

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

NEWS RELEASE

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Stars on Stage from Westport Country Playhouse to Be Taped before a Live Audience for Future National Television Broadcast

Three nights of in-person concerts by Broadway's Shoshana Bean, Gavin Creel, and Brandon Victor Dixon, August 31 – September 2

Lights! Camera! *Stars on Stage*, a three-part concert series from Westport Country Playhouse, will be taped for future national television broadcast from Tuesday, August 31 through Thursday, September 2. Each evening, in-person concerts featuring Broadway talents will be taped before a live audience on the historic Westport Country Playhouse stage. Broadcast dates are to be announced.

In hosting a concert series for television broadcast, the Playhouse is using this special experience to invite its existing audiences and to welcome others in the community who may have missed attending theater for over a year. Tickets have been made available for subscribers, current ticket holders, and donors. A limited number of tickets for each show, at \$75 and \$20 each, are now on sale for the public. Complimentary tickets are available for local first responders, students, teachers, and groups and organizations. Three days of special festivities are planned for donors, in addition to the performances.

Stars on Stage from Westport Country Playhouse will showcase Broadway artists Shoshana Bean (*Wicked*, *Waitress*) on Tuesday, August 31; Gavin Creel (*Hello, Dolly!*, *The Book of Mormon*) on Wednesday, September 1; and Brandon Victor Dixon (NBC's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Hamilton*) on Thursday, September 2. There will be two one-hour performances per evening, at 7 and 9 p.m.

Andrew C. Wilk, a resident of Westport, is the creator and executive producer of *Stars on Stage from Westport Country Playhouse*. He was executive producer of PBS's *Live From Lincoln Center* from 2012-2019, and is a five-time Emmy Award-winning producer. Donald Thoms and Annette Jolles also will produce, and Jolles and Wilk will serve as directors of the three programs.

"I created this new series with Westport Country Playhouse in mind, and shared the concept with Michael Barker, Playhouse managing director," said Wilk. "I chose Westport Country Playhouse because of its renown as one of the most esteemed and historic regional theaters in the country. Together, we are launching this series in the tradition of bringing great art to television viewers everywhere."

Mark Lamos, Westport Country Playhouse artistic director, noted, "This is a rare opportunity for our audience to simultaneously be involved in the taping of a national television program and see live concerts on the Playhouse stage in this, our 90th anniversary year. A shot in the arm as powerful as the vaccine!"

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WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

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Shoshana Bean will perform on Tuesday, August 31, at 7 and 9 p.m. Her three independent solo albums have all topped the iTunes R&B and blues charts in the US and UK, with her fourth and most recent project, *Spectrum*, debuting at #1 on the Billboard jazz charts. She has sold out solo concerts around the globe, lent her voice to countless films and television shows, amassed millions of views on YouTube, and performed alongside Ariana Grande, David Foster, Postmodern Jukebox, Brian McKnight, and Michael Jackson. Bean is a veteran of the Broadway stage having made her debut in the original cast of *Hairspray*, starring as the very first replacement for Elphaba in *Wicked*, and most recently as Jenna in *Waitress*. She won an IRNE Award for her performance as Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl*, and earned a Jeff Award nomination for her portrayal of CeeCee Bloom in the pre-Broadway musical production of *Beaches*.

Gavin Creel's concert is on Wednesday, September 1, at 7 and 9 p.m. He received a Tony Award for his performance as Cornelius Hackl in *Hello, Dolly!* starring Bette Midler and David Hyde Pierce. Creel made his Broadway debut originating the role of Jimmy Smith in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, for which he received his first Tony Award nomination, and has appeared on Broadway as Claude in *Hair* (Tony Award nomination), Jean-Michel in *La Cage aux Folles*, Stephen Kodaly in *She Loves Me*, and Dr. Pomatter in the Broadway and West End productions of *Waitress*, opposite Sara Bareilles. Creel originated the role of Elder Price in the West End production of *The Book of Mormon*, for which he received the Olivier Award for Best Actor in a Musical. Also in the West End, he starred as Bert in *Mary Poppins*. Other stage credits are the Broadway and First National Touring productions of *The Book of Mormon*, and Stephen Sondheim's *Bounce* at the Goodman and Kennedy Center theaters. On television, Creel recently appeared in *American Horror Stories*, and co-starred alongside Julie Andrews in ABC's "Eloise at the Plaza" and "Eloise at Christmastime."

Brandon Victor Dixon will take the Playhouse stage on Thursday, September 2, at 7 and 9 p.m. Following his Emmy Award-nominated turn as Judas in NBC's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Dixon most recently starred in Fox's *Rent: Live*, Amazon's *Modern Love*, and Starz *Power*. Prior to that he completed a star turn as Aaron Burr in *Hamilton* on Broadway. Since his professional debut, originating the role of Adult Simba in *The Lion King* national tour, Dixon was nominated for a Tony Award for his role as Harpo in Broadway's *The Color Purple*, a Grammy for his portrayal of Berry Gordy Jr. in *Motown The Musical*, and Olivier, Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, Outer Critics Circle, Drama League, and AUDELCO awards for his outstanding portrayal of Haywood Patterson in Kander and Ebb's *The Scottsboro Boys*. His company WalkRunFly has produced multiple works including the Tony Award-winning *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* starring Neil Patrick Harris. A Presidential Scholar semi-finalist and scholarship winner at the British Academy of Dramatic Acting in Oxford, Dixon is a graduate of Columbia University and a recipient of the University's I.A.L. Diamond Award for Achievement in the Arts.

All Playhouse visitors must provide proof of their Covid-19 vaccination to attend any performance or event at the Playhouse. Currently patrons are not required to wear masks. For updates on Covid-19 health and safety protocols at the Playhouse, please visit westportplayhouse.org/visit/covid19safety/

Sponsors of *Stars on Stage from Westport Country Playhouse* are Roz and Bud Siegel, Judy and Scott Phares, Eunice and David Bigelow, Kate and Bob Devlin, Anna Czekaj-Farber, Joyce Hergenhan, Mary Ellen and Jim Marpe, Christian J. and Eva Trefz, and Stacy and Howard Bass.

Westport Country Playhouse's 2021 Season Sponsor is the Eunice and David Bigelow Foundation. 2021 Season Media Sponsors are Mofly Media and WSHU Public Radio.

The Playhouse's 2021 Season is underway with two upcoming HD video productions from the Playhouse archives streaming on-demand: the musical, *Man of La Mancha* (2018), from August 23 through September 5, and John Steinbeck's classic drama *Of Mice and Men* (2008), from September 13 through 26. Both are directed by Mark Lamos, Playhouse artistic director. *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, will be staged in person, November 2 through November 20, and also filmed for streaming at home. Script in Hand playreadings will be on October 4 - 10, and December 14 - 19, titles TBA. All virtual content in the Playhouse's 2021 season will be available on demand for patrons' convenience, with captions in both English and Spanish translation. The complete schedule is available at westportplayhouse.org.

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

For *Stars on Stage from Westport Country Playhouse* tickets and information, visit westportplayhouse.org, call (203) 227-4177, or email at 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 90th 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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