

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

NEWS RELEASE

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Tony, Emmy, and Two-time Golden Globe Nominee Matthew Morrison to Headline Westport Country Playhouse Gala

Longtime Playhouse Supporter Ann Sheffer will be honored with The 2017 Playhouse Leadership Award

Tony, Emmy, and two-time Golden Globe nominee Matthew Morrison will headline Westport Country Playhouse's 2017 fundraising gala on Saturday evening, September 9. New this year will be the Gala's move to Saturday evening instead of Monday night as in past seasons. The Gala's theme, "Moonlight Over Venice," is a nod to the Playhouse's autumn production of "Romeo and Juliet".

The 2017 Playhouse Leadership Award will be presented to longtime Playhouse supporter Ann Sheffer of Westport, Connecticut, and Palm Springs, CA. "Ann has given incalculably to the Playhouse during important decades of its long history," said Mark Lamos, Playhouse artistic director. "She has expressed her love for this theater through extraordinarily generous support, both financial and spiritual. We have been grateful to her for all she's done, and it's a privilege for us all to honor Ann at our 2017 gala."

Gala headliner Matthew Morrison is a versatile actor who is recognized for his work on stage and on screen. Morrison most recently starred as "J.M. Barrie" in the Broadway musical, "Finding Neverland." Morrison received two Drama Desk nominations for his role, and won the category of Favorite Actor in a Musical in the Broadway.com Audience Awards. Morrison was nominated for a Tony Award for his role in "The Light in the Piazza," and received a Drama Desk nomination for Outstanding Actor in a Musical for "10 Million Miles." He also starred in the Tony-winning revival of "South Pacific" at Lincoln Center Theater.

In 2015, Morrison wrapped the final season of Fox's musical comedy series, "Glee," where he starred as the director of the glee club, "Mr. Schuester." For "Glee," Morrison received an Emmy nomination in 2010 for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Comedy Series, and Golden Globe nominations in 2010 and 2011 for Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series - Comedy or Musical. The show received the Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series – Comedy or Musical in 2010 and 2011. Morrison also was a guest star on CBS's "The Good Wife," where he played U.S. Attorney Conor Fox through the series finale.

Morrison released a self-titled album in 2011, which featured guest artists including Sting, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Sir Elton John, followed by an album of Broadway standards, "Where It All Began," in

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2013. He starred in the film, "What to Expect When You're Expecting," with Cameron Diaz, Jennifer Lopez, and Dennis Quaid; hosted and narrated the PBS special, "Oscar Hammerstein II - Out of My Dreams"; and was featured in a performance of Dustin Lance Black's play, "8," a fundraiser for the American Foundation for Equal Rights.

Morrison studied musical theater, vocal performance, and dance at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. He made his Broadway debut in "Footloose," but his big break came as heartthrob Link Larkin in "Hairspray."

Playhouse Leadership Award recipient Ann Sheffer's history with the Playhouse began when she became an usher at age 15 and has seen many iterations over the past five decades. She served as a trustee for 16 years and was a lead champion for the building of the new Playhouse, with a special interest in preserving its history and cultural significance.

Sheffer has been deeply involved in private, foundation, and government funding for the arts, on national, state, and local levels. Her family has been involved in Westport for three generations, and, although she is now bicoastal, Sheffer continues her active support of all things Westport, especially those relating to the cultural life of the community.

A cocktail party will begin at 5:45 p.m., followed by a 7 p.m. presentation of the Playhouse Leadership Award to Ann Sheffer, and 7:15 p.m. performance by Matthew Morrison. Dinner will be at 8:30 p.m. A silent auction will be on-going throughout the evening. The gala theme, "Moonlight Over Venice," will evoke mystery, elegance, and enchantment, with décor featuring Venetian masks, hanging lanterns, strands of twinkle lights, jewel tones, and an Italian ambiance. Attire is festive; black tie optional. Valet parking will be provided.

The 2017 Gala Committee co-chairs are Ania Czekaj-Farber and Athena Adamson. Committee members include Barbara Streicker (Board of Trustees chair), Mary Ellen Marpe (Development Committee chair), Karen Parrella (auction chair), Molly Alger, Vani Birnbaum, Deborah Bono, Paige Couture, Diane DelVecchio, Katia Friend, Patricia Goodrich, Kristen Haines, Marjorie Jacobson, Anne Keefe, Darlene F. Krenz, Maggie Lehnerd-Reilly, Elizabeth Marks, Maria Mendoza-Smith, Terry Nardozi, Judy Phares, Dana Rutson Robinson, Tricia Schwartz, Carol W. Seldin, Leslie Stetter, Diana Sussman, Nancy Tillson, Marietta B. White, Donovan Wildgoose, and Mindy Wolkstein.

The Honorary Gala Committee includes Maureen Anderman, Frank Converse, Mia Dillon, Keir Dullea, Jill Eikenberry, Daniel Gerroll, Joanna Gleason, James Earl Jones, Patricia Kalember, James Naughton, Kelli O'Hara, Christopher and Elaine Plummer, Chris Sarandon, and Michael Tucker.

Gala tickets are now on sale at the Benefactor and Patron levels. Benefactor level, at \$2,500 per person, includes red carpet welcome, silent auction and cocktail party with special guests, highest priority seating at performance, and a post-performance dinner with the artists. Patron level, at \$1,000 per person, includes red carpet welcome, silent auction and cocktail party with special guests, priority seating at performance, and post-performance dinner with the artists. All donations receive recognition in the evening's program and inclusion as a 2017 Gala donor in 2018 Season programs (at applicable giving levels).

Gala proceeds will benefit the non-profit, professional producing theater, now in its 87th season - its work on stage, with schools, and throughout the community.

For more Gala information or ticket purchases, contact Aline O'Connor, associate director of development, at 203-571-1138, or aconnor@westportplayhouse.org.

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 Playhouse creates this relationship with the community and provides this experience in multiple ways by offering: Live theater experiences of the highest quality, under the artistic direction of Mark Lamos, from May to November; educational and community engagement events and opportunities to further explore issues presented by the work on stage; special

performances and programs for students and teachers with extensive curriculum support material; *Script in Hand* playreadings throughout the year to deepen relationships with audiences and artists alike; the renowned Woodward Internship Program training program during the summer months for aspiring theater professionals; *Family Festivities* presentations from December through April to delight young and old alike and to promote reading through live theater; and the beautiful and historic Playhouse campus open for enjoyment and community events year-round. The value of the Westport Country Playhouse to all it touches is immeasurable.

Included in the Playhouse's 87th season is "Lettice and Lovage," May 30 – June 17, a 1990 Tony Award nominee for Best Play, written by Peter Shaffer, author of "Amadeus," and directed by Mark Lamos. The comedy tells of Miss Lettice Douffet, a tour guide for one of Britain's stately homes, who creates outrageous, exaggerated stories to make the stuffy house's historic past more fascinating. "Grounded," July 11 – July 29, winner of the 2016 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Solo Production and a Fringe First Award at the Edinburg Fringe Festival, written by George Brant and directed by Liz Diamond, is a drama about an ace fighter pilot. Grounded by an unexpected pregnancy, she is reassigned as a drone pilot in Las Vegas where the realities of war and suburban comfort collide. "Appropriate," August 15 – September 2, a 2014-15 Obie Award winner for Best New American Play, written by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, and directed by David Kennedy, Playhouse associate artistic director, is a comic drama about family secrets. When the Lafayette children gather to catalog their recently deceased father's Arkansas estate, they discover a shameful legacy. "Sex with Strangers," September 26 - October 14, written by Laura Eason and directed by Katherine M. Carter, is a look at a modern relationship in the digital age, When Ethan, a young sex blogger, turned bestselling author, meets Olivia, a reclusive, thirty-something novelist, dating turns dark as self-reinvention is just a click away. "Romeo and Juliet," October 31 – November 19, written by William Shakespeare and directed by Mark Lamos, is the tale of two star-crossed teenagers, who fight to love each other in a violent world. All play titles, artists, and dates are subject to change.

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