

ASOLO REP ANNOUNCES COMPLETE CASTING FOR THE WORLD PREMIERE OF *KNOXVILLE* OPENING APRIL 10

**Featuring Music by Stephen Flaherty
Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens
Adapted and Directed by Frank Galati**

SARASOTA, Florida – Asolo Repertory Theatre presents the world premiere of ***KNOXVILLE***, a new musical by Frank Galati, Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens, opening April 10 (with previews starting April 3). The musical reunites the Tony Award®-winning creative team behind Broadway’s *Ragtime* (1998). Frank Galati, an Asolo Rep associate artist, also directs the production, which will run through April 25. The world premiere of ***KNOXVILLE*** is made possible by a generous grant from The Roy Cockrum Foundation.

Based on James Agee's autobiographical Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *A Death in the Family*, the story begins as James Agee struggles to write his greatest novel – about the event that touched his young life, and the effect it had on his mother, his town and his own future. A powerful illumination of the forces that shape who we are, ***KNOXVILLE*** is a universal coming-of-age story about family, faith and love—and about the boy who will grow up to write it. With a sweeping musical score and an extraordinary creative team and cast, this world premiere is a must-see event.

“Agee ‘writes’ the story as the audience experiences it,” says Galati. “Our musical begins in 1955 in the Author’s workshop. He thinks, ‘Maybe by telling my story, I can find out who I am.’”

Galati adapted the book, with music by Flaherty and lyrics by Ahrens. Asolo Rep commissioned the project starting in 2018 and hosted a developmental workshop in June 2019, in addition to producing the world premiere. The cast features Broadway veterans Hannah Elless, Ellen Harvey, Ben Michael, and Jason Danieleley.

“The story throws us back to the turn of the century and World War I, but it’s sown in the field of 1950s anxiety,” says Galati, who first encountered the book in college in the 1960s, and revisited it again four years ago. “When you read Agee’s work, you retrieve the series of crises of the heart and faith that are universal. It revives in your mind what it felt like to be six years old.” Flaherty and Ahrens were also inspired by Agee’s prose. Flaherty tapped into the story’s history and setting. “I tried to create a very American sound that had elements of folk and country—popular parlor music of the period that would have been presented in a casual, intimate way,” says Flaherty. “Actors

often play instruments throughout the evening, supporting one another both musically and emotionally.” Ahrens’s lyrics reflect and amplify the poetry and mystery of Agee’s prose.

“**KNOXVILLE** is a tremendous achievement and a monument of theatrical artistry,” says Asolo Rep Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards. “I’m so proud of our contributions to its development, and I’m thrilled that we get to present it here first.”

KNOXVILLE’s first draft received a staged reading in New York City in December 2018. Broadway choreographer Josh Rhodes, whose previous Asolo Rep credits include the 2019 production of *The Sound of Music*, joined the project during its 2019 workshop in Sarasota. The creative team also includes Robert Perdziola as the scenic and costume designer.

Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty have garnered Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards for their unforgettable music and lyrics, and their work has been nominated for two Academy Awards® and Golden Globes®, and four Grammy Awards. The dynamic musical team behind *Ragtime*, which has been translated and produced around the world, *Anastasia* (Broadway production and feature film), *Once on This Island*, which received the 2018 Tony Award for Best Revival, *Seussical*, and more, were inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame in 2015.

Frank Galati is an Associate Artist at Asolo Rep, where he has directed *Rhinoceros*, *The Little Foxes*, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, *1776*, *Twelve Angry Men* and more. He received two Tony Awards for his direction and adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath* and was nominated for a Tony for helming the original Broadway production of *Ragtime*. He was nominated for an Academy Award for his screenplay, with Lawrence Kasdan, of *The Accidental Tourist*. He is a member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago.

Robert Perdziola has designed sets and costumes for many Asolo Rep productions including *A Doll’s House, Part 2*; *Rhinoceros*; *Born Yesterday* and *Living on Love*. He has designed for the American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, Boston Lyric Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Ballet, San Francisco Opera, and Santa Fe Opera. In Europe, he has designed for the Bolshoi Ballet, Finnish National Ballet, Latvian National Ballet, Garsington Opera, and Opera Monte Carlo. In Japan he has designed for the Hyogo Performing Arts Center and the Saito Kinen Festival.

Josh Rhodes has directed a number of Asolo Rep productions, including *The Sound of Music*, *Evita*, and *Guys and Dolls*; he also choreographed *Barnum*, *Working*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Yentl*. He choreographed the Broadway productions of *Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Cinderella*, *It Shoulda Been You*, *First Date* and *Bright Star*. On London’s West End, he choreographed *Carousel* at the English National Opera and *Sweeney Todd* starring Emma Thompson. Other choreography credits include *Company* starring Neil Patrick Harris, *Sondheim: The Birthday Concert* (PBS) and the U.K. tour of *Doctor Dolittle*.

CASTING

(in alphabetical order)

SARAH AILI*	Sally
JACK CASEY	Rufus
KATE CHAPMAN*	Jessie
JASON DANIELEY*	Author

HANNAH ELLESS* Mary
 ELLEN HARVEY* Aunt Hannah
 BARBARA MARINEAU* Catherine
 BEN MICHAEL* Jay
 WILLIAM PARRY* Joel
 NATHAN SALSTONE* Andrew
 JOEL WAGGONER* Ralph
 SCOTT WAKEFIELD* Man at the Scene/Father Jackson

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

Director Frank Galati
 Choreographer Josh Rhodes
 Scenic and Costume Design Robert Perdziola
 Orchestrator Bruce Coughlin
 Music Supervision and Music Direction Tom Murray

SELECTED ARTISTIC BIOS

Hannah Elless (Mary) starred on Broadway as Margo Crawford in Steve Martin and Edie Brickell’s musical *Bright Star* and most recently originated the role of Jess in Jack Thorne’s Broadway adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. Other Broadway credits include the latest revival of *Godspell* and the Off-Broadway productions of *Summer and Smoke*, *Come Back Little Sheba*, *Picnic*, and *The Other Josh Cohen*. Her film and TV credits include *The Lake Effect*, *Nora Ephron Goes to Prison*, *The Deuce* (HBO) and *Glee* (FOX).

Ellen Harvey (Aunt Hannah) has appeared on Broadway in *Present Laughter* (with Kevin Kline), *How to Succeed in Business...* (with Daniel Radcliffe), *The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Music Man*, among others. She’s also done national tours of *Mary Poppins*, *High School Musical* and *Mamma Mia*. Her TV credits include Martha Wilson in *House of Cards*, *Blacklist* and *Gotham*.

Ben Michael (Jay) played Henri in the First National Tour of *An American in Paris*, Cable in *South Pacific* at the Walnut Street Theatre, The Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* at the North Carolina Theatre and Jervis in *Daddy Long Legs* at the George Street Playhouse.

Jason Danieleley (James) has appeared on Broadway in *Pretty Woman*, *Chicago*, *The Visit*, *Next to Normal*, *The Full Monty* and *Candide*. His Off-Broadway credits include *Floyd Collins*, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *Dream True*, *Strike Up the Band* and *Trojan Women*, in addition to West End credits, PBS Concerts and cabaret appearances around the world.

ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE **Public Programming for Knoxville**

INSIDE ASOLO REP

Tuesday, April 21 | 11:00 am | Cook Theatre

Get a glimpse behind the curtain in this lively and engaging discussion series featuring the directors, designers, and creative artists from Knoxville.

Come one half-hour early for coffee and light bites provided by the Muse, and to browse the Designing Women Boutique pop-up shop.

\$5 for the public; FREE for donors and Asolo Rep Guild members

Call the Asolo Rep Box Office at 941.351.8000 for tickets.

GET “THE SCOOP”

Every Performance (Excluding Opening Night) | One Hour Prior to Curtain

Hear about the ideas that inspired the production presented by a member of the cast or creative team.

FREE

TUESDAY TALKBACK

April 14 | After the Show

An intimate post-show discussion with members of the cast.

FREE

SUNDAY SALON

April 19 | After the Show

Reflect on your experience through an informative post-show discussion following select Sunday matinees. Moderated by a member of Asolo Rep’s Artistic Department with outside experts.

FREE

THROUGH THE EYES OF A CRITIC

April 21 | After the Show

Participate in a special post-show discussion led by Jay Handelman of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*.

FREE

TICKETS

Tickets for **KNOXVILLE** start at \$33. To purchase tickets, call 941.351.8000 or 800.361.8388, visit www.asolorep.org, or visit the Asolo Repertory Theatre Box Office, located in the lobby of the theatre. Asolo Repertory Theatre is located at 5555 North Tamiami Trail in the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts. The Box Office is open Monday 10am - 5pm, Tuesday - Thursday 10am - 7:30pm, Friday - Saturday 10am - 8pm, and Sunday 10am - 2pm. The box office closes at 5pm when there are no evening performances and phone lines close one hour prior to the start of any performance. Season

Flex Subscriptions are also available online and by visiting or calling the box office.

SPONSORS

Asolo Rep is able to present **KNOXVILLE** because of the generosity of its sponsors. The corporate sponsors for **KNOXVILLE** are Cool Today, *Sarasota Scene Magazine*, SNN Suncoast News Network, Homewood Suites and Michael's on East. Asolo Rep 2019-20 Major Season Sponsors are Florida State University, the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Sarasota County, The Shubert Foundation, Designing Women Boutique, The Exchange, the Huisling Foundation, and Sunset Cadillac of Bradenton. Asolo Rep's artistic programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues.

ABOUT ASOLO REP

Now in its 61st season, Asolo Repertory Theatre is recognized as one of the premier professional theatres in America and one of the largest in the Southeastern United States. One of the few select theatres in the nation that performs in true rotating repertory, Asolo Rep's highly skilled acting company and extensive craftsmanship bring to life this unique performance method that gives audiences the opportunity to see multiple productions in the span of a few days. Asolo Rep presents up to 10 productions each season including contemporary and classic works and provocative musical theatre experiences. A theatre district in and of itself, Asolo Rep is committed to expanding its reach into the community, furthering its collaboration with the best theatre artists working in the industry today and cultivating new artists through its affiliation with the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards and Managing Director Linda DiGabriele, Asolo Rep's ambitious theatrical offerings and ground-breaking education and community programming engage audiences and ensure its lasting legacy for future generations.

www.asolorep.org