière's "Don Juan," November 5 through November 23, a world premiere translation and adaptation by Brendan Pelsue, directed by David Kennedy.

All play titles, artists, and dates are subject to change.

For more information and to buy tickets, visit [www.westportplayhouse.org](http://www.westportplayhouse.org), or call the box office at (203) 227-4177, toll-free at 1-888-927-7529, or visit Westport Country Playhouse, 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport. Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), follow on Twitter (@WCPlayhouse), and on YouTube (WestportPlayhouse).

## **ABOUT WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE**

The mission of Westport Country Playhouse is to enrich, enlighten, and engage the community through the power of professionally produced *theater worth talking about* and the welcoming experience of the Playhouse campus. The not-for-profit Playhouse provides this experience in multiple ways by offering live theater experiences of the highest quality, under the artistic direction of Mark Lamos; educational and community engagement events to further explore the work on stage; the New Works Initiative, a program dedicated to the discovery, development, and production of new live theatrical works; special performances and programs for students and teachers with extensive curriculum support material; Script in Hand play readings to deepen relationships with audiences and artists; the renowned Woodward Internship Program during the summer months for aspiring theater professionals; Family Festivities presentations to delight young and old alike and to promote reading through live theater; youth performance training through Broadway Method Academy, Westport Country Playhouse's resident conservatory program; and the beautiful and historic Playhouse campus open for enjoyment and community events year-round. Charity Navigator has recently awarded its top 4-star charity rating to the Playhouse in recognition of its strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency.

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