

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL DONALD EDWARDS MANAGING DIRECTOR LINDA DIGABRIELE

*****EMBARGOED Until Friday, March 6, 2015 at 11:05am EST*****

Asolo Repertory Theatre to Present *JOSEPHINE* in Spring 2016; The World Premiere of an Original Broadway-bound Musical

(SARASOTA, March 6, 2015) — On Friday, March 6, 2015, Asolo Repertory Theatre proudly announced that it will present the world premiere of ***JOSEPHINE***, an original Broadway-bound musical, in April and May 2016. Previews for ***JOSEPHINE*** begin April 27, **press night is Friday, May 6 at 8pm**, and the musical runs through Sunday, May 29. Chronicling a dynamic chapter in the life of the legendary African-American performer Josephine Baker, from 1939-1945, this exquisite new musical stars Grammy® nominated, multi-talented, multi-platinum selling recording artist Deborah Cox, who recently provided the vocals for the Whitney Houston Lifetime movie: *Whitney*. Ms. Cox starred on Broadway in the title role of *Aida* and as the female lead in the recent revival of *Jekyll & Hyde*.

Asolo Rep is producing ***JOSEPHINE*** in collaboration with two-time Tony Award®-winner Kenneth Waissman, who produced the original Broadway production of *Grease* and is one of only two producers in the history of Broadway to have a musical run over 3,000 performances and a play run over 1,000. Waissman produced a Broadway workshop for ***JOSEPHINE*** in May and June 2011, which also featured Cox as the iconic leading lady. ***JOSEPHINE*** will be directed and choreographed by two-time Tony Award-nominee Joey McKneely, who recently did the musical staging for the celebrated Broadway revival of *West Side Story*. ***JOSEPHINE*** features a book by Ellen Weston and Mark Hampton, and an original score composed by five-time Emmy Award®-nominee and three-time Grammy Award-nominee Stephen Dorff with lyrics by Academy Award®, Grammy, and Golden Globe®-nominee and two-time Emmy Award-winner John Bettis.

Led by Asolo Rep's Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards, Kenneth Waissman, Deborah Cox, Joey McKneely, and Stephen Dorff provided insight and behind-the-scenes information with members of the press and Asolo Rep donors and sponsors at a special presentation in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts

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JOSEPHINE

Page 2 of 6

Cook Theatre on Friday, March 6, 2015. It was also revealed that Ms. Cox will perform with Mr. Dorff at Asolo Rep's Annual Gala on Saturday, March 7 at The Ritz-Carlton Sarasota.

Inspired by Stephen Papich's book "Remembering Josephine," the musical revolves around Baker's stint as the star of the Folies Bergere in Paris between 1939-45, her scandalous affair with Swedish Crown Prince Gustav VI, and her heroic service in the French Resistance during World War II. She was hailed as the "Black Pearl." Picasso dubbed her the "Nefertiti of Now." Ernest Hemingway called her "the most sensational woman anyone ever saw." 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.

"We are excited to present the world premiere of this extraordinary original musical, brimming with unparalleled Broadway talent," said Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards. "**JOSEPHINE** vividly brings to life the story of a beloved American icon — one of the most magnetic and fascinating women in history. This celebration of Josephine Baker is a remarkably evocative work of art and a brilliant addition to our five-year American Character Project."

"For a number of years, I had been intrigued with the idea of recreating the glamorous and exotic world of Josephine Baker in a stage musical," said Kenneth Waissman. "She was a larger than life African-American expatriate who transcended her color, her gender and her times. Her exotic looks, fabulous gowns and feathered headdresses, her obsession with her royal lover and her life-risking exploits in the French underground during WWII provide the sex, romance and intrigue of this original new musical. I'm thrilled to be working with Asolo Repertory Theatre on the world premiere of this Broadway-bound dream."

Asolo Rep's complete 2015-16 Season will be announced on Monday, March 16 at 3pm in the Mertz Theatre. **Tickets for the season announcement are free but required.** Renewal subscriptions for the 2015-16 season are on sale now and new subscriptions go on sale immediately following the 2015-16 season announcement. Subscriptions are available by visiting the Asolo Rep Box Office, located in the

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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. Single tickets will go on sale in September 2015.

SELECT CREATIVE TEAM MEMBER BIOS

(In Alphabetical Order)

DEBORAH COX (Josephine Baker) is a GRAMMY®-nominated, multi-platinum selling and multi-talented entertainer. Ms. Cox has conquered the R&B and pop charts, with six top 20 *Billboard* magazine R&B singles, and an impressive twelve #1 hits on *Billboard's* Hot Dance Club Play chart. Cox new single, "Kinda Miss You" is produced by the award-winning team, The Rascals. While singing with Celine Dion, Cox was discovered by the renowned music industry executive Clive Davis and instantly signed to Arista Records. Her gold-selling debut album, *Deborah Cox*, was released in 1995. In 1998, she followed up with the release of her second project, *One Wish*. From this album came the double platinum "Nobody's Supposed To Be Here," which held the record for being the longest running #1 R&B single for 14 consecutive weeks and earned her a Soul Train Lady of Soul Award. Her second single, "*We Can't Be Friends*," also went to #1 on *Billboard's* singles chart and sold over 500,000 copies. "*Things Just Ain't The Same*" and "*It's Over Now*" followed. Deborah has sung with Andrea Bocelli and toured with David Foster, Cyndi Lauper and Sarah McLachlan with Lilith Fair. She was also invited to perform for First Lady Michelle Obama and President Obama. In 2000, Deborah collaborated with her friend Whitney Houston to record the duet "Same Script Different Cast" for her *Greatest Hits* CD. Her third album, *The Morning After*, was released in 2002 with "Up & Down (In & Out)" co-written with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. In 2003, her fourth album, *Remixed*, was released, featuring her *Billboard* magazine chart-topping dance remixes. In 2008, she formed Deco Recording Group and released her sixth studio album, *The Promise*, which earned her a tenth #1 spot on the *Billboard* Dance chart with the international hit single, "Beautiful U R." In 2012, Deborah garnered her eleventh #1 *Billboard* Dance single with "If It Wasn't For Love." In addition to roles in both film and television, Cox also released her fifth album, *Destination Moon*, a GRAMMY®-nominated tribute album to the legendary Dinah Washington. In between recordings and tours, she has performed in Tony Award-winning Broadway productions. In 2013, she co-starred as Lucy in Frank Wildhorn's and Steve Cuden's Broadway musical *Jekyll &*

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JOSEPHINE

Page 4 of 6

Hyde. In 2004, Cox made her Broadway debut in the lead role of Elton John's and Tim Rice's Broadway musical, *Aida*. Her recent critically-acclaimed and stellar vocal performance in Lifetime's Biopic, *Whitney* has received rave reviews from media outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*, *Newsday*, *The Boston Globe*, *ESSENCE* and numerous others. Over the years, Cox has worked behind the scenes recording music for several film soundtracks, including *Akeelah and the Bee*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Kingdom Come*, *Money Talks*, *A Good Man is Hard To Find* and Tyler Perry's *Meet the Browns*. Cox has been recognized for her longstanding commitment to various social issues in the LGBTQ community. In January 2015, she received the Out Music Pillar Award. In 2014, she also received the California State Senate Award and in 2007, she received The Civil Rights Award from the New York Senate for her efforts in the fight for Human Rights and Equality.

JOEY McKNEELY (Director/Choreographer) is a two-time Tony Award® nominee. He did the musical staging, recreating the Jerome Robbins choreography, for the recent hit Broadway revival of *West Side Story*, currently on National Tour. At the request of Andrew Lloyd Weber, McKneely directed and choreographed *Evita* for the 'opening of The Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation Theatre in Chiswick, outside of London. The London Times, in reviewing the production, stated, "Director Joey McKneely gets every decision right!" He choreographed the Broadway hits *Smokey Joe's Café* and *The Boy From Oz* (in which Hugh Jackman starred as the famous Australian singer, Peter Allen.) He also choreographed the Cy Coleman musical, *The Life*, receiving a Tony Award nomination and an Outer Critics Award nomination. McKneely made his directorial debut with *West Side Story* at La Scala Opera House in Milan. The production played in more than 15 countries around the world, including an engagement in London at the Sadler-Wells Theatre. In Tokyo, he directed and choreographed the musical, *The Beautiful Game*. In addition, McKneely directed and choreographed national tours of *Annie Get Your Gun*; *Crazy For You*; *Pippin*; *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and *Smokey Joe's Café*. Other musical staging credits include: the Broadway production of *The Wild Party*; *Whistle Down the Wind*; *A Wonderful Life*; *The Time of Your Life*; *Jolson, the Musical* and *Making Tracks*. Beginning as a performer, he appeared in the original Broadway casts of *Starlight Express*; *Roza*; *Carrie*; the revival of *She Loves Me* and *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*.

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JOSEPHINE

Page 5 of 6

STEVE DORFF (Composer) is a five-time Emmy Award nominee and a three-time Grammy Award nominee. Barbra Streisand sings his latest song "I'd Want It to Be You" on her just released new album, *Partners*. He has written over twenty 'Top 10' pop hits, nine number one film songs, and with lyricist John Bettis, wrote such hits as Whitney Houston's "One Moment in Time," Madonna's "Crazy For You," Barbra Streisand's "Higher Ground" and Michael Jackson's "Human Nature." In addition to **JOSEPHINE**, he composed, in collaboration with lyricist John Bettis, the stage musicals, *Lunch, Say Goodnight* and *Pure Country*. He created the themes for several television series including: *Murphy Brown*; *Murder She Wrote* and *Growing Pains*. He wrote the two number one hits from the film *Heartland*. He also wrote the music for the films *Dancer, Texas Pop 81, Blast From the Past* and *Dudley Do-Right* with Brendan Fraser.

JOHN BETTIS (Lyrics) is a member of the Songwriter's Hall of Fame, an Emmy Award winner and an Academy Award and Grammy Award nominee. Mr. Bettis is co-founder of The Carpenters. With composer Frank Wildhorn, he did the lyrics for the musical *Svengali*. Randy Travis, Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Madonna, Barry Manilow, Dionne Warwick, Julio Iglesias, Harry Connick, Jr., Carole Burnett and Diana Ross have all recorded his songs.

ELLEN WESTON (Co-Bookwriter) wrote the book & lyrics for *A House in the Woods* at the Goodspeed Opera House and the stage musical *A Matter of Wife and Death*. Screenplay and producing credits include: *And the Beat Goes On: The Sonny and Cher Story*; *Holiday in Your Heart* (starred Leann Rimes and Bernadette Peters); *Outrage* (starred Rob Lowe); *Sleeping With the Devil* (starred Shannen Doherty and Tim Matheson); *Lies Before Kisses* (starred Ben Gazzara and Jaclyn Smith); *Fear Stalk* (starred Jill Clayburgh); and the miniseries *Medusa's Child*.

MARK HAMPTON (Co-Bookwriter) wrote the Off Broadway hit *Full Gallop* with Mary Louise Wilson (who also starred as the infamous Vogue Magazine editor Diana Vreeland.) His latest play, *The Secret Letters of Jackie & Marilyn*, debuted at the Pittsburgh Public Theater. *The Boswell Sisters*, a musical he co-authored on the life of the 1930's singing trio, premiered at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre. With Judy Collins, Mr. Hampton co-wrote a one-woman show entitled *Both Sides Now*.

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JOSEPHINE

Page 6 of 6

KEN WAISSMAN (Producer) is one of only two producers in the history of Broadway to have a musical run over 3000 performances and a play run over 1000. (The other producer who shares this distinction is the legendary David Merrick.) Waissman developed and produced the original Broadway production of Grease as well as two of Broadway's longest running plays, Agnes of God by John Pielmeier and Torch Song Trilogy by Harvey Fierstein. Waissman's prolific Broadway efforts have resulted in four motion picture features, a PBS TV special, 25 Tony Award® nominations, 5 Tony Awards® including a Tony Award® as 'Best Play Producer.' He is currently developing Josephine, an original musical inspired by Josephine Baker, the exotic star of the Folies Bergère in Paris. Deborah Cox will play the title role and Joey McKneely will direct and choreograph. Prior to Broadway, 'Josephine' will premiere at the Asolo Theater in Sarasota, Florida. Other Broadway credits include: Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Zindel's play, And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little with Julie Harris and Estelle Parsons and the Sherman brothers musical, Over Here!, which starred the Andrew Sisters and featured Ann Reinking, John Travolta, Marilu Henner and Treat Williams. Waissman made his producing debut with the John Herbert play Fortune and Men's Eyes, which was directed by Sal Mineo and featured Tommy Lee Jones.

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