

# WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Westport Country Playhouse and WSHU Public Radio Partner for Playhouse Radio Theater's "Special Delivery"**

#### **Free-of-charge audio play's broadcast premiere on Saturday, July 10**

Westport Country Playhouse Radio Theater, a free-of-charge broadcast series, in partnership with WSHU Public Radio, will present the new audio play combining humor and suspense, "Special Delivery," on Saturday, July 10, at 1:06 p.m. (following a news update at top of the hour), with a rebroadcast on Sunday, July 11, at 4:06 p.m. Radio station frequencies and locations are listed at wshu.org. "Special Delivery" will also be accessible on the Playhouse's website (westportplayhouse.org) from July 12 through August 1.

"Special Delivery," written by Shay Youngblood, is about Leesa Colescott, a VIP courier of fine arts. She has been tasked with delivering not only a strange piece of art, but also an angry 12-year-old boy named Asher, to the home of an uncle he's never met – all during a raging thunderstorm. Their destination is an isolated farmhouse which turns out to be full of surprises just like the ones found in the young boy's favorite late-night horror movies. And yet...those other-worldly voices Asher hears coming from the paintings on the walls can't be real - can they? Humor and suspense meet in this family-friendly radio play about discovering one's true gifts.

Director of "Special Delivery" and curator of Playhouse Radio Theater is Mark Shanahan, who is also curator of the Playhouse's Script in Hand playreadings.

"[Playwright] Shay Youngblood is a master storyteller whom I have long admired, and I am so pleased to team with her on this episode of Westport Country Playhouse Radio Theater," said Shanahan. "From her first line, 'Do you like being afraid of the dark?', Shay leans into the fun and spine-tingling joys of old-fashioned radio drama, taking listeners on a surprising journey through a classic haunted house scenario.

"But what delights me most," added Shanahan, "is that Shay's play is ultimately about the bonds of family, revealing equal amounts of heart and mystery as she explores the true nature of those sounds which go bump in the night. Along with our extraordinary cast and John Gromada's immersive sound design, we hope our audience will find Shay Youngblood's radio play to be a special delivery, indeed."

The cast includes Leon Addison Brown as Dr. Freeman (Westport Country Playhouse's "Master Harold...and the Boys" and two playreadings; Broadway's "Misery," "The Trip to Bountiful" - Drama

- MORE -

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Desk Award, "On the Waterfront," "Someone to Watch Over Me," "Prelude to a Kiss"; BFA. North Carolina School of the Arts); James T. Lane as Narrator/Adult Asher (Broadway's "Kiss Me, Kate," "King Kong," "The Scottsboro Boys," "Chicago," "A Chorus Line"; National Tours of "Jersey Boys," "Fame"; [www.jamestlane.com](http://www.jamestlane.com)); Raif-Henok as Asher (age 11, presenter at the 2019 Grammy Awards; "Access Hollywood's" special correspondent to "The Nickelodeon's Kids' Choice Awards"); and Rhonda Ross as Leesa Colescott (Raif-Henok's real-life mom, singer-songwriter, Emmy-nominated actress; television's "Another World"; Showtime's "Bessie Coleman: A Dream to Fly"; NBC's "The Temptations"; feature film "Hook'd Up"; National Tour of "The Vagina Monologues").

Playwright Shay Youngblood is an Atlanta-based writer, visual artist, and educator. She is the author of several novels including "Black Girl in Paris," collections of short stories, and numerous essays. Her published plays, including "Shaking the Mess Out of Misery" and "Amazing Grace" (a stage adaptation of the Mary Hoffman picture book), have been widely produced, and her short stories have been performed at Symphony Space and recorded for NPR's "Selected Shorts." In 2021 she was appointed commissioner to the Japan U.S. Friendship Commission and serves as a board member of Yaddo artists' community. Her current projects include illustrated children's books, a superhero graphic novel collaboration, an environmental fable, and "The Architecture of Soul Sound," a multi-media performance work about architecture, memory, and the environment inspired by research in Japan, China, and the U.S.

Director Mark Shanahan appeared at Westport Country Playhouse in "Around the World in 80 Days," "Tryst," "Sedition," "David Copperfield," "Journey's End," and over 20 Script in Hand playreadings. In addition to curating Playhouse Radio Theater, he is curator of the Playhouse's Script in Hand series and has directed Playhouse Script in Hand readings of "Butterflies Are Free," with Blythe Danner and Jonathan Groff, and "The Greatest Gift" by Weston playwright David Wiltse, and co-directed with Anne Keefe "Miracle on South Division Street." New York acting credits include "The 39 Steps," "Small World," "Checkers," "Tryst," "The Shaughraun," "As Bees in Honey Drown," and "The Internationalist." His directorial work has been seen at Alley Theatre, George Street Playhouse, Virginia Stage, Hudson Stage, Theatre Square, The White Heron, Fulton Opera House, Mile Square Theatre, Weston Playhouse, Florida Rep, Penguin Rep, Merrimack Rep, Hangar Theatre, The Cape Playhouse, and many more. He has written numerous radio plays for The White Heron Theatre Ghost Light Series and is the author of the Off-Broadway and regional hit comedy, "The Dingdong," as well as "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," "See Monsters of the Deep," "A Murder at Fernly Hall," and "A Sherlock Carol," which premieres this fall Off-Broadway. He is a graduate of Brown University (BA) and Fordham University (MA, faculty). [www.mark-shanahan.net](http://www.mark-shanahan.net).

John Gromada, sound design and original music, is a composer and sound designer for theater, film, television, and dance. He has been on the production team for 10 Westport Country Playhouse shows, including "Of Mice and Men." Best known for his theater music for plays, he has written scores and designed sound for many critically acclaimed, award-winning Broadway productions. Gromada received a Tony nomination for his work on "The Trip to Bountiful" and has also received three Drama Desk Awards, and the Lucille Lortel, Obie, Henry Hewes, Drama-Logue, EDDY, and Connecticut Critics Circle awards. [www.johngromada.com](http://www.johngromada.com).

Claudia Marino is production coordinator.

Following the audio play will be a brief discussion with playwright and director of "Special Delivery."

The audio play runs approximately 30 minutes. Appropriate for ages eight and up. Complete details at <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/special-delivery/>

"Special Delivery" marks the Playhouse's second play commission for terrestrial radio and online audio platforms, in collaboration with WSHU. The first play commission was "The Return," broadcast in May.

2021 Season Sponsor is the Eunice and David Bigelow Foundation. Production Sponsor is Barbara Samuelson. 2021 Season Media Sponsors are Moffly Media and WSHU Public Radio.

The production was recorded for audio broadcast under strict Covid-19 protocols, with actors recording remotely from their own homes.

The Playhouse's 2021 Season includes two new virtual productions, "Tiny House," a timely new comedy, written by Michael Gotch, and directed by Mark Lamos, Playhouse artistic director, playing June 29 through July 18; and "Doubt: A Parable," the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning drama written by John Patrick Shanley and directed by David Kennedy, Playhouse associate artistic director, playing November 2 through November 21. Two HD video productions from the Playhouse archives will stream on-demand, beginning with the musical, "Man of La Mancha" (2018), from August 23 through September 5, and another TBA, from September 13 - 26. Script in Hand playreadings will be on October 19 – 24, and December 14 – 19, titles TBA. The complete schedule is available at [westportplayhouse.org](http://westportplayhouse.org).

All play titles, artists, dates, and formats are subject to change.

For Westport Country Playhouse tickets and information, visit [westportplayhouse.org](http://westportplayhouse.org), call (203) 227-4177, or email at [boxoffice@westportplayhouse.org](mailto:boxoffice@westportplayhouse.org). Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), follow on Twitter (@WCPlayhouse), and on YouTube (WestportPlayhouse).

### **ABOUT WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE**

Founded in 1931, Westport Country Playhouse is celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. 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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