

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

MARK LAMOS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | MICHAEL BARKER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse, in Partnership with WSHU Public Radio, Presents “A Merry Little Christmas Carol”

Free-of-charge audio play, featuring Paxton Whitehead as Scrooge, offers an inventive and theatrical holiday experience from your home.

Westport Country Playhouse, in partnership with WSHU Public Radio, will present a free-of-charge audio play, “A Merry Little Christmas Carol,” on Saturday, December 19, at noon, followed by a rebroadcast on Saturday, December 26, at 8 p.m. WSHU frequencies and locations are listed at wshu.org in the About Us drop-down menu.

“A Merry Little Christmas Carol” is written and directed by Mark Shanahan, adapted from his play of the same name, and based on “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens. The holiday show runs approximately two hours and is appropriate for ages 6 and up.

For children ages 5-8 and their parents, “A Christmas Carol Storytime” will offer a live, children’s version of the Dickens’ classic read by Jenny Nelson, Playhouse director of education and community outreach, on Saturday, December 12, at 10 a.m., on Zoom, free-of-charge. The interactive storytime will bring “A Christmas Carol” to life with a downloadable activity book. The young readers’ version is written by Adam McKeown and illustrated by Gerald Kelley. Running time is approximately one hour. Register to receive a Zoom link at <https://forms.gle/oEuztGH8XzE5eSQy6>.

“A Christmas Carol’ never fails to move audiences, no matter the medium in which the story is told,” said Shanahan. “It is a tale filled with hope and promise, reminding us that it is never too late to become our best selves. Dickens’ masterpiece charges us to recall that we are all responsible for the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters---an idea which rings true now more than ever.

“Our merry little audio play invites audiences to feel as if they are nestled in their seats back at the Playhouse, watching some of their favorite actors in captivating roles as we raise the curtain on yet another wonderful story, well told,” Shanahan added.

“In a year in which we cannot gather together inside the theater, the Playhouse is continuing to find new ways to tell stories. We hope our production will deliver some holiday cheer to all of our listeners,” he noted. In addition to helming this production, Shanahan is co-curator of the Playhouse’s Script in Hand playreading series.

“A Merry Little Christmas Carol” brings to life the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge, the curmudgeon everyone loves to hate; the Spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Future; the festive Fezziwigs; and the darling Cratchit family with the ever-hopeful Tiny Tim. Part ghost story, part celebration, “A Merry Little

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Christmas Carol" features original music and sound effects to propel this classic tale of human transformation.

Paxton Whitehead will play the role of Ebenezer Scrooge. Whitehead was in Westport Country Playhouse productions of "Lettice and Lovage," "What the Butler Saw," "Bedroom Farce," "The Circle," "How the Other Half Loves," "Time of My Life," "Relatively Speaking," "A Bench in the Sun," and "The Crucifer of Blood," and a Script in Hand playreading of "Dial 'M' for Murder." His Broadway credits include "The Importance of Being Earnest," "My Fair Lady"---Helen Hayes Award, "Noises Off"---Drama Desk Award, "Camelot"---Tony Award nomination, and "Lettice and Lovage" with Maggie Smith.

The cast includes Playhouse alumni and friends Brian J. Carter as Bob Cratchit, Joel de la Fuente as Fred, Sana 'Prince' Sarr as The Street Urchin/Peter Cratchit, Triney Sandoval as Jacob Marley, Mia Dillon as Mrs. Dilber, Geneva Carr as The Ghost of Christmas Past, Mark Shanahan as Mr. Creakle, Pearl Sun as Fan, Richard Henry as Old Fezziwig, Joe Delafield as Dick Wilkins, Danielle Davenport as Belle, Britney Coleman as The Ghost of Christmas Present, Sarah Manton as Mrs. Cratchit, Catherine Shanahan as Martha Cratchit, Theo Adamson as Tiny Tim, John Gromada as The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, and Mark Lamos, Westport Country Playhouse artistic director, as The Narrator.

Director/playwright/adaptor 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. He is co-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 stage includes "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 is the author of the Off-Broadway and regional hit comedy, "The Dingdong," and, in addition to "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," another holiday adaptation, "A Sherlock Carol." He is a graduate of Brown University (BA) and Fordham University (MA, faculty). www.mark-shanahan.net.

John Gromada, who conceived original music, sound design, and audio production, 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.

The Playhouse's production team includes Anne Keefe, casting and artistic administration; Joel David Abbott, associate sound designer; Erin Joy Swank, stage manager; David Dreyfoos, associate producer and director of production; and RJ Romeo, technical director and associate director of production. For WSHU, staffing includes A. Rima Dael, station manager; Tom Kuser, program director and "Morning Edition" host; and Julie Freddino, production director.

Following each of the two acts in "A Merry Little Christmas Carol" on the WSHU broadcast, behind-the-scenes interviews will be hosted by Tom Kuser, WSHU's program director and "Morning Edition" host, with guests Mark Shanahan, writer and director; John Gromada, composer, sound designer, and audio producer; A. Rima Dael, WSHU station manager; and Mark Lamos, Westport Country Playhouse artistic director.

The audio play will be available on the Playhouse's website, westportplayhouse.org, December 19 through January 3, along with a full cast list, an activity book for kids, and other details related to the making of this production.

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

“A Merry Little Christmas Carol” production sponsors are Mary Ellen and Jim Marpe, and Judy and Scott Phares.

For more information, visit www.westportplayhouse.org, email boxoffice@westportplayhouse.org, or call the box office at (203) 227-4177, Tuesday through Friday, 12 to 6 p.m. The physical box office is closed, but a limited staff is working from home and replying within 72 hours of inquiry.

Stay connected to the Playhouse at westportplayhouse.org, on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), follow on Twitter (@WCPlayhouse), and on YouTube (WestportPlayhouse). Westport Country Playhouse is located at 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport.

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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