

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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“An Evening with Justin Paul & Friends with Kelli O'Hara and James Naughton” at Westport Country Playhouse on Sat., Sept. 9

Benefit concert for Playhouse features three Tony Award winners and others who have Fairfield County connections.

Justin Paul, an Oscar, Grammy, Tony, and Olivier Award-winning creator and Westport, Connecticut native, will headline a one-night-only fundraiser, “An Evening with Justin Paul & Friends with Kelli O'Hara and James Naughton,” at Westport Country Playhouse, on Saturday, September 9, at 8 p.m. In addition to Tony Award winners O'Hara and Naughton, the benefit concert for the Playhouse will feature performers from Paul's past projects and award-winning Broadway musicals. A complete list of special guests will be announced soon.

Mark Shanahan, incoming Playhouse artistic director for the 2024-25 season, will offer opening remarks as the Playhouse enters a new chapter in its history.

Justin Paul is best known for his work on “La La Land,” “Dear Evan Hansen,” and “The Greatest Showman.” The accompanying albums for each project have appeared in the top 10 of the Billboard 200, the latter of which certified Platinum in 22 countries. With the release of the novelization of “Dear Evan Hansen,” Paul became a *New York Times* best-selling author. Most recently, he was awarded a Tony Award as a co-producer of the Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway musical “A Strange Loop.”

Paul's other credits include the films “Spirited”; “Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile”; “Aladdin”; and “Trolls”; television's “Harlem,” “Smash,” “The Flash,” “A Christmas Story, Live!,” and Season 3 of “Only Murders in the Building”; Broadway's “A Christmas Story: The Musical”; and Off-Broadway and regional theater's “Dogfight,” “James and the Giant Peach,” and “Edges.” Upcoming projects include Disney's live-action “Snow White.” A graduate of the University of Michigan, Paul serves on the board of the Dramatist Guild Foundation and is proud to call Westport, Connecticut, his hometown.

Kelli O'Hara received a Tony Award for her performance in “The King and I.” Other Broadway musicals include “South Pacific,” “The Bridges of Madison County,” “The Pajama Game,” and “The Light in the Piazza.” Most recently, she appeared in “Days of Wine and Roses.” O'Hara was honored at a Westport Country Playhouse gala in 2015, and also appeared at the Playhouse in fundraisers and readings.

James Naughton earned Tony Awards for “Chicago” and “City of Angels.” At Westport Country Playhouse, he directed “Our Town,” which transferred to Broadway, and appeared in “James Naughton: Street of Dreams,” produced by Mike Nichols, “Ancestral Voices,” and other productions, readings, and fundraisers. Both O'Hara and Naughton are Fairfield County residents.

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Director is Caley Beretta, a graduate of Westport's Staples High School. She is the senior manager of creative development at Disney Theatrical Group, overseeing the development of new Broadway musicals ("Frozen," "Aladdin"), regional, international, and pilot productions ("Hercules," "Freaky Friday," "The Jungle Book," "The Hunchback of Notre Dame"), and the adaptation of titles for amateur licensing ("Tangled," "Descendants," "Moana JR."). In 2018, she co-produced "Women's Day on Broadway," and produced the event in 2019. Beretta is a graduate of Northwestern University.

Producer is Ben Frimmer, who has been teaching theatre arts for the Westport Schools for the past 28 years. He holds a BFA in acting from Ithaca College and an MA in educational theatre from NYU. He has been an actor in theater, film, and television. As a director, he has been responsible for over 50 productions with both children and adults. He served as assistant to the producer for the American Theatre Wing's Tony Awards.

Music director is Mat Eisenstein, a NYC-based music director, pianist, composer/arranger, and coach. He is currently the associate conductor/keyboard for the Broadway production of "Some Like It Hot." He has also conducted the Broadway companies of "Frozen," "Newsies," "Book of Mormon, among others, and has played keyboards in over 45 Broadway pit orchestras. Recordings include six Broadway cast albums and Eisenstein's original solo piano album, "Surroundings." www.mateisenstein.com.

A limited number of tickets at \$1000, including a post-performance meet and greet with Justin Paul and other artists, may be reserved by contacting Catherine MacKay, Playhouse operations and special events coordinator, at cmackay@westportplayhouse.org or 203-571-1141. Tickets at \$300 and \$500 for performance only may be reserved at <https://tickets.westportplayhouse.org/6164/6165> or by calling the Playhouse box office at 203-227-4177.

More information on "An Evening with Justin Paul & Friends with Kelli O'Hara and James Naughton" is at <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/an-evening-with-justin-paul-friends-with-kelli-ohara-james-naughton/>

2023 Media Sponsor is Moffly Media.

Westport Country Playhouse is a 501(c)(3) organization. All proceeds from this event will support the non-profit performing arts center and professional, producing theater, its work on stage and throughout the community.

A complete schedule of Playhouse events is available at westportplayhouse.org. All titles, artists, dates, and times are subject to change.

For Westport Country Playhouse information and tickets, visit westportplayhouse.org or call the box office at (203) 227-4177, toll-free at 1-888-927-7529. Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), Instagram (wcplayhouse), and YouTube (WestportPlayhouse). Westport Country Playhouse is located at 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport.

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