



PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL DONALD EDWARDS  
MANAGING DIRECTOR LINDA DIGABRIELE

**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

**February 6, 2019**

**Asolo Repertory Theatre to Present the World Premiere  
of *KNOXVILLE* in Spring 2020;**

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

**Tony Award®-winning *Ragtime* Creative Team  
to Reunite at Asolo Rep for *KNOXVILLE***

(**SARASOTA, February 6, 2019**) — Asolo Repertory Theatre will proudly present the world premiere of ***KNOXVILLE*** in spring 2020. This moving and innovative musical will feature lyrics by **Lynn Ahrens**, music by **Stephen Flaherty** and will be adapted and directed by **Frank Galati**, reuniting the dynamic Tony Award-winning creative team behind *Ragtime*, one of the most beloved musicals of all time. ***KNOXVILLE*** is based on James Agee's Pulitzer Prize-winning autobiographical novel *A Death in the Family* and based, in part, on the play *All The Way Home* by Tad Mosel

Asolo Rep will host a workshop in June 2019 prior to ***KNOXVILLE***'s world premiere in the spring of 2020. Casting and production dates will be announced at a later date. The musical was announced on February 6 at a media and donor event featuring behind-the-scenes insight from the creative team and a sneak peek performance featuring **Claybourne Elder** (Broadway: *Torch Song*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, and *Bonnie and Clyde*), who is set to perform in the workshop.

Knoxville, Tennessee. 1915. Jay Follett stands with his son Rufus on a hill, watching the trains travel through the quiet night below and teaching him about life. So begins ***KNOXVILLE***, a world premiere musical adaptation of James Agee's Pulitzer Prize-winning autobiographical masterpiece, *A Death in the Family*. When an unexpected turn of events leaves Rufus' family spinning, he and his mother Mary embark on a journey through the mysteries of life and death, faith and doubt, in order to come to terms with what they have lost and what they have found. An enduring illumination of the forces that shape us into who we are, ***KNOXVILLE*** is a quintessentially American coming-of-age story about family, faith and love, and the boy who will grow up to write it.

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. Their musical, *Marie*, will have its west coast premiere at Seattle's 5th Avenue Theatre this April.

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.

“**KNOXVILLE** is a love story, inspired by James Agee’s perfectly crafted prose, animated by Lynn Ahren’s vivid poetry and borne aloft by Stephen Flaherty’s gorgeous new music,” said Adapter/Director Frank Galati. “Like James Joyce, James Agee created ‘a portrait of the artist as a young man’ in his novel. But in this story the artist is an American and his story goes to the core of the American soul, that’s where faith abides as well as doubt.”

“It is an honor to be a part of the creation of this tremendous new musical with this extraordinary, award-winning team, who are some of the brightest stars of the American theatre,” said Asolo Rep Producing Artistic Director **Michael Donald Edwards**. “The brilliant Lynn Ahrens, Stephen Flaherty and Frank Galati have an inspiring, poignant vision for this iconic American story, and we are thrilled to have their masterpiece brought to life on stage at Asolo Rep.”

In addition to being a novelist, James Agee was a poet, screenwriter and film critic. At the age of 28, he penned the sweeping prose-poem *Knoxville: The Summer of 1915*, in just 90 minutes. The poem would become the prologue for *A Death in the Family*. His screenplays include *The Night of the Hunter* and *The African Queen*, for which he was nominated for an Academy Award. He also collaborated with photographer Walker Evans on the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. He wrote the screenplay for the 1963 film adaptation of his novel *A Death in the Family*, entitled *All the Way Home*, starring Jean Simmons and Robert Preston.

The world premiere of **KNOXVILLE** is made possible by a generous grant from The Roy Cockrum Foundation. The mission of The Roy Cockrum Foundation is to award grants to support world-class performing arts projects in not-for-profit professional theaters

throughout the United States of America. The Roy Cockrum Foundation enables theaters to reach beyond their normal scope of activities and undertake ambitious productions.

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## **SELECTED ARTISTIC BIOS**

**Lynn Ahrens** (Lyrics, **KNOXVILLE**) and **Stephen Flaherty** (Music, **KNOXVILLE**) are considered the foremost theatrical writing team of their generation and are members of the Theater Hall of Fame. They won Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards for *Ragtime*, and were nominated for two Academy Awards and two Golden Globes for *Anastasia*, Twentieth Century Fox's animated feature film. *Anastasia* is also now a long-running hit on Broadway. Last season, *Once On This Island* won Broadway's 2018 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. In 2019, Ahrens and Flaherty are currently nominated for their fourth Grammy Award, as well as for the Songwriters' Hall of Fame. Other theatre credits include *Seussical* (one of the most produced shows in America); *Rocky*; *My Favorite Year*; *Chita Rivera-The Dancer's Life*; *Dessa Rose*; *A Man of No Importance*; *The Glorious Ones*; *Lucky Stiff* and two upcoming shows, *Knoxville* and *Marie*, which will premiere at Seattle's 5th Avenue Theatre this April. Council, Dramatists Guild of America; co-founders, Dramatists Guild Fellows Program. [AhrensandFlaherty.com](http://AhrensandFlaherty.com)

**Frank Galati** (Adapter/Director, **KNOXVILLE**) is a member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago. His adaptation of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* opened the theatre's 40th anniversary season. Over the years, he has received nine Joseph Jefferson Awards for his work in Chicago theatre. Here at Asolo Rep he has directed *Rhinoceros*, *The Little Foxes*; *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*; *Both Your Houses*; *Philadelphia, Here I Come*; *1776*; *My Fair Lady*; *Twelve Angry Men*. He has directed at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Berkeley Rep, Mark Taper Forum, Long Wharf Theatre, Chicago Opera Theatre, San Francisco Opera, Dallas Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, The Stratford Festival in Canada, and the Roundabout Theatre in New York. For 20 years he was an Associate Director at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. He won two Tony Awards in 1990 for his adaptation and direction of the Steppenwolf production of *The Grapes of Wrath* on Broadway and was nominated again in 1998 for directing *Ragtime* on Broadway. In 1989, Mr. Galati was nominated for an Academy Award for his screenplay (with Lawrence Kasdan) of *The Accidental Tourist*. In 2000 he was inducted into The American Academy of Arts & Sciences. Mr. Galati is a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. He lives in Sarasota.

## **ABOUT ASOLO REP**

Now in its 60th 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](http://www.asolorep.org)

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