

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Patricia Blaufuss, Public Relations Manager
(203) 227-5137 x197 | (203) 571-1287 | pblaufuss@westportplayhouse.org

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Westport Country Playhouse's New Works Initiative Continues in July and August

Westport Country Playhouse's New Works Initiative continues its 2019 season with readings of "The Splitting" by Serena Berman, directed by Jake Beckhard, in July, and "Starter Pistol," written by Michael Gotch and directed by Mark Lamos, Playhouse artistic director, in August. The Playhouse's New Works Initiative develops new plays and musicals with playwrights, directors, and other artists, culminating in readings before an invited audience.

"The Splitting" will be developed on July 23 and 24. According to the playwright Serena Berman, "The Splitting" explores our culture's seismically shifting ideas about assault and consent.

In "The Splitting," Sadie and Will, a young couple living in Chicago, are elated and relieved that their summer-long experiment with an open relationship has been a success. The easy bonds of their love begin to fray, however, when a stranger approaches Sadie with a disturbing alternate version of events, forcing her to choose between her identity as a woman and her desire to trust her partner.

The cast includes Susannah Perkins as Sadie, Mirirai Sithole as Nisha, and Harrison Unger as Will.

Playwright Serena Berman is also a performer and producer. She is a member of the 2019-2020 Ars Nova Play Group. Her work has been produced and developed at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Short Play Festival (finalist 2018, upcoming 2019), Less Than Rent Theatre, Davenport Theatre, Flying V Theatre, Absolu Théâtre, Chinatown Soup, and Renegade Theatre Festival, among others. www.serenaberman.com

Director Jake Beckhard was a 2016 Westport Country Playhouse directing fellow. He is a freelance theater director and director of performance at Chinatown Soup. Most recently, he directed at Odyssey Theatre, Brick Theater, Ars Nova, Hangar Theatre, and Williamstown Theatre Festival. He is a Drama League directing fellow, and a resident director at The Flea. www.jake-beck.com

On August 1 and 2, "Starter Pistol" will be developed as part of the New Works Initiative. Somewhere in the dying small-town Midwest of our Brave New America, Karen James—wife, mother, and breadwinner—has enough venison chili to survive the approaching winter but is being pushed to the edge by her husband's work injury and her son's misbehavior. A visit from a stranger promises relief, but only if Karen and her family can survive secrets from the past and the buried conflicts they reveal.

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25 POWERS COURT WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT 06880

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE T (203) 227-5137 F 203.221.7482 | BOX OFFICE T (203) 227-4177 F (203) 454-3238

westportplayhouse.org

Playwright Michael Gotch is a founding member of Delaware's Resident Ensemble Players (REP), and has performed in over 50 REP productions since its inaugural season in 2008/09. He also teaches in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Delaware. Outside The REP, Gotch continues to work around the country at a number of leading theaters, including Westport Country Playhouse's "A Flea in Her Ear" last season, a co-production with the REP. "Starter Pistol," Gotch's second play, was a finalist in the Ashland New Play Festival's 2019 competition. It will receive its world premiere in January 2020 with REP, directed by Lamos. Gotch's first play, "Minor Fantastical Kingdoms," received a Playhouse New Works Initiative workshop in July 2018.

Director Mark Lamos has helmed many plays at Westport Country Playhouse since 2008. His extensive New York credits include "Our Country's Good," for which he received a Tony Award nomination. A former artistic director at Hartford Stage, he earned the 1989 Tony Award for the theater's body of work. He was awarded the Connecticut Medal for the Arts as well as honorary doctorates from Connecticut College, University of Hartford, and Trinity College. In 2016 he was the recipient of the John Houseman Award.

The 2019 New Works Initiative season kicked off in early June with a private reading of the new play, "form of a girl unknown," written by Charly Evon Simpson, and directed by Melissa Crespo.

The Playhouse's New Works Initiative is funded by the New Works Circle, chaired by Michele Flaster. Founding members are the late Howard J. Aibel, Stephen Corman, Czekaj Artistic Productions, Sandra and Neil DeFeo, Kate and Bob Devlin, Michele and Marc Flaster, Susan Jacobson and David Moskovitz, Judy and Scott Phares, Barbara and John Samuelson, Barbara and John Streicker, and Johnna G. Torsone and John McKeon. Annual members are the late Darlene Krenz, Teresa Nardozzi, Roz and Bud Siegel, and Marietta Battaglia White.

Throughout its 89 seasons, Westport Country Playhouse has been home to 60 world premiere productions of new plays and musicals, including the recent comedy, "Love and Money," by A. R. Gurney, directed by Mark Lamos, and co-produced with New York's Signature Theatre, and last season's "Thousand Pines," by Matthew Greene, directed by Austin Pendleton.

For more information about the Playhouse's New Works Initiative, call 203-227-4177. Westport Country Playhouse, 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport. www.westportplayhouse.org. Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), Twitter (@WCPlayhouse), 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 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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