

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse Script in Hand Playreading of Brand-New Comedy on Monday, April 15

Westport Country Playhouse will present a Script in Hand playreading of “Tenderness and Gratitude Number Four,” a new comedy written and directed by Enid Graham, on Monday, April 15, at 7 p.m. The play features Mary Testa, three-time Tony nominee for Broadway’s “On the Town,” “42nd Street,” and “Oklahoma!,” and Robert Sella, Broadway veteran of “Flying Over Sunset,” “Sylvia,” and “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang,” among other productions.

“Following the recent, time-honored classic and modern plays we’ve had in our Script in Hand series, it’s a pleasure to present a brand-new work as a Script In Hand reading,” said Mark Shanahan, curator of the Playhouse Script in Hand playreading series and Playhouse artistic director. “Enid Graham is an actress I’ve always admired on stage and screen, and her work as a playwright is equally brilliant.”

In “Tenderness and Gratitude Number Four,” Michael is a party boy who avoids intimacy at all costs. Jenny is a jaded, wise-cracking office worker who still harbors dreams of becoming an artist. When the two strike up an unlikely friendship at work, they are forced to learn what it means to open up to someone else, and how to take a long, hard, messy look at oneself in the mirror. A new play by celebrated actress and author Enid Graham, “Tenderness and Gratitude Number 4” is a humorous and often heartbreaking examination of love, art, truth, lies, office politics, and the complicated road to true friendship.

Shanahan added, “‘Tenderness and Gratitude Number 4’ balances a sharp, crackling wit with a deeply felt examination of the human heart. The play made me gasp in surprise more than once upon first reading it. Truly, Michael and Jenny’s journey goes to unexpected places, and I know our audience will fall in love with these wonderful characters as portrayed by this incredible, accomplished cast.”

Playwright Enid Graham noted that she thinks of her new play as “a love story about a friendship.” She said, “There are many plays about love affairs, but we don’t see friendships explored in the same way. The experiences of being changed by a friend and being deeply heartbroken by a friend are quite universal and equally powerful.”

Cast members: **Fiona Robberson** (Jordann) is currently playing Ann Deever in the upcoming production of “All My Sons” at Hartford Stage, starring Marsha Mason. She appeared in Off-Broadway’s “Confederates,” “Big Hunk O’ Burnin’ Love,” “Three Texas Women,” “The Bacchae,” and regional theater’s “A Midwinter Night’s Dream,” “Much Ado About Nothing,” “A Child’s Christmas in Wales,” “Titus Andronicus,” “Romeo and Juliet,” “Easter,” and “A Christmas Carol,” and the film “Plano.” She graduated The Juilliard School MFA Acting (Group 50), and NYU Tisch BFA Acting. fionarobberson.com

Blake Russell (Danny) was at Westport Country Playhouse last year in a New Works reading of “Bad Accents.” On Broadway, he appeared in “Take Me Out” and “Slave Play.” Other theatre includes “Play On Shakespeare Festival” (OSF/CSC), “The Glory of the World” (BAM), and “That High Lonesome Sound” (Humana Festival). A 2022 Juilliard graduate, he performed there in “Stick Fly,” “Julius Caesar,” “The

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African Company Presents Richard III," and "The Line." Television credits include "The Good Fight" and "The Blacklist." As a producer, he worked with HomeBase Theatre Collective, Self Care Saturdays, and The Chicago Home Theater Festival.

Robert Sella (Michael) appeared in Broadway's "Flying Over Sunset," "Sylvia," "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang," "Sideman," "Cabaret," and "My Fair Lady"; West End's "The Lady from Dubuque"; First National Tour of "Angels in America"; Off-Broadway's "Music in the Air," "1776"; and roles at regional theatres including McCarter Theatre Center, Alley Theatre, Hartford Stage, and Long Wharf Theatre. Film/TV includes "1985," "Manchester-by-the-Sea," "Sleepy Hollow," "The Astronaut's Wife," "New Amsterdam," "Mindhunter," and "In Plain Sight." Sella is a graduate of UCLA and Juilliard.

Mary Testa (Jenny) appeared in Westport Country Playhouse's "Jam and Spice: The Music of Kurt Weill" in 2007 and "The Night They Invented Champagne - Celebrating Lerner & Loewe," a fundraiser in 2016. She is the recipient of the Legend of Off-Broadway Award, three Tony nominations, two Lucille Lortel nominations, six Drama Desk nominations, two Drama League nominations, two Outer Critics Circle nominations, an Obie Award, and a special Drama Desk Award celebrating "Queen of the Mist" and "Three Decades of Outstanding Work." Her credits include Broadway's "Oklahoma!," "Wicked," "Guys and Dolls," "Xanadu," "Chicago," "42nd St," "Marie Christine," "On the Town," and "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum"; Opera's "Anna Nicole"/BAM; Off-Broadway's "Oklahoma!," "The Portuguese Kid," "The Government Inspector," "First Daughter Suite," "Caucasian Chalk Circle," "Queen of the Mist," "Love Loss..," "A New Brain," and "See What I Wanna See." Testa's films include "Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical," "The Mother" (short; three Best Actress Awards), "Big Stone Gap," "Eat Pray Love," and "The Bounty Hunter." Television work includes "The Good Fight," "Divorce," "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," "Bull," "SMILF," "Two Broke Girls," "Difficult People," and "Whoopi." Featured on 14 original cast albums, Testa's album with Michael Starobin, "Have Faith," is now available.

Rebbekah Vega-Romero will read stage directions. At Westport Country Playhouse, she read stage directions for a Script in Hand playreading of "Mauritius." Other theater credits include "The Fantasticks," "A Christmas Carol," and "West Side Story." Her writing, "Smalls & Talls: A Duet for Two Women," is a 2024 Semifinalist for the Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. Her short film, "The Question," was an official Selection of four festivals. She was an inaugural summer jam fellow at the Dramatist Guild Foundation and 2023 Doreen Montalvo Scholarship honoree. B.A./Boston University.
RebbekahVegaRomero.com

Stage manager is **Megan Smith** who has stage managed many Westport Country Playhouse productions and Script in Hand and New Works playreadings since 2005.

Playwright **Enid Graham** is a 2022 graduate of the Lila Acheson Wallace Playwriting Program at Juilliard. Her work includes: "A Long Time Ago in a Dark Yard at Night" and "Do Not Go, My Love" (reading series at the Hudson Stage Company), "Golden" (Falconworks), "What Martha Did" (Launch Pad at UCSB), "Ruth" (2018 National Playwrights Conference), "Smoke" (2022 NPC finalist), "Pathological Venus" (2020 NPC finalist), "Something Unrecognizable," "The Plans I Have for You," "The Astonishing and Improbable Adventures of Ann Lee," and "Saint Vegas." As an actress, her credits include numerous Broadway productions such as "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime," and "Honour" (Tony Award nomination), and television/film including "The Sinner," "Boardwalk Empire," "Margaret," "Mare of Easttown," and "Rabbit Hole."

Mark Shanahan, Playhouse artistic director and Script in Hand curator, is the writer/director of *The New York Times* Critics' Pick "A Sherlock Carol" (Off-Broadway Alliance nomination, Best New Play 2021), playing three seasons in New York, annually at London's Marylebone Theatre, and for the 2023 holiday season at Westport Country Playhouse. He recently directed his own adaptation of "Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd," in partnership with Agatha Christie Ltd., which premiered at the Tony Award-winning Alley Theatre. He is the author of "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," "See Monsters of the Deep," the Off-Broadway and regional hit comedy "The Dingdong," as well as numerous radio plays as creator of the White Heron Ghost Light series, featuring Christopher Plummer, Judith Ivey, Rhonda Ross, and other

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notables. Shanahan has directed at stages around the country such as Alley Theatre, George Street Playhouse, Virginia Stage, Arkansas Rep, White Heron, Mile Square Theatre, Hudson Stage, Theatre Squared, Fulton Opera House, Weston Playhouse, Orlando Shakespeare Festival, Florida Rep, Penguin Rep, Merrimack Rep, The Cape Playhouse, and many more. As an actor, Shanahan has appeared on and Off-Broadway ("The 39 Steps," "Tryst," "The Shaugraun," and others) and at many celebrated regional theatres. Shanahan has appeared on the Westport Country Playhouse stage in "Journey's End" (2005), "David Copperfield," directed by Joanne Woodward and Annie Keefe, (2005), "Sedition" (2007), "Tryst" (2008), and "Around the World in 80 Days" (2009), and numerous Script In Hand readings. Shanahan is also the creator and curator of Westport Country Playhouse Radio Theater, in partnership with WSHU Public Radio, and served as writer/director of the Playhouse radio adaptation of "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," and as director of scripts commissioned for the series. mark-shanahan.net.

Tickets are \$30. Running time is 95 minutes; no intermission.

For full details on the Script in Hand playreading of "Tenderness and Gratitude Number Four," visit: <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/script-in-hand-tenderness-and-gratitude-number-four/>

The Script in Hand Playreading Series is supported by Joyce Hergenhan and the White Barn Program of the Lucille Lortel Foundation. Westport Country Playhouse is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

More Script in Hand playreadings are scheduled on Mondays at 7 p.m. on May 13, June 10, September 9, October 7, and December 2; titles to be announced. Script in Hand playreadings offer intimate storytelling as professional actors bring the words to life without sets or costumes. For a video on Script in Hand, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2eWDaF-JXA>.

A complete schedule of Playhouse events is available at westportplayhouse.org. All play titles, artists, dates, and times are subject to change.

For Westport Country Playhouse information and tickets, visit westportplayhouse.org or call the box office at (203) 227-4177, toll-free at 1-888-927-7529. Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), Instagram ([wcplayhouse](https://www.instagram.com/wcplayhouse)), and YouTube (WestportPlayhouse). Westport Country Playhouse is located at 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport.

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