

# WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Tony Award® Winner Kelli O’Hara and Sirius/XM® Radio Personality Seth Rudetsky Headline Westport Country Playhouse Gala**

#### **Westport’s Ania Czekaj-Farber will receive the 2019 Leadership Award**

Tony Award®-winning Broadway star Kelli O’Hara and Sirius/XM® radio personality Seth Rudetsky will headline Westport Country Playhouse’s 2019 Gala “Black & White Ball: A De-Lovely Evening,” on Saturday evening, September 14. The gala will be a theater lover’s night of delight celebrating the music of Cole Porter, with a cocktail party at 5:15 p.m., dinner at 6:15 p.m., gala performance at 7:30 p.m., live and silent auctions, and an after-party at 9 p.m. with dancing and live music by Cutting Edge Dueling Pianos. The Gala’s Cole Porter theme ties in with the O’Hara’s current role on Broadway in Cole Porter’s “Kiss Me, Kate.”

The gala performance will be a one-of-a-kind event with Rudetsky at the piano accompanying O’Hara as she sings Cole Porter classics and other Broadway tunes. In addition, the pair will share a spontaneous piano-side chat about O’Hara’s life and career.

“Our Black and White Gala promises to be the most elegant and fun night of any gala yet,” said Mark Lamos, Westport Country Playhouse artistic director. “How could it not be, with the music of Cole Porter and the presence of Kelli, who was honored here when she and her family moved to Westport. This time she returns with a difference, in an evening with Broadway legend and insider Seth Rudetsky.”

Ania Czekaj-Farber of Westport, will be honored with the Playhouse’s 2019 Leadership Award for her vision and philanthropy. “Ania is a very special trustee and a very special friend,” said Lamos. “Her ebullient and passionate support of our work comes from a place of deep understanding and knowledge about music, theater, and the arts. Combined with her acumen and her boundless good humor, the generosity of her nature and her financial and spiritual support makes all of us value her without measure — and with great joy.”

Kelli O’Hara’s portrayal of Anna Leonowens in the critically acclaimed revival of “The King and I” garnered her the 2015 Tony Award® for Best Leading Actress in a Musical, along with Drama League and Outer Critics nominations. Her most recent role leading the Broadway revival of “Kiss Me, Kate” earned O’Hara glowing reviews and a 2019 Tony nomination for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Musical. She has countless other Broadway, regional/Off-Broadway, film, and television credits, showcasing her versatility and unequivocal talent.

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Seth Rudetsky brings his extensive theater career to the Playhouse stage for the first time. He is currently the afternoon host on Sirius/XM® Satellite Radio's "On Broadway" as well as the host of "Seth Speaks" on Sirius/XM® Stars. He co-wrote and starred in the musical "Disaster!" which ran Off-Broadway for three years before transferring to Broadway. As a pianist, Rudetsky has played for more than a dozen Broadway shows including "Ragtime," "Les Misérables," and "Phantom of the Opera." His impressive theater experience has united his work with some of Broadway's greatest.

Ania Czekaj-Farber has been an active member of the Playhouse community for many years as secretary of the Playhouse's board of trustees and Gala co-chair from 2015 through 2017. She received an MA/BA in economics from Hunter College in New York. As head of Czekaj Artistic Productions and an opera singer, she has produced countless productions and events. Her company aims to attract young artists to the art of opera singing and inspire them to create new classical music. As a proud Montessori parent of three children, she has actively supported the school's teaching, vision, and community since 2004. She also supports early childhood education as a funding partner of the Trust for Learning collaborative fund.

The 2019 Gala Committee co-chairs are Athena T. Adamson and Paige Couture. The Committee includes Barbara K. Streicker, board chair; Mary Ellen Marpe, development chair; Kate Bahnmann, Deb Bono, Jessica Caldwell, Ania Czekaj-Farber, Linda Heinzelman, Maggie Lehnerd-Reilly, Maria Mendoza-Smith, Terry Nardozi, Brinton Parson, Judy M. Phares, Dana Rutson Robinson, Tricia Schwartz, Nancy Tillson, and Marietta B. White.

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

Lamos added, "Our gala committee is dedicated to making the whole evening a complete delight, and all I can hear when I think about it is that great Cole Porter song, 'What a Swell Party It Is!' Please join us. Your presence helps assure the continued prosperity of the Playhouse, which has been a part of our community for almost a century."

Benefactor level tickets, at \$2,500 per person, include red carpet welcome, pre-performance dinner, highest priority seating at performance, silent/live auction, and a post-performance after-party, with enhanced VIP privileges. Patron tickets, at \$1,250 per person, include red carpet welcome, pre-performance dinner, priority seating at performance, silent/live auction, and a post-performance after-party. Supporter tickets, at \$350 per person, include a ticket to the performance, silent/live auction, and a post-performance after-party. Corporate sponsorship opportunities are also available. Attire is festive; black tie optional. Valet parking will be provided.

Westport Country Playhouse is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation and contributions are tax-deductible, less the value of goods and services received, as provided by law. All donations receive recognition in the evening's program and inclusion as a 2019 Gala donor in 2020 Season programs at applicable giving levels.

Gala proceeds will benefit the non-profit, professional producing theater, now in its 89th season - its work on stage, with schools, and throughout the community.

Event schedule and artists subject to change.

For more Gala information or ticket purchases, contact the Playhouse box office at 203-227-4177 or visit [westportplayhouse.org/Gala2019](http://westportplayhouse.org/Gala2019).

## **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.

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