

# 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

For Immediate Release: March 9, 2022

### **Westport Country Playhouse Stages “Next to Normal,” Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award®-winning Pop/Rock Musical**

#### **Diverse casting distinguishes historic theater’s 2022 Season opener, headed by Broadway’s Darlesia Cearcy and Wilson Jermaine Heredia**

The three-time Tony Award®-winning musical and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, “Next to Normal,” will open Westport Country Playhouse’s 92<sup>nd</sup> Season, from April 5 through April 24. A multi-racial cast is headed by Wilson Jermaine Heredia, Tony Award® winner for his portrayal of Angel in “Rent,” and Darlesia Cearcy, who played Erzulie in the Tony Award®-winning revival of “Once on This Island.” The musical is directed and choreographed by Marcos Santana, who helmed the Playhouse production of “In the Heights” in 2019. Featuring a six-piece live orchestra, the pop/rock score is by Tom Kitt, with book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey.

“It’s a powerful piece of musical theater, with a great score, and some absolutely amazing performers,” stated Mark Lamos, Playhouse artistic director. “In choosing ‘Next to Normal,’ Marcos [Santana], director, said it would be exciting to explore how issues presented in this musical challenge communities of color as much as they do white families. He noted that ‘you just don’t hear about it as much.’ Given the extraordinarily exciting artists of color hungry to bring their vision, skills, and voices to mainstream musicals, both Marcos and I decided this would be the show to open our 2022 season.”

“Next to Normal” pushes the boundaries of contemporary musical theater with a story about a family’s loss and endurance. Dad’s an architect. Mom rushes to pack lunches and pour cereal. Their daughter and son are bright, wise-cracking teens. They appear to be a typical suburban American family. And yet, their lives are anything but ordinary because the mother has been battling mental illness for 16 years. While the mother’s struggle prevents the family from having a life that is normal, they hope for one that is “next to normal.” The musical takes audiences into the minds and hearts of each character, presenting their family’s story with love, compassion, and spirit. The show is appropriate for ages 14 and up; running time is approximately two hours with one 15-minute intermission.

Diversity in casting will give audiences a different perspective on the popular musical. The cast includes Darlesia Cearcy as Diana, the wife and mother. She was in Westport Country Playhouse’s “Nicolette and Aucassin” in 2000. Other credits include Broadway’s Tony Award-winning revival of “Once on This Island,” “Shuffle Along,” “The Color Purple,” and “Ragtime.”

Wilson Jermaine Heredia will play Dan, Diana’s husband. He was in Broadway’s “Rent,” for which he won the 1996 Tony Award® for the role of Angel, and Drama Desk and Obie awards for best featured actor in the musical. Heredia reprised the role in London and in the 2005 film. Other credits include

- MORE -

#### **WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE**

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](http://westportplayhouse.org)

Broadway's "La Cage aux Folles" opposite Harvey Fierstein; films "Tick, Tick... Boom!" for Netflix and "Flawless" with Robert De Niro.

Others in the cast are Daniel J. Maldonado as Gabe, Diana and Dan's son (Off-Broadway's "The Streets of New York"; regional theater's "Newsies," for which he earned a Helen Hayes nomination; Boston world premiere of "Moulin Rouge! The Musical"; "Grease," "Pippin," "The Graduate," "Rock of Ages," "The Who's Tommy"); Ashley LaLonde as Natalie, Diana and Dan's daughter (vocalist at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, 54 Below, Don't Tell Mama, U.S. Open; recent graduate of Harvard University); Gian Perez as Henry, Natalie's classmate (Broadway's original cast of "Sing Street" as Kevin; Cantor in "Night Side Songs" at A.R.T.; new album "No Love for Cowboy"); and Katie Thompson as Dr. Madden/Dr. Fine (Broadway's "Oklahoma" as Aunt Eller; world premiere of "Renascence," "R.R.R.E.D. a Secret Musical," which she composed; other theatrical credits include "Giant," "Big Fish," "Pump Boys and Dinettes").

Music composer Tom Kitt, who will be the guest at the Playhouse's Sunday Symposium on April 10, received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama as well as two Tony Awards® for Best Score and Best Orchestrations for "Next to Normal," in addition to the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding New Score. He is also the composer of "If/Then" (Tony nomination); "Flying Over Sunset"; "High Fidelity"; "Bring it On, The Musical," co-composed with Lin-Manuel Miranda; Disney's "Freaky Friday"; "Dave"; and "Orphans," among others.

Playwright and lyricist Brian Yorkey received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, as well as the Tony Award for Best Score, for "Next to Normal." He was also nominated for the Tony Award® for Best Musical and Best Book of a Musical for "Next to Normal," and his work on the show earned him the Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Score. He partnered again with the "Next to Normal" team on "If/Then" (Tony Award® nominee for Best Score). Yorkey co-wrote with John Logan the libretto for "The Last Ship" (Outer Critic's nomination), with a score by Sting. His musical adaptation of "Freaky Friday" for Disney Theatricals enjoyed a national tour before being adapted into a Disney Channel original movie.

Director and choreographer Marcos Santana directed and choreographed Westport Country Playhouse's "In the Heights" in 2019, and choreographed the Playhouse's "Man of La Mancha" in 2018. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, his Broadway credits as associate choreographer include "On Your Feet!" (Tony Award® nomination), and "Rocky" (Tony Award® nomination).

The creative team includes Emily Croome, music director; Adam Koch, scenic designer; Jennifer Caprio, costume designer; Cory Pattak, lighting designer; Domonic Sack, sound designer; Sean Sanford, props supervisor; Katie Ciszek, dramaturg; Nicole Eastwood, behavioral health consultant; Tara Rubin Casting, Claire Burke, CSA, casting; and Caitlin Kellermeyer, production stage manager.

Production Sponsor is Czekaj Artistic Productions. Corporate Production Sponsor is Bank of America. Additional support is from cthumanities. 2022 Season Media Sponsors are Moffly Media and WSHU Public Radio.

Performance schedule is Tuesday at 7 p.m., Wednesday at 2 and 8 p.m., Thursday and Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 3 and 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. (No Wed. or Sat. matinees during preview week; no Sun. performance on Easter, April 17). Special series include Taste of Tuesday (April 5), LGBT Night Out (April 7), Post-Play Dialogues (April 7, 12, 19, 22), Opening Night (April 9), Sunday Symposium (April 10), Backstage Pass (April 20), Thursday TalkBack (April 21), and Open Captions (April 24).

Single tickets for "Next to Normal" start at \$35 during preview performances (April 5 - 8), and beginning April 9 Opening Night, tickets start at \$50 and are subject to change based upon availability. Buy early for best prices. For information on special offers, including discounts for students, senior citizens, educators, military and first responders, Indigenous peoples, professional playwrights, and groups, as well as options for pay-what-you-will and Westport Library pass, visit [www.westportplayhouse.org/visit/box-office/](http://www.westportplayhouse.org/visit/box-office/).

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

All audience members must present proof of vaccination and booster and wear a mask at all times while inside Westport Country Playhouse. Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the U.S., requires that actors perform only at theaters where audiences wear masks. For updates on Covid-19 health and safety protocols at the Playhouse, visit <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/visit/covid19safety/>

For more information and to buy tickets, visit [www.westportplayhouse.org](http://www.westportplayhouse.org), or call the box office at (203) 227-4177, toll-free at 1-888-927-7529, or visit Westport Country Playhouse, 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport. 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; 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.

###