

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Patricia Blaufuss, Public Relations Manager
(203) 227-5137 x197 | (203) 571-1287 | pblaufuss@westportplayhouse.org
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Westport Country Playhouse Kicks Off 2024 Script in Hand Playreading Series with Tale of Sports Legend “Lombardi”

A powerful, yet humorous drama, about Vince Lombardi, the inspirational football coach and his devoted family, on and off the playing field.

Westport Country Playhouse will present a Script in Hand playreading of “Lombardi,” a Broadway hit about the legendary football coach Vince Lombardi and his family, on and off the playing field, on Monday, February 5, at 7 p.m. The inspirational drama infused with humor is written by Academy Award® winner Eric Simonson, based on the book “When Pride Still Mattered — A Life of Vince Lombardi” by Pulitzer Prize winner David Maraniss. Director is Mark Shanahan, curator of the Playhouse Script in Hand playreading series and also Playhouse incoming artistic director.

“A week before Super Bowl Sunday, come to the Playhouse to kick off our 2024 Script In Hand reading series,” said Shanahan. “Lombardi” is an intensely moving and surprisingly humorous play about an American legend whose presence is still felt far beyond the gridiron. Simonson’s play introduces us to the legendary coach in ways that make him human, while also telling the stories of those who loved him, including wife Marie and the players who followed him into the annals of sports history.

“Whether you love football or you simply crave a beautiful story well told, this is a perfect play for a cold, February night among the warmth of friends at the Playhouse,” added Shanahan.

“Lombardi” brings to life one of the greatest sports personalities of all time, Hall of Fame football coach Vince Lombardi, for whom the Super Bowl trophy is named. In 1965, when a young reporter from *Look* magazine arrives at the sports legend’s doorstep looking to write an in-depth profile, he finds a story far richer, far deeper than he imagined. “Lombardi” is a powerful family drama about passion, loyalty, and the ability to drive others to achieve more than they ever thought possible. “Winning isn’t everything, but the will to win is everything.” – Vince Lombardi.

The six-member cast includes **John Ottavino** as Vince Lombardi and **Antoinette LaVecchia** as Lombardi’s wife, Marie. **Ottavino** has been in 70 professional productions in 36 states and seven countries, including “A Doll’s House” on Broadway, “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf” in Leningrad, and “Hawk Moon” in Vienna; Off-Broadway’s “Checkers,” “The Poor Itch,” “The Crucible”; regional theater’s “Circle, Mirror, Transformation” - Kevin Kline Award, “Seascape” - Carbonelle Award nomination, “Blackbird” - Cincinnati Award; and running roles on television’s “NYPD Blue,” “The Commish,” “As The World Turns.” **Antoinette LaVecchia** has appeared in Broadway’s “Torch Song,” “A View from the Bridge”; Off-Broadway’s “Kimberly Akimbo”; Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s “The Rose Tattoo,” Hartford Stage’s “Ah, Wilderness,” TheaterWorks’ “I Loved, I Lost, I Made Spaghetti”; television’s “The Sopranos”; honors include Connecticut Critics Circle Award, BroadwayWorld.com CT Best Actress Award, Outer Critics Circle nomination; MFA Tisch/NYU, Moscow Art Theatre.

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Others in the cast include **Matt Gibson** as Paul Hornung (Broadway's "Gypsy"; UK, Ireland, Toronto tour of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat"; London's "My Favorite Things: Rodgers and Hammerstein's 80th Anniversary Concert"; NYC's "Austen's Pride," "Finian's Rainbow," "New Girl in Town," "I Am Harvey Milk"; over 30 AEA principal roles in musical theater; film's "Wonka"; BFA, NYU Tisch; www.mrmattgibson.com @mrmattgibson); **Patrick Halley** as Michael McCormick (Westport Country Playhouse's Script in Hand readings of "Miracle on South Division Street," "A Merry Little Christmas Carol"; New York's The Pearl Theatre Company, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Astoria Performing Arts Center; regional theaters include Alliance Theatre, Denver Center Theatre Company, Cleveland Play House, People's Light, Baltimore Center Stage, Syracuse Stage, Bucknell graduate; www.patrickhalley.com); **Stanley Andrew Jackson** as Dave Robinson (Internationally, "Romeo and Juliet," "Twelfth Night," "Henry V," "As You Like It"; Off-Broadway's "The Refuge Plays"; regional theater's "The Three Musketeers," "A Wonder In My Soul," "Swimming While Drowning," "And in This Corner: Cassius Clay"; BFA, Howard University; MA, Classical Acting, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London; www.stanleyandrewjackson.com); **Jason M. Shipman** as Jim Taylor (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Black Ensemble Theatre, Theatre Squared, Arkansas Repertory Theatre, Piven Theatre, The Warehouse Theatre, Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival, among others; founding member of Spectrum Theatre Ensemble, a neurodiverse theatre company based in Providence, RI; BA, University of South Carolina in Aiken; MFA, University of Arkansas); and **Hannah Bakke** reading stage directions (actor, playwright, composer, teaching artist; recent credits include "Ghost Quartet," "Once Upon a Mattress," "Escape to Margaritaville," "The Wedding Singer"; member, family folk band Danville; composed original musical, "The Garden," for Minneapolis Children's Theatre Company's Triple Threat Teen Intensive, Instagram (@thegardenfolkmusical).

Playwright **Eric Simonson** also wrote the plays "Fake," "Honest," "Magic/Bird," and "Bronx Bombers." He won the 2005 Academy Award for his short documentary, "A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin." Simonson is an ensemble member and artistic associate of Steppenwolf Theatre of Chicago. There he directed the Chicago, Australian, and Broadway productions of "The Song of Jacob Zulu," for which he received a Tony nomination. He has also directed his own adaptation of "Bang the Drum Slowly" for a number of theaters. He is a director with Chicago's "Stories on Stage," which airs classic short stories on WBEZ. As an actor, Simonson appeared in Steppenwolf's Chicago, La Jolla, London, and New York companies of the Tony Award-winning production of "The Grapes of Wrath." Simonson is the recipient of the Joseph Jefferson Award for "The Song of Jacob Zulu," the Nathaniel Prussy Alumni Award for Outstanding Achievement from Lawrence University, and the Princess Grace Foundation Award for his work at Steppenwolf Theatre. Simonson received training from The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and graduated from Lawrence University in 1982. He is an Instructor at The University of Chicago.

Author **David Maraniss** is an associate editor at *The Washington Post*. He won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting, shared in the *Post's* 2008 Pulitzer for coverage of the Virginia Tech tragedy, and edited a series on Walter Reed that won the 2008 Pulitzer Gold Medal. He has also been a Pulitzer finalist three other times. He is the author of critically acclaimed books on Bill Clinton, Vince Lombardi, Roberto Clemente, Vietnam, and the Rome 1960 Olympics and is at work on "Out of This World," a multigenerational biography of Barack Obama. DavidMaraniss.com

Director **Mark Shanahan** is Playhouse Script in Hand curator, and was recently named Westport Country Playhouse incoming artistic director, a position he will assume in March. Shanahan is the writer/director of *The New York Times* Critics' Pick "A Sherlock Carol" (Off-Broadway Alliance nomination, Best New Play 2021), playing three seasons in New York, annually at London's Marylebone Theatre, and for the 2023 holiday season at Westport Country Playhouse. He recently directed his own adaptation of "Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd," in partnership with Agatha Christie Ltd., which premiered 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

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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 \$30. Running time is approximately two hours with one intermission. The play is appropriate for age 12 and up.

For full details on the Script in Hand playreading of “Lombardi,” visit:

<https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/script-in-hand-lombardi/>

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

More Script in Hand playreadings are scheduled on Mondays at 7 p.m. on March 11, April 15, May 13, June 10, September 9, October 7, and December 2; titles 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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