

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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Westport Country Playhouse Presents Script in Hand Playreading of “The Trip to Bountiful,” Written by Horton Foote and Directed by Michael Wilson

Wilson directed the acclaimed 2013 Broadway revival of the classic play that has roots at Westport Country Playhouse.

Westport Country Playhouse will present a Script in Hand playreading of “The Trip to Bountiful,” about an elderly woman determined to visit her childhood home in Bountiful, Texas, written by multi-award-winning author Horton Foote, on Monday, March 11, at 7 p.m. Director is Michael Wilson, who helmed an acclaimed 2013 Broadway revival and 2014 Lifetime movie of the classic play. In 1953, Westport Country Playhouse staged the premiere of “The Trip to Bountiful” prior to its Broadway transfer.

“What an honor to have Michael Wilson bring ‘The Trip to Bountiful’ back home to the Playhouse for our Script In Hand series,” said Mark Shanahan, curator of the Playhouse Script in Hand playreading series and Playhouse artistic director. “First written as a television play, Horton Foote’s 1953 masterpiece received its world premiere stage production at Westport Country Playhouse before moving to Broadway and subsequently across the globe.”

The 1953 Playhouse and Broadway productions, directed by Vincent J. Donehue, starred Lillian Gish, Eva Marie Saint, and Jo Van Fleet, who won the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Play for her portrayal of Jessie Mae Watts.

“Michael Wilson’s understanding of this play is deeply felt, as evidenced by the celebrated Broadway revival and television film versions which he directed,” Shanahan added. “It is a thrill to host him at the Playhouse to re-investigate a work he knows so intimately and loves with such passion.”

Wilson’s 2013 Broadway production starred Cicely Tyson, who received the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play as Carrie Watts.

Horton Foote’s moving play tells the story of Carrie Watts, who dreams of escape from the bustling city and of a return to simpler times in her beloved Bountiful, Texas. She sets out on a risky journey to her beloved hometown, with her family in hot pursuit. Along the way, she encounters kindness and compassion...and makes a remarkable discovery about the true meaning of home.

The four-member cast includes **Leon Addison Brown** as Ludie Watts, Houston Ticket Man #1, Roy. He appeared in Westport Country Playhouse’s “Master Harold...and the Boys,” and several Script in Hand playreadings. He has appeared in leading roles on Broadway in “Misery,” “The Trip to Bountiful,” “Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me,” “On the Waterfront,” and “Prelude to a Kiss”; Off-Broadway’s “Soft,” “Transfers,” “Painted Rocks of Revolver Creek,” “The Train Driver,” “Master Harold...and the Boys,” “Two Trains Running”; and at regional theaters across the country. He played recurring roles on “Chicago

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Med," "Evil," "Law & Order" and was a series regular on "The Breaks" and "The Knick." His film credits include "Paris Is in Harlem," "40 Winks," "The Whirly Girl," "A Walk Amongst the Tombstones," "The Surrogate," "Ben Is Back," and the upcoming "Atrabilious," "Boss"(HBO), and "American Rust" Season 2 (Prime). He has a Drama Desk Award, is a three-time recipient of the Connecticut Critics Circle Award, and has been nominated for ADELCO and Drama League awards. He began acting at the University of South Carolina, then transferred to UNC School of the Arts where he received a BFA in theatre. He teaches second year acting at SUNY Purchase.

Kimberly Gilbert will play Jessie Mae/Houston Ticket Man #2/Sherriff. She has been a proud Union member since 2001. In the DC Theatreverse she has frequented the stages of Ford's Theatre, Round House, Theater J, Studio, The Kennedy Center, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Olney, and is a company member of both Taffety Punk and Woolly Mammoth Theatre. Regionally, she has played at Penumbra, Syracuse Stage, Portland Center Stage, Denver Center, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, and The Adirondack Theatre Festival. In 2015 she won the Helen Hayes Award for Best Actress in a Play for her performance of the title character in David Adjmi's "Marie Antoinette." She earned her MFA with the inaugural class of The Academy at Shakespeare Theatre Company. She can be seen next on stage as Volumnia in "Coriolanus" at Avant Bard in Washington DC.

Hero Marguerite will portray Thelma. Her recent stage credits include "A Christmas Carol" (Hartford Stage), "Circle Mirror Transformation" (Chester Theatre Company, Berkshire Theatre Awards Nominee), "RE/Emergence" (RE/Emergence Collective), "Sweeney Todd" (Pan Opera), "Hope I Die Before I Get Old" (CitySpace), "Amahl and the Night Visitors" (Hartford Opera Theater), "Port of Entry" (WAM Theatre, staged reading), and "Iodine" (Berkshire Voices, workshop). Film credits include Len Berkman's "Cordelia Lear" (Independent), "Making Learning Stick Series" (Wesleyan University Psychology Department), and "Backwater" (Independent). BA Smith College (Denton Snyder Prize), and LAMDA classical semester program.

Nancy Robinette will play Carrie Watts. She performed in Michael Wilson's "The Trip to Bountiful" at Ford's Theatre also with Kimberly Gilbert. She recently was awarded the Helen Hayes Tribute for her 40+ years in Washington theatre. In New York she most recently appeared in "Prayer for the French Republic" for which she received an Outer Critics Circle nomination. Other NY credits include "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time," "The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek," and "Give Me Your Answer Do!" Recent TV and film: "Up Here," "Louie," and "The Three Christs."

Director **Michael Wilson's** Broadway productions include the premiere of Matthew Barber's Tony-nominated Best Play, "Enchanted April," starring Jayne Atkinson and Molly Ringwald; Horton Foote's "Dividing the Estate"; revivals of John Van Druten's "Old Acquaintance"; Gore Vidal's "The Best Man," starring Candice Bergen and Angela Lansbury; and "The Trip to Bountiful," starring Cicely Tyson, who received the 2013 Tony Award for Best Actress. For his commission, development and direction of Horton Foote's 3-part, 9-hour epic "The Orphans' Home Cycle," he received a Drama Desk and Outer Critics' Circle Award. He served nine seasons as associate director of Houston's Alley Theatre and 13 seasons as artistic director of the Tony Award-winning Hartford Stage. For the last decade or more, Wilson has focused on directing projects for stage and screen, while continuing to serve and lead the field. Last summer, he was named artistic director/theater at Wild Geese Gallery where he will be offering acting intensive workshops this April and May. Wilson is a Morehead-Cain Scholar graduate in Dramatic Art from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Playwright **Albert Horton Foote, Jr.** was an American playwright and screenwriter, perhaps best known for his Academy Award-winning screenplays for the 1962 film "To Kill a Mockingbird" and the 1983 film "Tender Mercies," and his notable live television dramas during the Golden Age of Television. He received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1995 for his play "The Young Man From Atlanta."

Mark Shanahan, Playhouse Script in Hand curator and recently named Westport Country Playhouse artistic director, 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

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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 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 **Jereme Kyle Lewis** (Broadway's "Back to the Future," "New York, New York," "MJ the Musical," "The Trip to Bountiful"; Off-Broadway's "Fat Ham," "Little Shop of Horrors").

Tickets are \$30. Running time is approximately two hours with one 15-minute intermission. The play is appropriate for ages 13 and up.

For full details on the Script in Hand playreading of "The Trip to Bountiful," visit: <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/script-in-hand-thetriptobountiful/>

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 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: <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/whats-on/>
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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