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\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\*

**Asolo Repertory Theatre and the FSU/Asolo Conservatory  
for Actor Training Announced their 2015-16 Seasons**

**(SARASOTA, March 16, 2015)** — On Monday, March 16, 2015, Asolo Repertory Theatre and the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training announced their highly anticipated 2015-16 seasons with a special presentation in the Mertz Theatre. Led by Asolo Rep's Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards and the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training Director and Associate Artistic Director of Asolo Rep Greg Leaming, the 2015-16 season marks the fourth season of the theatre's ambitious five-year American Character Project. The season, which boasts the world-premiere of a Broadway bound musical in the spring, will follow the same format as the 2014-15 season, with two mainstage musical productions in the fall and spring, four productions playing in rotating rep on the Mertz stage from January through April, one play in the Historic Asolo Theater and a summer musical production. Asolo Rep's 2015-16 season will also feature the seventh annual *Unplugged* new play festival in the spring.

Next season, some of the theatre's show start times have changed, with earlier options to accommodate patrons. Wednesday and Thursday matinees will now begin at 1:30pm and Wednesday and Thursday evening shows will start at 7:30pm. All other start times remain the same.

-more-

## 2015-16 Season Announcement

### Page 2 of 10

The season kicks off in November with the groundbreaking American musical *West Side Story*, with a heartrendingly beautiful book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, and legendary choreography by Jerome Robbins. Based on Shakespeare's tragic love story *Romeo and Juliet*, *West Side Story* is set in mid-1950s New York City and follows two street gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, and the star-crossed lovers entangled in the rivalry. The original Broadway production premiered in 1957 and was nominated for six Tony Awards®, winning two. The 1961 film adaptation starring Natalie Wood was nominated for 11 Academy Awards®, winning 10. Featuring such beloved classics as "Maria," "America," "I Feel Pretty" and "Tonight," this not-to-miss musical runs Tuesday November 10 through Sunday, December 27. Two-time Tony nominee Joey McKneely will direct and reproduce Robbins' choreography.

The January rotating repertory season kicks off with Robert Schenkkan's political and historical Tony and Drama Desk-Award-winning drama *All The Way*. *All The Way* opens right after the shocking assassination of President John F. Kennedy and chronicles the first year in office of divisive president Lyndon Baines Johnson, including his fight to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Asolo Rep's production will be directed by Emily Sophia Knapp, who was the associate director of the play's Broadway, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and American Repertory Theatre productions. *All The Way* runs January 5 through April 9, 2016.

The third production in Asolo Rep's 2015-16 season, which runs January 13 through February 25, 2016, will have audiences roaring. Directed by Peter Amster, *Living on Love* is a music-filled comedy that centers on the world's most famous opera singer, her philandering maestro husband and her devious plot for revenge. Written by two-time Tony Award-winner Joe DiPietro, the Broadway production of *Living on Love* starts previews on April 1, 2015 and stars stage sensation Renée Fleming.

Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright Eugene O'Neill's sole comedy *Ah, Wilderness!*, directed by Associate Artistic Director and the Director of the FSU/Asolo Conservatory Greg Leaming, runs January 20 through April 10, 2016. Set at the turn of the 20th century in a small town in Connecticut, this sweet coming-of-age classic centers around the Miller family and their son, Richard, a

-more-

## 2015-16 Season Announcement

### Page 3 of 10

passionate 16-year-old entranced by his first love Muriel, whose family disapproves of Richard's lascivious courting methods.

The 2015-2016 season continues to dazzle audiences in March with *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, directed by Tony winner Frank Galati. Todd Kreidler's stage adaptation of William Rose's 1967 screenplay poignantly examines the complex struggles inter-racial couples battled in America in the 1960s and illuminates the issues that remain relevant in today's culture. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* runs March 9 through April 18, 2016.

Directed by Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards, the season's Historic Asolo Theater production is the recent Broadway hit, *Disgraced*. Written by Ayad Akhtar, whom the *Washington Post* said "finds urgent dramatic connections that serious theatregoers crave," this Pulitzer Prize-winning sociopolitical masterpiece, which runs March 30 through April 24, 2016, examines the lives of post-9/11 Muslim Americans and the sacrifices and choices they must make.

In the spring, Asolo Rep is thrilled to present the world premiere of the Broadway bound original musical *Josephine*, starring internationally renowned, Grammy nominated entertainer Deborah Cox. *Josephine* chronicles a dynamic chapter in the life iconic performer Josepine Baker, from 1939 to 1945, including her scandalous affair with Swedish Crown Prince Gustav VI, her electrifying rise to stardom in Paris, and her role in the French Resistance during World War II. Joey McKneely returns to direct this new musical, which runs April 27 through May 29, 2016.

There will also be an exciting summer production to end Asolo Rep's 2015-16 season, to be announced very soon.

"This season's not-to-miss productions speak to one another in a powerfully provocative way – from the iconic opening moments of *West Side Story* in the fall to the spring's dazzling world premiere of the original musical *Josephine*, each play tells the story of an iconic and identifiable American character," said Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards. "Several further plays in the season – the sensational *All The Way*, the compelling *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, and the electrifying *Disgraced* – explore racial diversity and reflect what America looks

-more-

## 2015-16 Season Announcement

### Page 4 of 10

like today. The delightful and hilarious *Living on Love* and the heartwarming *Ah, Wilderness!* only deepen the ongoing conversation about what it means to be an American. I am thrilled to share this dynamic season with our patrons.”

In October and November 2015, Asolo Rep proudly presents the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training New Stages Tour production of *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare's gender-bending romantic comedy continues the lighthearted fun of last season's wildly successful production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which reached 14,000 students. The New Stages Tour, which features a cast of third-year Conservatory students, presents condensed, 45-minute versions of classic literature to schools and community venues throughout the state.

The FSU/Asolo Conservatory's 2015-16 season kicks off with Tom Stoppard's outrageous comedy *The Real Inspector Hound*, an absurdist satire that follows the antics of two theatre critics who get sucked into the plot of a murder mystery. It is followed by David Ives' equally hilarious *The Liar*, the lively adaptation of Corneille's French farce about a handsome and charismatic man who also happens to be a pathological liar, and the chaos that ensues when he falls in love. Next, Shakespeare's dark and thrilling *Macbeth* takes the stage in the riveting tale of a man who sacrifices everything for power. This striking season ends with the compelling drama *Nora*, Ingmar Bergman's adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's stunning yet tragic classic, *A Doll's House*.

"The 2015-16 Conservatory season represents a remarkable combination of classical and contemporary plays. From classical tragedy to contemporary farce, the season has the kind of range and youthful spirit that the community has come to expect on the Cook Stage," said FSU/Asolo Conservatory Director Greg Leaming. "I think it's a really spectacular way to introduce this community to the second year company of graduate actors as they move from the classroom to the stage and prepare to take on roles on the Asolo Rep mainstage in their third year of training. It promises to be a thrilling season, full of absurd comedy and disturbing tragedy, all performed by this wonderful company of young actors."

**Season subscriptions for the 2015-16 season are on sale now and available by visiting the Asolo Rep Box Office**, located in the lobby of the theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota, by calling 941.351.8000 or 800.361.8388 or online at [www.asolorep.org](http://www.asolorep.org). Single tickets will go on sale in September 2015.

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## **2015-16 Asolo Repertory Theatre Season**

### ***West Side Story***

November 13-December 27

Previews November 10, 11, 12

Based on a Conception of Jerome Robbins

Book by Arthur Laurents

Music by Leonard Bernstein

Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Directed by Joey McKneely

Choreography reproduced by Joey McKneely

With ground breaking choreography by the legendary Jerome Robbins, book by Arthur Laurents, an unforgettable score by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, *West Side Story* changed Broadway dance and the face of musical theatre forever. While Manhattan's west side rumbles with the clash of the Jets and Sharks, star-crossed lovers Maria and Tony seek a "somewhere" their romance can thrive. Based on one of the greatest love stories of all time – Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – *West Side Story* is powerful and poignant, and its electrifying Latin and jazz-infused score including "Tonight," "America," "I Feel Pretty," and "Somewhere" completes the masterpiece. The production will be directed and choreographed by Tony nominee Joey McKneely, who will reproduce Jerome Robbins' stunning original choreography.

### ***All The Way***

January 8-April 9

Previews January 5, 6 & 7

By Robert Schenkkan

Directed by Emily Sophia Knapp

Based on the original production directed by Bill Rauch

One man. One year. One chance to change America. 1964 was a pivotal year in American history and Lyndon Baines Johnson sat at the center of it all. A master politician with towering ambition and ruthless tactics, the conflicted Texan will do whatever it takes to get the Civil Rights bill passed and secure his re-election. Meanwhile, in faraway Vietnam, a troublesome conflict looms. The winner of the

## 2015-16 Season Announcement

### Page 6 of 10

2014 Tony Award for Best Play, this gripping drama captures the critical moment that marked the end of an era and the shift to the political climate of today. Go all the way with LBJ, Martin Luther King, Jr., J. Edgar Hoover, Hubert Humphrey and more in this action-packed, electrifying portrayal of one of the most tumultuous times in our country's history.

#### ***Living on Love***

January 15-February 25

Previews January 13 & 14

By Joe DiPietro

Based on the play *Peccadillo* by **Garson Kanin**

Directed by Peter Amster

There's only one person with a worse temperament, bigger ego and more flamboyant sense of self-importance than opera diva Raquel – and that's her husband, the Italian maestro Vito De Angelis. When Raquel discovers that Vito has become enamored with a young lady hired to ghostwrite his largely fictional autobiography, she retaliates by hiring her own handsome young scribe to chronicle her life as an opera star. Sparks fly, silverware is thrown and romance blossoms in the most unexpected ways in this glamorous romp through the world of music, marriage and celebrity. With a highly anticipated Broadway run starting this April starring opera diva Renee Fleming, Asolo Rep is thrilled to receive the rights to present the regional premiere of this sparkling new comedy.

#### ***Ah, Wilderness!***

January 22-April 10

Previews January 20 & 21

By Eugene O'Neill

Directed by Greg Leaming

A comedy...by Eugene O'Neill? Yes! One of the pillars of 20th-century drama who created some of the most tragic stories for the stage, O'Neill also penned the wonderfully romantic and sweetly funny, *Ah Wilderness!* Set in New England in the days of America's innocence, the play looks back to an idyllic age when goodness and honesty were the norm and family life was picnics and Sunday drives in the family Buick. On July 4, 1906, while the Miller family is planning their traditional

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## **2015-16 Season Announcement**

### **Page 7 of 10**

Fourth of July festivities, dreamy-eyed middle child Richard is spurned by his first love and sets out on a rebellious adventure into the adult world. Family life and all its foibles were never so beautifully portrayed as in O'Neill's coming-of-age love letter to a simpler time in America.

### ***Guess Who's Coming to Dinner***

March 11-April 18

Previews March 9 & 10

By Todd Kreidler

Based on the screenplay by William Rose

Directed by Frank Galati

When the classic film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* premiered in U.S. theaters in December 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. was still alive and racial issues were bubbling. Now, 47 years later, this beloved comedy of manners has a new, totally electric adaptation for the stage with a fresh perspective to the themes that are as relevant as ever. A progressive white couple's proud liberal sensibilities are put to the test when their daughter, fresh from a whirlwind romance, brings her African-American fiancé home to meet them. Personal beliefs clash with the mores of the late 1960s in this warm and funny exploration of love and culture and which of them has the greater hold on our hearts.

### ***Disgraced***

April 1-24

Previews March 30 & 31

The 2013 Pulitzer Prize winning play by Ayad Akhtar

Directed by Michael Donald Edwards

In the Historic Asolo Theater

New York. Today. Muslim-American lawyer Amir Kapoor has worked hard to achieve the American Dream – complete with a successful career, a beautiful wife and \$600 custom-tailored shirts. But beneath the veneer, success comes at a price. At the moment of achieving his life-long ambitions, he falls victim to professional and personal betrayals that manifest in one of the most explosive and controversial scenes ever written for the theater. Hailed as "terrific and turbulent, with fresh currents of dramatic electricity" (*New York Times*), this Pulitzer Prize-

**-more-**

## **2015-16 Season Announcement**

**Page 8 of 10**

winning examination of big city aspiration and cultural assimilation dares to face the truth hiding just below the deception.

### **World Premiere**

#### ***Josephine***

May 6-29

Previews April 27-May 5 (8 previews)

Book by Ellen Weston and Mark Hampton

Music by Stephen Dorff

Lyrics by John Bettis

Based on a story by Kenneth Weissman

Directed and choreographed by Joey McKneely

Romance, intrigue and plenty of excitement will fill the stage next spring when Asolo Rep presents the world-premiere of *Josephine*, the original new musical bound for Broadway following its Sarasota run. The entrancing Josephine Baker was beautiful, ambitious, and the toast of Europe at the height of her fame in the 1920s-30s. Born into poverty in St. Louis, she rose to become an icon of the Jazz Age, captivating Paris audiences as a dancer, singer, actress and the twentieth-century's first international black female sex symbol. Directed and choreographed by Tony nominated Joey McKneely and starring Grammy-nominated, platinum-selling recording artist Deborah Cox, this dazzling new musical revolves around Baker's stint as the star of the Folies-Bergere in Paris from 1939-45, her scandalous affair with Swedish Crown Prince Gustav IV, and her service in the French Resistance during World War II.

### **Summer Production TBA**

June 2016

### **New Stages Tour**

#### ***Twelfth Night***

By William Shakespeare

Adapted and Directed by Jen Wineman

October and November 2015

**-more-**



## 2015-16 Season Announcement

### Page 9 of 10

Presented by Asolo Rep and the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training, the New Stages Tour, which features a cast of third-year Conservatory students, brings exciting 45-minute adaptations of classic literature to schools and community venues throughout the state of Florida. Director Jen Wineman, who helmed last year's infectiously popular *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, works her magic on Shakespeare's timeless comedy of unrequited love, pride, pranks, and self-discovery: "If music be the food of love, play on."

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## 15-16 FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training Season

### ***The Real Inspector Hound***

November 3 - 22

By Tom Stoppard

Directed by Greg Leaming

A comic gem from this century's master playwright, Tom Stoppard. Two theatre critics attending a performance of a British murder mystery become caught up in an evening that goes spectacularly awry! A masterpiece of farce and absurd comedy unlike anything else from the pen of this brilliant writer.

### ***The Liar***

December 29 – January 17

By David Ives

Adapted from the comedy by Pierre Corneille

Dorante is charming, witty, handsome, and a pathological liar whose outlandish stories create an ever-increasing series of problems for himself and everyone around him. A bubbling French farce adapted by the funniest American playwright of this or any other age, the author of *Venus in Fur* and *The School for Lies*.

### ***Macbeth***

February 23 – March 13

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Jonathan Epstein

One of the darkest, most powerful and disturbing works by this playwright. The

-more-

## 2015-16 Season Announcement

Page 10 of 10

Scottish nobleman Macbeth receives a supernatural prophecy and chooses a life of violence, unleashing the devastating psychological effects of evil and the lust for power. Featuring the entire second year graduate acting company of the FSU/Asolo Conservatory.

### ***Nora***

April 12 – May 1

Adapted from Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

Directed by Andrei Malaev-Babel

Ibsen's powerful masterpiece about one woman who discovers the crippling restrictions placed upon her, and upon all woman, by her culture, adapted by the one of the greatest film makers of the 20th century. This searing retelling pares the story down to the five people caught in the web of lies and misinformation, and as a result cuts to heart of this classic and deeply tragic play.

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