

# WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

## NEWS RELEASE

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## Westport Country Playhouse Announces Postponement of 2020 Season to Next Year, Due to Global Pandemic

### Focus will now be online content to connect with stay-at-home audience

Westport Country Playhouse is postponing its 2020 season until spring 2021, due to the global pandemic. All programming will move to 2021, including the season's five main productions, Script in Hand Playreading series, Family Festivities presentations, and the New Works Initiative. This year would have marked the historic, professional theater's 90<sup>th</sup> season. Since its founding in 1931, the Playhouse has been closed for only four seasons, from 1942 through 1945, during World War II.

"We hope our audience will understand and support this very emotional and challenging decision," said Mark Lamos, Playhouse artistic director, "but we, like our sister non-profit theaters and arts organizations world-wide, feel that the predicted future is too unknowable at this point."

In consideration of public health guidelines, and for the safety and well-being of patrons, friends, artists, and staff, the Playhouse doors have been shut since mid-March. An abbreviated 2020 season, with three plays instead of the usual five, was previously announced to begin in July. As the current health crisis continues, the decision was made to postpone the entire 2020 season to 2021.

This year, the Playhouse will focus on a wide range of online content to connect with its audience while they stay at home. The first program in the virtual series will be "Getting to Know You: A Celebration of Young Artists," with Tony Award®-winning Broadway star Kelli O'Hara, on Friday, April 17, at 7 p.m., on the Playhouse YouTube channel and Facebook Live. Ten Fairfield County high school students, selected at random, will perform a musical theater selection and chat with O'Hara. More Playhouse-generated online events will be announced soon.

In 2021, a five-play season will run from mid-April through mid-November, built around a reimagining of the Tony Award-winning musical, "Ain't Misbehavin'," which was originally scheduled for this season. Pending availability of artists, design teams, and licensing, other productions previously announced for 2020 may be produced next year, including the Tony Award-winning musical, "Next to Normal"; a new comedy, "Tiny House"; a world premiere translation of "Antigone"; and the drama, "Blues for an Alabama Sky."

### Impact on Playhouse Staff and Revenue

The Playhouse has been forced to furlough approximately half of its staff, and plans their return in time to produce the 2021 season. The goal is to continue employee health insurance without interruption.

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### WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

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As the suspension of productions has severely impacted revenue from ticket sales, the not-for-profit Playhouse has applied for government loans through the CARES Act (Corona Virus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act).

In addition, the Playhouse has established a Survival Fund with a goal to raise \$1.6MM between now and December 31, 2020. Tax deductible contributions to the fund will be gratefully accepted to help continue the theater's work as a center of creativity and community for greater Fairfield County. To donate, please visit [westportplayhouse.org/donate](http://westportplayhouse.org/donate).

"We will need the public's support now more than ever as we strive for survival through the months ahead in order to emerge in a year and raise the curtain on our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary," said Lamos. "Our thanks will be on that stage, a stage that has survived many dark days for nearly a century. It will be there for *you!*"

### **Options for 2020 Ticket Holders**

Current ticket holders for all 2020 stage events, including one or more of the season productions, Script in Hand series, and Family Festivities presentations, will be notified by the Playhouse box office, via email or regular mail, regarding options for assigning their ticket values: donate the amount, receive a credit for future events, or request a refund.

Barbara Streicker, chairman of the Playhouse board of trustees, summed up the postponement plan, "The board, in conjunction with the artistic director and the managing director, is taking this monumental step of postponing the 2020 season in order to protect all who attend and produce our outstanding theatrical productions. We are saddened by the circumstances - and look forward to opening again in 2021 - under healthy conditions."

The Playhouse box office staff is available to answer patrons' questions by leaving a message on the box office voicemail at (203) 227-4177, or by email at [boxoffice@westportplayhouse.org](mailto:boxoffice@westportplayhouse.org). The Playhouse's physical box office is closed, but staff is working from home, returning phone messages and replying to emails. With the high volume of inquiries, it may take up to one week to respond. 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 of the highest caliber 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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