

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse Presents a Celebration of Jewish Musical Theater on May 15

Ari Axelrod brings to Westport his award-winning show honoring Broadway's Jewish composers Irving Berlin, Leonard Bernstein, Carole King, and more.

Westport Country Playhouse will present a musical concert, "Ari Axelrod - A Place for Us: A Celebration of Jewish Broadway," on Monday, May 15, at 7 p.m. The internationally acclaimed, award-winning show honors the songs, stories, and contributions to American musical theater by Jewish composers, such as Irving Berlin, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Carole King. Tickets are \$25.

The program will launch the new Mic in Hand series, a spin-off of the Playhouse's popular Script in Hand series. Both series are curated by Mark Shanahan.

"I'm excited to expand our Script In Hand Series into this new format for the first time, especially with Ari Axelrod taking the stage," said Shanahan. "There's a good reason Ari's show is so celebrated. It's joyous, funny, revealing, and ultimately, an extremely moving evening of theatre presented by a master storyteller delivering some of the greatest songs ever written."

A post-show talkback with Axelrod and ADL Connecticut regional director Stacey Sobel will explore inspiration for the show and its relevance amidst increased levels of hate and antisemitism nationwide.

The Jewish Week named Ari Axelrod one of the 36 most influential Jews under the age of 36 in the United States. He received the 2022 Bistro Award for Best Theatrical Artistry in Song. His show, "A Place For Us: A Celebration of Jewish Broadway," began with a sold-out run at the historic Birdland Jazz Club, featuring six-time Emmy and Tony nominee Tovah Feldshuh. It has since grown to international acclaim, performing to sold-out audiences around the world, and garnered him a BroadwayWorld Award and a MAC Award nomination for Best Male Vocalist in 2020. His debut solo show, "Taking the Wheel," directed by Tony Award winner Faith Prince, and music directed by multiple MAC Award winner Alex Rybeck, has been performed in numerous cities around the country. Axelrod's work as a director has been seen at the Tony Award-winning Paper Mill Playhouse, Birdland Jazz Club, 54 Below, and The Green Room 42. His debut album, "Ari Axelrod Live at Birdland," is now available on all streaming platforms. For more information, visit Axelrod's website: <https://www.ariaxelrod.com/> For performance videos, visit Axelrod's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@ari_axelrod

"What a thrill to bring this show, which is in many ways about the importance of legacy, to a theatre so rich in artistic heritage," said Axelrod. "I hope to give Westport audiences a rekindled love, a fresh understanding, and a newfound appreciation of songs we've all loved throughout the years."

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Curator Mark Shanahan appeared at Westport Country Playhouse in “Around the World in 80 Days,” “Tryst,” “Sedition,” “David Copperfield,” “Journey’s End,” over 20 Script in Hand playreadings, and directed readings of “Butterflies Are Free,” with Blythe Danner and Jonathan Groff, and “The Greatest Gift” by Weston playwright David Wiltse. He is the creator and curator of Westport Country Playhouse Radio Theater and writer/director of the Playhouse radio adaptation “A Merry Little Christmas Carol.” New York acting credit 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, Arkansas Rep, White Heron, Fulton Opera House, Weston Playhouse, Florida Rep, Penguin Rep, Merrimack Rep, The Cape Playhouse, and many more. He has written numerous radio plays for White Heron’s Ghost Light Series (featuring Christopher Plummer and Judith Ivey, among others), and is the playwright/adaptor of the Off-Broadway and regional hit comedy, “The Dingdong”; as well as “A Merry Little Christmas Carol”; “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”; “See Monsters of the Deep,” and “A Sherlock Carol,” which was nominated as Best Play 2022 by the Off-Broadway Alliance Awards and has played at New World Stages Off-Broadway and at the Marylebone Theatre in London. www.mark-shanahan.net

More information on “Ari Axlerod - A Place for Us: A Celebration of Jewish Broadway” at: <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/ari-axlerod/> Mike Stapleton is music director and pianist. Running time is 90 minutes with no intermission.

The 2023 Script in Hand/Mic in Hand Series is supported by Joyce Hergenhan and the White Barn program of the Lucille Lortel Foundation.

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

For more information and to buy tickets, visit 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) and on YouTube (WestportPlayhouse).

ABOUT WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

Founded in 1931, 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.

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