

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse Presents Comedy, “Theatre People,” a Script in Hand Playreading on Monday, November 13

Mark Shanahan directs brand-new, fast-paced, and funny adaptation of a classic.

Westport Country Playhouse will present a Script in Hand playreading of the comedy, “Theatre People,” on Monday, November 13, at 7 p.m. Written by West Hartford native Paul Slade Smith, the play is a brand-new adaptation of Ferenc Molnár’s classic Hungarian farce, “Play at the Castle.” Director is Mark Shanahan, curator of the Playhouse Script in Hand playreading series and also Westport Country Playhouse incoming artistic director.

“What a delight to welcome Paul Slade Smith’s wonderful new comedy to the Script In Hand Series,” said Shanahan. “Paul’s play captures the snappy banter of an old-fashioned, backstage comedy while having just enough of a modern sensibility to turn this adaptation of a classic into something fresh and new. ‘Theatre People’ is frothy, fast-paced fun—and as performed by this all-star cast of gifted comedians, it’s sure to fill the Playhouse with plenty of laughter.”

The witty comedy is set in 1948 in a Newport mansion populated with characters in love with theater: Charlotte and Arthur, a married playwright couple; Margot, a celebrated ingénue; Victor, a narcissistic Broadway baritone; and Oliver, a young, insecure novelist; as well as Olga, an unabashedly unhelpful housekeeper. Filled with romance, misunderstandings, and surprises, the plot focuses on theatre people who are trying to write a surefire Broadway hit but create as much drama among themselves as on paper.

The six-member cast includes **Shereen Ahmed** as Margot Bell (recently starred in City Center Encore’s production of “The Light in the Piazza” as Franca; Broadway/National Tour of “My Fair Lady” as Eliza; Off-Broadway’s “A Man of No Importance” at Classic Stage Company, “Meet Me in St. Louis” at Irish Rep; Carnegie Hall debut in spring 2023 as Iolanthe in Gilbert and Sullivan’s operetta, “Iolanthe”; shereenahmed.com @shereen_ahmed); **Erin Noel Grennan** as Olga (regional credits include Cincinnati Playhouse’s “Reckless,” Paper Mill Playhouse’s “The Outsider,” Boarshead Theatre’s “Unnecessary Farce,” Drury Lane’s “The Man Who Came to Dinner,” Totem Playhouse’s “Noises Off”; seven seasons with Peninsula Players, and two with The Gaiety Theatre in Ireland; television credits include “Bull,” “Blue Bloods,” and many commercials; erinnoelgrennan.com); and **Beth Leavel** as Charlotte Sanders (Tony Award winner as the title character in “The Drowsy Chaperone”; Tony nominations a DeeDee Allen in “The Prom,” and as Florence Greenberg in “Baby It’s You”; upcoming role as Miranda Priestley in the new Broadway musical, “The Devil Wears Prada”; other Broadway credits include “Bandstand,” “Mamma Mia!,” “Young Frankenstein,” “42nd Street,” “Crazy For You”).

Also, **John Rapson** as Victor Pratt (Westport Country Playhouse’s “Agatha Christie’s The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”; currently, Broadway’s “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street” as Beadle Bamford; 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); **Rodolfo Soto** as Oliver Adams (“In The Heights” as Usnavi at Westport Country Playhouse and Broadway’s Music Circus; Westport

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Country Playhouse's New Works playreading of "Bad Accents"; TheaterWorks USA's tour of "The Lightning Thief"; "Ring of Fire" at North Carolina Theatre; BFA in Acting and BA in Writing for the Stage from Marymount Manhattan College); and **Lee Wilkof** as Arthur (originated the roles of Seymour in "Little Shop of Horrors" and Sam Byck in "Assassins"; most recent performance was as The Announcer in "Champion" at The Metropolitan Opera; 125 films and television shows; celebrating 50 years in show business this year; nominated for a Tony Award, and three Drama Desk Awards; recipient of an Obie Award, and a SAG Award). Stage directions will be read by **Joanna Parson** (New York credits include "Broken Story," "A Man of No Importance," "The Wild Party"; national tour "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story"; recent films "Boston Strangler," "Dumb Money"; television's "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel"; comedy cabarets; @joannaparsonactor.

Playwright Paul Slade Smith said, "As a West Hartford native, I am truly thrilled to have my play receive a reading at this Connecticut gem of a theatre!" Smith is an actor and playwright living in Brooklyn with his wife, actress Erin Noel Grennan, who is a member of the "Theatre People" cast. Smith's play, "Unnecessary Farce," is the winner of nine regional theatre awards, and has had over 325 productions throughout the United States, and in Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Switzerland, Iceland, Singapore, and Japan. His political comedy, "The Outsider," had a record-making 34 productions in 2022. Smith received a 2019 Helpmann Award nomination for Best Actor in a Musical for his performance as Willy Wonka in the Australian premiere of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." Stateside, his acting credits include the original Broadway casts of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," "Finding Neverland," and the 2018 Lincoln Center revival of "My Fair Lady"; U.S. national tours of "My Fair Lady" (Jaime), "Wicked" (Doctor Dillamond), and "The Phantom of the Opera"; and productions at American Repertory Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf, Geva Theatre Center, Asolo Repertory, and Theatre Under the Stars in Houston. His TV credits include NBC's "The Blacklist," and HBO's "The Other Two" and "The Gilded Age."

Director Mark Shanahan is also Playhouse Script in Hand curator, and was recently named Westport Country Playhouse incoming artistic director for 2023-24. He will assume the position in March 2024. Shanahan is the writer/director of *The New York Times* Critics' Pick "A Sherlock Carol" (Off-Broadway Alliance nomination, Best New Play 2021), playing two seasons in New York, annually at London's Marylebone Theatre, and for the 2023 holiday season at Westport Country Playhouse, December 19-23. He recently directed his own adaptation of "Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd," in partnership with Agatha Christie Ltd., premiering this month at the Tony Award-winning Alley Theatre. He is the author of "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," "See Monsters of the Deep," the Off-Broadway and regional hit comedy "The Dingdong," as well as numerous radio plays as creator of the White Heron Ghost Light series, featuring Christopher Plummer, Judith Ivey, Rhonda Ross, and other notables. Shanahan has directed at stages around the country such as Alley Theatre, George Street Playhouse, Virginia Stage, Arkansas Rep, White Heron, Mile Square Theatre, Hudson Stage, Theatre Squared, Fulton Opera House, Weston Playhouse, Orlando Shakespeare Festival, Florida Rep, Penguin Rep, Merrimack Rep, The Cape Playhouse, and many more. As an actor, Shanahan has appeared on and Off-Broadway ("The 39 Steps," "Tryst," "The Shaugraun," and others) and at many celebrated regional theatres. Shanahan has appeared on the Westport Country Playhouse stage in "Journey's End" (2005) "David Copperfield," directed by Joanne Woodward and Annie Keefe, (2005), "Sedition" (2007), "Tryst" (2008), and "Around the World in 80 Days" (2009), and numerous Script In Hand readings. Shanahan is also the creator and curator of Westport Country Playhouse Radio Theater, in partnership with WSHU Public Radio, and served as writer/director of the Playhouse radio adaptation of "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," and as director of scripts commissioned for the series. mark-shanahan.net.

Stage manager is Megan Smith who has stage managed many Westport Country Playhouse productions and Script in Hand and New Works playreadings since 2005.

Tickets are \$25. Running time is approximately two hours, including one 15-minute intermission. The play is appropriate for age 15 and up; it contains some suggestive content.

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For full details on the Script in Hand playreading of “Theatre People,” visit:
<https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/script-in-hand-november/>

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

An upcoming Script in Hand playreading is scheduled on Monday, December 4, title to be announced. 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>.

A complete schedule of Playhouse events is available at westportplayhouse.org. All play 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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