

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

December 10, 2019

**Asolo Rep Proudly Presents Agatha Christie's
MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS
January 8 - March 8**

(**SARASOTA, December 10, 2019**) — Asolo Rep proudly kicks off its winter repertory season with Agatha Christie's ***MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS***. The classic edge-of-your-seat murder mystery will be brought to the stage with a new adaptation by two-time Tony Award®-winning master of farce **Ken Ludwig** and directed by Asolo Rep Associate Artist **Peter Amster**. ***MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*** previews January 8 and 9, opens January 10 and runs in rotating repertory through March 8 in the Mertz Theatre, located in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts.

All aboard the Orient Express for an unforgettable adventure teeming with glamour, humor and intrigue! In the middle of a snow-filled night, as the infamous train hurtles from Istanbul to Paris, all is status quo until an American tycoon is found dead in his compartment. Everyone on board is a suspect, each with a seemingly ironclad alibi, and the dapper detective Hercule Poirot must solve the case before another passenger meets the same fate.

"***MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*** is a quintessential thrill ride," said Producing Artistic Director **Michael Donald Edwards**. "But what may surprise audiences is how Ken Ludwig brilliantly took Agatha Christie's original masterpiece and infused it with even more wit, charm and humor. To have Ken Ludwig's brilliant adaptation brought to life by our own resident master of comedy, Peter Amster, makes this production a must-see theatrical treat!"

James DeVita (Hercule Poirot) makes his Asolo Rep debut this season. He is a veteran member of the American Players Theater acting company, where he has appeared in *Blood Knot*, *A View From the Bridge*, *The Seagull*, *Of Mice and Men*, and more.

Returning Asolo Rep favorites include **David Breitbarth** (Monsieur Bouc), who has appeared in more than 80 productions at the theatre and is embarking on his 24th season, **Matt DeCaro** (Samuel Ratchett), returning for his fourth season, and **Peggy Roeder** (Princess Dragomiroff), returning for her ninth.

The cast also features **Grant Chapman** (Hector MacQueen), **Diana Coates** (Countess Andrenyi), **Helen Joo Lee** (Mary Debenham), **Cora Messer** (Little Girl), **Tina Stafford** (Helen Hubbard) and **Gregg Weiner** (Michel the Conductor).

Also featured are third year FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training students

Jonathan Grunert (Colonel Arbuthnot) and **Alex Pelletier** (Greta Ohlsson). Students **Carla Corvo** (Miss Westmacott), **Joe Ferrarelli** (Marcel, Head Waiter), **Michael Judah** (Jacques) and **Brian Ritchie** (Mr. Mallowan) round out the cast.

Director Peter Amster's previously helmed Asolo Rep's productions of *A Doll's House, Part 2* (2019); *Morning After Grace* (2018); *Born Yesterday* (2017); *Living on Love* (2016) and *The Matchmaker* (2015). His work has been seen at Steppenwolf, the Goodman, the Court, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Utah Shakespeare Festival, ACT, and more.

"There's something about a well-crafted murder mystery that is always thrilling, entertaining, and surprisingly soothing," said Peter Amster. "The stage becomes a world where a mystery is actually solved, where bad people are brought to justice, where order is restored. It doesn't happen often enough in the real world —especially now — but at least in the theatre, we can come together and, in a way, see what it's like when some form of justice prevails."

The set is designed by Paul Tate dePoo III, who created the set for Asolo Rep's critically acclaimed production of *The Sound of Music*, running through December 28. He also previously designed *Evita* (2017) and *Josephine* (2016) at the theatre. His work has been seen Off-Broadway, at the Muny, Signature Theatre, ODKorea and more.

"In terms of motion, the scenic, lighting and projection departments are really working together to create that sensation on stage," said Paul Tate dePoo III. "In addition to the turns the set makes, there are special treatments in the windows that synchronize with lighting and video so that you really can't tell where one stops and the other starts. The design of the train is a hybrid of Art Nouveau and 'turn-of-the-century' elements, with a real sense of craftsmanship as well. It almost has a nautical feeling to it, like a yacht on train tracks, and that certainly speaks to the grandeur that we are trying to capture."

Asolo Rep's production of **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** will also feature original music by Gregg Coffin, who previously served as music director for Asolo Rep's *Sweeney Todd* (2019). He also composed the original music for Asolo Rep's production of *The Matchmaker* (2015). He was the composer/lyricist for the Off-Broadway production of *Five Course Love*. Regionally, he has worked at Arena Stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Guthrie Theatre Center, and more.

CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

CORA MESSERLittle Girl
JAMES DEVITA* Hercule Poirot
JOE FERRARELLI Marcel, Head Waiter
JONATHAN GRUNERT Colonel Arbuthnot
HELEN JOO LEE* Mary Debenham
TINA STAFFORD* Helen Hubbard
GRANT CHAPMAN* Hector MacQueen
DAVID BREITBARTH* Monsieur Bouc
PEGGY ROEDER* Princess Dragomiroff
ALEX PELLETIER Greta Ohlsson
GREGG WEINER* Michel the Conductor
MATT DECARO* Samuel Ratchett
DIANA COATES* Countess Andrenyi
MICHAEL JUDAHJacques
BRIAN RITCHIEMr. Mallowan
CARLA CORVO≠Miss Westmacott

*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.
≠ Appears courtesy of Actors' Equity Association

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

Director.....	Peter Amster
Scenic Designer.....	Paul Tate dePoo III
Costume Designer.....	Tracy Dorman
Lighting Designer.....	Jax Messenger
Sound Designer.....	Matt Parker
Projection Designer.....	Greg Emetaz
Hair/Wig & Make-up Designer.....	Michelle Hart
Composer.....	Gregg Coffin

SELECTED ARTISTIC BIOS

PETER AMSTER (Director) returns to Asolo Rep where he directed *Morning After Grace*, *Born Yesterday*, *Living on Love*, *The Matchmaker*, *Vanya and Sonya and Masha and Spike*, *You Can't Take it With You*, *Fallen Angels*, *Deathtrap*, *The Perfume Shop*, *This Wonderful Life* and choreographed *1776*. In Chicago, he was nominated for Joseph Jefferson Awards for directing *Once on this Island*, *The World Goes Round*, *The Rothschilds* (Apple Tree Theatre); *Pride and Prejudice* (Northlight Theatre). Other Chicago theatres include Steppenwolf, Goodman, Court Theatre, Live Bait, Pegasus, and Route 66. Regional theatres include Gulfshore Playhouse, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Utah Shakespeare Festival, ACT, Syracuse Stage, Geva Theatre, Indiana Rep, American Repertory Theater, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Peninsula Players, Weston Playhouse, Maltz Jupiter Theatre, and Laguna Playhouse. Peter has directed and choreographed operas for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theater, Skylight Opera in Milwaukee, and Light Opera Works.

DAVID BREITBARTH* (Monsieur Bouc) 80+ productions at Asolo Rep include: *Rhinoceros* (also at American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco), *The Little Foxes*, *Both Your Houses*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Clybourne Park*, *God of Carnage*, *Once in a Lifetime*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *The Immigrant*, *A Few Good Men*, *Laughing Stock*, *A Flea in Her Ear*, *Rounding Third*, *Art*, *Hobson's Choice*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and world premieres of *Men of Tortuga* and *Perfect Mendacity*. Broadway First National Tour: *Spring Awakening*. Off-Broadway: *Short Change*, *Perfect Crime*, *Fluorescent Hunger*, and *This Hard Life*. Los Angeles: *Life in the Trees* (West Coast premiere) and *David's Mother*. Film/television: *Frasier*, *Taken!*,

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Law & Order, and *Fame*. He has appeared regionally around the country and is a member of Florida Repertory Theatre's Ensemble of Theatre Artists. David is a 2013 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow selected by the prestigious Ten Chimneys Foundation.

GRANT CHAPMAN* (Hector MacQueen) is thrilled to join the company at Asolo Rep. Other recent credits include *Our Town* and *Into the Breeches!* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival); *Angels in America* (Actor's Express); *Winnie the Pooh* (Alliance Theatre); and six seasons with The Williams Project including *The Time of Your Life*, *Small Craft Warnings*, *A Bright Room Called Day*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *Orpheus Descending*. Grant trained at the Brown University/Trinity Rep MFA program, and the University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater BFA program. www.grantchapman.net

DIANA COATES* (Countess Andrenyi) is ecstatic to be making her Asolo Rep debut. She was most recently seen in the Midwest premiere of Rachel Bond's *Sundown*, *Yellow Moon* and as the title character in First Folio of Chicago's *Henry V*. Her favorite credits include *The House That Will Not Stand* at the acclaimed Victory Gardens, *Blues for an Alabama Sky* with the African Continuum Theatre Company of DC, and *Isabella* in Michigan Shakespeare Festival's *Measure for Measure*. Television Credits include *Chicago Fire* starring opposite David Eigenberg and *Chicago Med* starring opposite S. Epatha Merkerson.

MATT DECARO* (Samuel Ratchett) was seen last as Judge Danforth in *The Crucible* and Stan in *Sweat* at Asolo Rep. Previously, he played LBJ in *The Great Society*, Oscar Hubbard in *The Little Foxes*, and Gene in Frank Galati's *Rhinoceros*. He reprised his role in *Rhinoceros* with David Breitbarth under Mr. Galati's triumphant direction earlier this year at ACT in San Francisco. Matt has appeared recently as Judge Wargrave in *And Then There Were None*, as Winston Churchill and Harold Wilson in *The Audience* (Jeff Nomination), and as Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Jeff Award). Matt has played at theatres across the country including Lincoln Center, MTC, Goodman, Guthrie, McCarter, Old Globe and internationally in Dublin, Toronto, and China. Select TV & film credits include *The Wise Kids*, *Eagle Eye*, *House*, *The Office*, and *Prison Break* among many others.

JAMES DEVITA* (Hercule Poirot) is very happy to be making his debut at Asolo Rep. He is an author, actor, and a theater director. He has been a core member of the acting company at American Players Theater, a classical repertory company in Wisconsin, for 25 years. His novels include: *A Winsome Murder*, *The Silenced*, and *Blue*. He has also worked extensively as a playwright for young audiences; the American Alliance for Theatre and Education honored his body of work with the Charlotte B. Chorpensing Award. James is also a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship for Fiction. www.jamesdevita.com

HELEN JOO LEE* (Mary Debenham) is delighted to make her Asolo Rep debut. She got her start acting and improvising in the expat theatre community in Seoul, South Korea. Since then, she's been in Chicago playing roles in *Kentucky*, *In the Canyon*, *You for Me for You*, and *American Hwangap*. She was the permanent replacement in Second City's 41st revue *Fantastic Super Great Nation Numero Uno*. Her television and

film credits include *Chicago Med*, *Empire*, *The Chi*, *Later Days*, *Teacher*, and *Canal Street*.

PEGGY ROEDER* (Princess Dragomiroff) has appeared at Asolo Rep in *A Doll's House, Part 2*; *The Crucible*; *The Grapes of Wrath*; *The Matchmaker*; *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*; *Good People*; *Ah, Wilderness!* and others. She has performed nationally at Steppenwolf, Atlantic Theater Company, Mark Taper Forum, Cleveland Play House, Chautauqua Theater Company, Goodman, Milwaukee Rep, Chicago Shakespeare, Muny, and Peninsula Players. Her work has garnered four Jeff Awards, three Artisan Awards, and two After Dark Awards. Film and TV credits include *Groundhog Day*, *Road to Perdition*, *An Acceptable Loss*, *Stranger than Fiction*, *Star Trek: DS9*, *Law & Order*, and *In Memoriam*.

TINA STAFFORD* (Helen Hubbard) is in her first season at Asolo Rep and is excited to collaborate with this wonderful company. She spent two years on the road with the first national tour of the Broadway musical *Once*. Leading roles around the country at Florida Studio Theatre, Cape Playhouse, Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, Bucks County Playhouse, Paper Mill Playhouse, Goodspeed, Cleveland Play House, Cincinnati Playhouse, Westport Country Playhouse, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Arena Stage, Geva Theatre Center, KC Rep, and the Utah, Texas, and Maine Shakespeare Festivals, among many others. Proud AEA member.

GREGG WEINER* (Michel the Conductor) is thrilled to make his Asolo Rep debut. Some favorite roles include Charlie in *Speed-the-Plow* (GableStage) and the one-man show *Every Brilliant Thing* (Zoetic Stage) in Miami. Locally, he's appeared at Florida Repertory, most recently in *Disgraced* and at American Stage in *The Pitmen Painters* and *Red*. Gregg is a multiple Carbonell, Silver Palm, Best of New Times, and Theatre Tampa Bay acting honors recipient. TV and Film credits include *War Dogs*, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, and *Transporter 2*. Gregg's a member of Actor's Equity Association and a New World School of the Arts alumnus. www.greggweiner.net

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

The Scoop (FREE)

Arrive one hour before curtain to hear the ideas and inspirations that contributed to the making of **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** (Opening Night, January 10, is excluded.)

Sunday Salon (FREE)

Sunday, January 12
Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Reflect on your experience through a lively and informative post-show discussion following select Sunday matinees in the Mertz and Cook Theatres. Featuring members of Asolo Rep's Artistic Department and special guests.

Tuesday Talkbacks (FREE)

January 14, February 4, March 3
Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Join us for an intimate post-show discussion with featured actors following every Tuesday performance of **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS**.

OUT@AsoloRep: MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS [Sold Out]

Thursday, January 16 at 6:30pm; show starts at 7:30pm
Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Contact Asolo Rep's Box Office for subscription and ticket information.

Now in its 10th season, OUT@AsoloRep is Sarasota's premier cultural event connecting local Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities with fantastic theatre. Enjoy a pre-show reception and learn about participating LGBT organizations, and gain personal insight into *THE SOUND OF MUSIC* from the creative team and cast members.

OUT@AsoloRep is sponsored by Morton's Gourmet Market & Catering, CAN Community Health and Sabal Palm Bank.

Inside Asolo Rep: MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS and THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT

Tuesday, February 4 at 11am
Cook Theatre

10:30am: Enjoy coffee and light bites by Muse at the Ringling, and visit the Designing Women Boutique Pop-Up Shop

Panel discussions are \$5; and free for all donors at the Cherubim Angels level and higher and Asolo Rep Guild Members.

Get rare insights into the artistic process, hear directly from the people responsible for producing **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** and **THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT** and engage in stimulating discussion inspired by the plays' themes and issues. **Inside Asolo Rep is sponsored by Muse at the Ringling, Designing Women Boutique and The Observer.**

TICKETS

Tickets for **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** and the entire 2019-20 Asolo Repertory Theatre season are on sale now. Tickets for **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** start at \$33.

Subscriptions for the season are also on sale.

To purchase tickets, call 941.351.8000 or 800.361.8388, visit www.asolarep.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 – Friday 10am – 5pm through October. Beginning November 1, 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 subscription packages are also available online and by visiting or calling the box office.

SPONSORS

Asolo Rep is able to present **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** because of the generosity of its sponsors. The corporate sponsors for **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS** are Energy Today, Sarasota Scene Magazine, 107.9 WSRZ, SNN and Morton's Gourmet Market & Catering, with additional support from the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

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 Huisking Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, Designing Women Boutique, The Exchange, 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

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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

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