

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 30, 2023

Santino Fontana, Kristine Nielsen, and Arnie Burton Lead Cast in Reading of “Agatha Christie’s The Murder of Roger Ackroyd” at Westport Country Playhouse on June 12

New adaption for the stage of Christie’s famous murder mystery

Westport Country Playhouse will present a Script in Hand playreading of “Agatha Christie’s The Murder of Roger Ackroyd” on Monday, June 12, at 7 p.m. From the novel by Agatha Christie, the cunning tale of murder and deception is a brand new adaptation for the stage by Mark Shanahan, who will also direct. This summer, the Alley Theatre in Houston will stage the play’s world premiere production.

A murder. A mansion. A mysterious cast of suspects...and a puzzle which can only be solved by the great Hercule Poirot himself. Set in 1926 England, “Agatha Christie’s The Murder of Roger Ackroyd” has been hailed as “the best whodunnit ever written” and cemented Christie’s reputation as the “Queen Of Crime.”

“I’ve loved Agatha Christie’s ‘The Murder of Roger Ackroyd’ since I first read it as a teenager and adapting it for the stage has been a labor of love,” said Shanahan, Script in Hand curator and the play’s adaptor/director. “I’m overjoyed that we have assembled this truly remarkable and celebrated cast of Broadway veterans and Playhouse favorites for a night filled with mystery, laughter, and a few good thrills. It’s going to be a killer Script In Hand reading at the Playhouse!”

Cast members include **Arnie Burton** as Hercule Poirot (Westport Country Playhouse’s Script in Hand playreading of “Murder by Misadventure”; Broadway’s “Machinal,” “Peter and the Starcatcher,” “The 39 Steps,” “A Free Man of Color,” “Amadeus”; Off-Broadway’s “The Government Inspector” - Callaway Award, The Mystery of Irma Vep - Drama League nom.; film “The Greatest Showman”); **Joe Delafield** as Ralph Paton (Westport Country Playhouse’s “School for Husbands,” “Christmas at Pemberley”; Broadway’s “Tartuffe”; Off-Broadway’s “Outward Bound,” “The Breadwinner”; BA Columbia University, MFA NYU’s Graduate Acting Program); **Anissa Felix** as Flora Ackroyd (Broadway’s “Motown: The Musical,” “Sunset Boulevard,” starring Glenn Close, “The Donna Summer Musical”; Mark Shanahan’s “A Sherlock Carol” at New World Stages; Netflix’s “Survival of the Thickest”; BET+’s “Diarra from Detroit”).

Santino Fontana as Dr. James Sheppard (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle awards for “Best Actor in a Musical” as Michael Dorsey/Dorothy Michaels in “Tootsie,” Tony Nomination for “Cinderella”; Disney’s “Frozen”; Amazon’s “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel”; Lucille Lortel, Obie, Outer Critics Circle awards for “Sons of the Prophet”; @santinfontana); **Allen Gilmore** as Roger Ackroyd (Westport Country Playhouse Script in Hand playreading of “The Scream”; roles include Othello, Cyrano, Ebenezer Scrooge; Congo Square Theater Company ensemble member; Lunt-Fontanne Fellow; 3Arts Prize awardee; Nicholas Ruddal Prize recipient); **Richard R. Henry** as Major Hector Blunt (Westport Country Playhouse’s “Room Service,” Script in Hand playreading of “Mauritius”; Off-Broadway’s “Two Gentlemen of Verona,” Yale Rep’s “Assassins,” Goodspeed’s “Oliver,” John Leguizamo musical “Kiss My Aztec!”; www.richardhenrynyc.com); **Tom Hewitt** as John Parker (Broadway’s “Hadestown” as Hades; other Broadway bad guys include Scar, Dracula, Pontius Pilate, Frank-N-Furter, for which he earned Tony and Drama Desk nominations; Off Broadway’s “Treasure Island,” “Jeffery,” “Beau Jest” - Outer Critics Nomination).

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Isabel Keating will portray Caroline Sheppard (Broadway's "Wicked," "It's Only a Play," "Hairspray," "Spider-Man," "Enchanted April," "The Boy from Oz" – Drama Desk, Theatre World awards, Tony, Drama League, Outer Critics nominations; Westport Country Playhouse and Off-Broadway in Mark Shanahan's "A Sherlock Carol"; Emmy Award-winning PBS's "Judy Garland: By Myself"; Instagram@isabelkeating); **Kristine Nielsen** as Gertrude Ackroyd (Two-time Tony Award nominee, two-time Obie Award winner, Outer Critics Circle Award winner; Broadway's "Vanya and Sonya and Masha and Spike," "Present Laughter," "You Can't Take It With You," among others; Westport Country Playhouse reading of "Fallen Angels"; HBO's "The Gilded Age"); **John Rapson** as Inspector Raglan (Currently, Beadle Bamford in Broadway's "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street"; Broadway/Off-Broadway's "Les Misérables," "Between the Lines"; first national tour of "A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder"; Goodspeed's "The Drowsy Chaperone"; University of Michigan); **Sharone Sayegh** as Ursula Bourne (Westport Country Playhouse's Script in Hand playreading of "As Bees in Honey Drown"; Broadway's "Come From Away," "The Band's Visit," "Mamma Mia!"; 1st National Tour "Come from Away"; Off-Broadway's "Road Show," "The Wildness," "Scheherazade"; Syracuse University; sharonesayegh.com); and **Anna Simone Scott** as Helen Russel (acting credits span Australia, Europe, and U.S.; Off-Broadway's "The Crucible," "The Lover"; London's "The Norman Conquests"; 2021 Daytime Emmy Nomination for "Take My Heart"; recurring starring roles on "As the World Turns," "Another World," "Days of Our Lives").

Stage directions will be read by Anne Keefe (artistic director of Westport Country Playhouse with Joanne Woodward in 2008, associate artistic director from 2000-2006, also with Ms. Woodward, former Script in Hand curator). Stage manager is Megan Smith (many Westport Country Playhouse productions, and Script in Hand and New Works playreadings since 2005).

Director and the play's adaptor 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

Tickets are \$25. Running time is approximately two hours, including one 15-minute intermission. The play is recommended for age 10 and up.

For full details on the Script in Hand playreading of Agatha Christie's "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd," visit <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/sih-roger-ackroyd/>

The Script in Hand Playreading Series is supported by Joyce Herganhan and the White Barn Program of the Lucille Lortel Foundation.

Script in Hand playreadings offer intimate storytelling as professional actors bring the words to life without sets or costumes. For a video on Script in Hand, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2eWDaF-JXA>

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

For more information and to buy tickets, visit 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), Instagram (@wcplayhouse), and YouTube (WestportPlayhouse).

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.

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