

# WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

## NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release: November 16, 2018

### **Westport Country Playhouse Announces Encore Engagement of “The Pianist of Willesden Lane”**

Westport Country Playhouse will present the acclaimed musical memoir, “The Pianist of Willesden Lane,” from December 5 through December 22. The production returns to the Playhouse by popular demand after a sold-out run in April 2017.

Starring Grammy-nominated pianist and storyteller Mona Golabek, the unique piece is about Golabek’s mother, who, as a young Jewish girl, was sent from Nazi-threatened Vienna to London, holding on to her music to stay alive. Golabek intertwines the true story of family, hope, and survival with piano selections by Grieg, Chopin, Beethoven, Debussy, Bach, and even a little Gershwin.

“We are honored to bring back this internationally acclaimed artist in her mesmerizing and stunning theatrical event that has been a great success and riveted audiences, not only last year in Westport, but also in Los Angeles, San Diego, Boston, Chicago, New York, and London,” said Mark Lamos, Playhouse artistic director. “It is a tale told deep from the heart about the power of music to heal and sustain the soul.”

Based on the book “The Children of Willesden Lane: Beyond the Kindertransport: A Memoir of Music, Love, and Survival” by Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen, and adapted and directed by Hershey Felder, the play is set in Vienna in 1938 and in London during the Blitzkrieg. Fourteen-year-old Lisa Jura spends her time practicing piano, dreaming of becoming a concert pianist. But with Hitler’s armies advancing into Vienna, her parents obtain passage for her on the Kindertransport, forcing Lisa to leave her family behind and put her future on hold. Lisa’s daughter, Mona Golabek, shares her mother’s gripping tale of escape and the people she met on her journey.

The family-friendly show is appropriate for children age 10 and up.

American concert pianist Mona Golabek has appeared at the Hollywood Bowl, The Kennedy Center, and Royal Festival Hall. She is a Grammy nominee who has been the subject of several documentaries, including “Concerto for Mona” with conductor Zubin Mehta. Her recordings include “Carnival of the Animals” and Ravel’s “Mother Goose Suite” featuring Meryl Streep, both recorded with Golabek’s sister, Renee Golabek-Kaye. Both daughters were taught by their mother Lisa Jura, who is the subject of Golabek’s acclaimed book, “The Children of Willesden Lane.” Golabek’s father Michele Golabek received the Croix de Guerre for his role in the French Resistance.

Golabek founded Hold On To Your Music, a foundation devoted to spreading the message of the power of music. With the help of the Milken Family Foundation, Facing History and Ourselves, and the

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Annenberg Foundation, Golabek created educational resources which, with her book, have been adopted into school curricula across America. Additional educational partnerships have been formed with the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, Mashplant and the USC Shoah Foundation — all helping to bring forth the story of Lisa Jura.

Director and adaptor Hershey Felder created and performed “George Gershwin Alone,” which played on Broadway, in the West End, and in theaters around the country. His Composers Sonata — “George Gershwin Alone”; “Monsieur Chopin”; “Beethoven, As I Knew Him”; “Maestro Bernstein”; “Hershey Felder as Franz Liszt in Musik”; and “Hershey Felder as Irving Berlin” — has been presented at dozens of theaters across the U.S. and around the world. He created Eighty-Eight Entertainment in 2001; its newest division, Hershey Felder Presents, continues in the creation of new works of musical theater. Next year Westport Country Playhouse will present “Hershey Felder as Irving Berlin,” from July 16 – August 3, as part of the Playhouse’s 2019 Season.

Tickets start at \$30; ticket for students/educators are \$20. 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.

Free-of-charge events surrounding the production include a documentary film screening of “Finding Leah Tickotsky: A Discovery of Heritage in Poland,” on Monday, December 10, at 7 p.m.; and an age-appropriate group discussion with community Holocaust survivors, hosted by the ADL and Federation for Jewish Philanthropy, on Saturday, December 16, following the 3 p.m. matinee performance. Both events will take place in the Lucille Lortel White Barn Center.

Education Partners for this production are Judy and Scott Phares.

For more information or tickets, call the box office at (203) 227-4177, or toll-free at 1-888-927-7529, or visit Westport Country Playhouse, 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport. Tickets are available online 24/7 at [www.westportplayhouse.org](http://www.westportplayhouse.org). Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), follow on Twitter (@WCPlayhouse), or view Playhouse videos 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 Circle 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, WCP’s resident conservatory program; and the beautiful and historic Playhouse campus open for enjoyment and community events year-round.

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