

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 11, 2023

Westport Country Playhouse Announces Departure of Artistic Director Mark Lamos in January 2024

“...raised the Playhouse’s already formidable artistic standards through collaboration with world-class, American theater artists.”

Mark Lamos will step down as Westport Country Playhouse artistic director after 15 seasons, effective January 15, 2024. Reflecting on his years at the historic theater, Lamos said, “I worked hard to raise its already formidable artistic standards through my collaboration with some truly world-class, American theater artists, staging the most physically beautiful productions our budgets allowed.” Lamos added that he took special pleasure in investing in the work of Black, Latinx, and AAPI artists, bringing their voices to the Playhouse stage, and serving larger communities.

From 2009 through the present, Lamos oversaw some 64 Playhouse productions, 25 of which he directed. This summer, Lamos will direct his final production as Playhouse artistic director - a new adaptation of the classic thriller, “Dial M for Murder,” playing July 11 through July 29. At the theater’s annual gala on Saturday, September 9, Lamos’ contributions to the Playhouse will be celebrated.

Lamos gave heartfelt thanks to the Playhouse trustees and the community who have supported his work. Praising the “amazing” Playhouse staff, Lamos stated, “I’ll really miss them. It’s been a joy working with people who realized dreams and met goals, especially our associate producer/director of production David Dreyfoos, without whom all the work on stage--and so much else--would have been impossible.”

Lamos added, “I hope that our community will join me during the run of ‘Dial M for Murder’ this summer and celebrate all the wonderful memories we have made here, at the Playhouse.”

“The pandemic, though challenging and globally tragic, also proved positive-- for me-- in many ways,” Lamos noted. “While working tirelessly to sustain the Playhouse during this period of extreme uncertainty, I was also relieved of the burdens, excitement, and anxiety of producing and directing. I began to sense another way of living my life now.”

Though Lamos worked diligently alongside staff and trustees to keep the Playhouse functioning during two difficult years, the pandemic’s exigencies allowed him to spend more time at home with his husband Jerry, and to experience new-found quotidian joy. He cited long daily walks, listening to more music, reading for hours a day, investing in his home, and taking care of an aging, beloved dog.

“The racial reckoning that awakened our country also had a profound, transformative effect on my feelings about how and why we make theater now,” Lamos said. “And I realized I’d need time to take the advice of two formidable female friends who insisted I create a new artistic challenge for myself. That project has begun but needs my full attention.

“And so after some thoughtful times over the holidays, last January 15th I felt the time had come to exercise the clause in my contract that allows me to leave upon 12 months’ notice.”

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Anna Czekaj-Farber, chair, Playhouse Board of Trustees, said, "I have been privileged, season after season, to observe firsthand Mark's artistic influence on, and his inspiration of, artists, Trustees, audiences, donors - all around. Mark has strongly believed that live theater is essential, vital, and validates our humanity. He has never been afraid to challenge us with the important stories brought to life on stage, in productions of stellar quality. His skilled directing has been marked by creative interpretation, surprising elements, poetic and melodic beauty elicited from well-known classics such as

'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Camelot,' and modern plays like 'Mlima's Tale.' Mark leaves an inspiring legacy of theater worth talking about."

Czekaj-Farber added, "Mark's tenure coincided with a time of enormous growth, change, and opportunity for the Playhouse. He tirelessly encouraged Trustees to be champions of the Westport Country Playhouse - one of the oldest regional theaters. The board and staff now look forward to this opportunity to put in motion our plan for the future, working diligently to ensure stability, continuity, and a smooth transition to the new artistic leadership in 2024 and to a robust, vibrant Westport Country Playhouse of the future."

Lamos' 15 Seasons at Westport Country Playhouse

Mark Lamos has been Westport Country Playhouse artistic director since February 2009, earning five Connecticut Critics Circle Awards for his direction of Playhouse productions. During his tenure, the Playhouse was named "Theater Company of the Year" by *The Wall Street Journal* in 2013.

As for his personal favorites over the years, Lamos recounted a long list, starting in autumn 2008, a few months before he took the artistic director post. "My Playhouse debut was replacing an ailing Paul Newman as director of John Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men,' a 'bucket list' play for me until then. Paul's death during our rehearsals inspired me and a superb cast of actors to strive for the finest work possible. Joanne Woodward, during the very last days of Paul's illness, was actually present at our first rehearsal. What heroism that must have taken."

Another "bucket list" dream was realized when Lamos staged the musical "She Loves Me." Lamos stated, "After a performance, I watched David Kennedy, associate artistic director, host a Sunday Symposium with the show's composers Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, and book writer Joe Masteroff - reuniting as a team for the first time in decades and praising our production to the skies. That was a total thrill for me."

Lamos commended Kennedy for "leading deeply informed Sunday Symposia with the likes of writer Joan Didion, Samuel Beckett biographer Deirdre Bair, and playwrights David Hare and Christopher Durang, as well as bringing his formidable directing skills to a number of our most thought-provoking productions."

Lamos recalled Phylicia Rashad's "sensitive, deeply felt, and layered" production of Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun." "The play sounded new notes when we presented it shortly after the election of the first Black President of the United States and began my realization to present work by, and with, artists of color, in all seasons going forward during my tenure."

Lamos remembered the Playhouse production of A.R. (Pete) Gurney's "The Dining Room," as "purring like a Rolls Royce, due to the perfectly blended execution of the play's every delicate moment by a perfect ensemble of actors attuned to the uniquely WASP harmonies only Pete Gurney could hear and sing. Pete came and gave advice. Gosh, that was a happy month."

Regarding new work at the Playhouse, Lamos said that he was "tremendously proud" of the Playhouse's world premiere production of Matthew Greene's play, "Thousand Pines," directed by Austin Pendleton. "It brought a deeply disturbing vision to the stage but also brought us special attention from important foundations who have continued to support our growing exploration of new work."

Topicality often served as the basis for Lamos' production choices. "How amazingly relevant 'Man of La Mancha' suddenly became with an all-Latino cast at the moment of an inflamed border crisis and the

confirmation hearings of Brett Kavanaugh amidst accusations of his sexual abuse of women,” Lamos remarked. “The cast so *owned* that show. Gave it such power.”

Creating the production of Lynn Nottage’s “Mlima’s Tale” was, according to Lamos, “probably the most personally meaningful project over the 15 seasons of my tenure. Working with an amazing design team in tandem with movement director Jeffrey L. Page was incredibly inspiring, as was Nottage’s haunting message about the ivory trade.”

Of the Playhouse’s big musicals that Lamos claims are “almost always wonderful audience-pleasers,” he named “Camelot,” “Man of La Mancha,” “In the Heights,” and “Ain’t Misbehavin’” as “the four that were large challenges yet deeply enjoyable to experience on the part of the team that pulled them together.”

Lamos’ Credits – Broadway, Off-Broadway, Regional Theater, and Opera

Lamos’ Broadway credits include “Our Country’s Good” (Tony nomination), “The Rivals,” “Cymbeline,” “Seascape” (Tony nomination, best revival) for Lincoln Center Theater, “The Deep Blue Sea,” and “The Gershwins’ Fascinating Rhythm.” Off-Broadway work includes “Tiny Alice,” “Measure for Measure” (Lortel Awards for both), productions at Playwrights Horizons, Primary Stages, Signature Theatre, The Public Theater, and “As You Like It” at Shakespeare in the Park.

During Lamos’ 16 seasons as artistic director at Hartford Stage, the theater received the 1989 Regional Theater Tony Award for its body of work. He also directed for Kennedy Center, Canada’s Stratford Festival, Guthrie Theater, Yale Repertory Theatre, A.C.T., The Old Globe, Delaware Rep, Ford’s Theatre, D.C.’s Shakespeare Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and others. He was the first American to direct a company in the former Soviet Union (“Desire Under the Elms” at Moscow’s Pushkin Theatre), and the first to act as dramaturge in the creation of a ballet, Alexei Ratmansky’s “The Tempest,” for American Ballet Theatre.

Lamos’ work in opera is extensive. For the Metropolitan Opera he directed new productions of “I Lombardi” with Luciano Pavarotti, and “Wozzeck,” both televised for “Great Performances,” as well as the world premiere of Harbison’s “The Great Gatsby,” and “Adriana Lecouvreur” with Placido Domingo. He created many productions for NYC Opera, including televised productions of “Paul Bunyan,” “Tosca,” “Central Park,” and “Madama Butterfly,” which earned an Emmy Award. Other opera venues include Glimmerglass, Bergen National, Gothenberg, Munich Biennale, London’s Barbican, L’Opera du Montreal, Chicago Lyric, Santa Fe, St. Louis, Dallas, San Francisco, and more.

Lamos attended Northwestern University on a music scholarship. He began his career in the theater as an actor on and Off-Broadway and in regional theater, and made his film debut in “Longtime Companion.” He was awarded the Connecticut Medal for the Arts as well as honorary doctorates from Connecticut College, Trinity College, and the University of Hartford, and was the recipient of the John Houseman Award.

ABOUT WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

Founded in 1931, Westport Country Playhouse is celebrating its 92nd 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; and the beautiful and historic Playhouse campus open for enjoyment and community events year-round. For information about Westport Country Playhouse, visit westportplayhouse.org.

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