

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL DONALD EDWARDS • MANAGING DIRECTOR LINDA DIGABRIELE



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

UPDATED APRIL 11, 2016

**ASOLO REP PRESENTS THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED
WORLD PREMIERE OF JOSEPHINE;
PREVIEWS FOR THE BROADWAY-BOUND ORIGINAL MUSICAL
STARRING GRAMMY NOMINEE AND MULTI-PLATINUM
RECORDING ARTIST DEBORAH COX START APRIL 27**

(SARASOTA, March 30, 2016) — Asolo Rep is thrilled to present the world premiere of the Broadway-bound new musical: **JOSEPHINE**. Previews for **JOSEPHINE** begin April 27, press opening night is Friday, May 6 at 8pm, and the musical runs through Sunday, May 29 in the Mertz Theatre, located in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts. 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 Weissman, who developed and 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. **JOSEPHINE** will be directed and choreographed by two-time Tony Award-nominee Joey McKneely, who directed and choreographed Asolo Rep's record-breaking, critically acclaimed 2015 production 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

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Award-nominee Stephen Dorff with lyrics by Academy Award®, Grammy, and Golden Globe®-nominee and two-time Emmy Award-winner John Bettis.

Based on Stephen Papich's book "Remembering Josephine," the musical revolves around Baker's stint as the star of the Folies Bergère 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.

Broadway, television and film actor Kevin Earley stars alongside Ms. Cox as Jo Bouillon, Josephine Baker's band conductor and love interest. Mr. Earley's Broadway and National Tour credits include *Les Misérables*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Mr. Earley received a Drama Desk nomination for the title role in *Death Takes a Holiday*, an L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award for *1776*, and a Joseph Jefferson Award for *Assassins*. Mark Campbell will portray Josephine Baker's forbidden lover, Prince Gustav VI of Sweden. Mr. Campbell created the role of the Phantom for the 25th Anniversary Tour of *The Phantom of the Opera*. He can also be seen on the Fox show *Sleepy Hollow* as George Washington.

"We are excited to present the world premiere of this extraordinary original musical, brimming with unparalleled Broadway talent," said Asolo Rep 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."

"I am so excited about this production of **JOSEPHINE** where I play Josephine Baker," said Deborah Cox. "I've been working on this incredible project for several years and now it's time to present it. I can't wait for everyone to experience what is only the tip of the iceberg of a true icon. There is so much about Josephine Baker that I'm still discovering and yet the little that I do know is more than most of us would be able to achieve in a couple of lifetimes."

"**JOSEPHINE** the musical will be every bit as sensational as Josephine Baker the woman was — glamorous, provocative, sexy and heartwarming," said Director/Choreographer Joey McKneely. "It's a spectacular singing and dancing show to raise the roof and have people talking for decades, just as Josephine Baker would have done herself. It brings me so much joy to finally bring her amazing story to the stage for all to enjoy!"

JOSEPHINE contains adult language and brief nudity. It may not be appropriate for younger audiences.

CAST

(In order of appearance)

Deborah Cox*	Josephine Baker
Matthew McGee*	Joujou
Kevin Earley*	Jo Bouillon
Lynette DuPree*	Bricktop
Mark Campbell*	Prince Gustav VI of Sweden/Herr Goering
Michael Keyloun*	Sven
Tori Bates	Young Josephine
Naomi C. Walley*	Mama/Female Ensemble
Alison Mixon*	Female Ensemble
Elyse Collier*	Female Ensemble
Laura Keller*	Female Ensemble
Jelani Alladin*	Male Ensemble
Zach Williams*	Male Ensemble
Julian Ramos*	Male Ensemble
Dillon Cassidy	Male Ensemble
Asia Dekle	Female Ensemble
Timothy J. Fitzgerald	Male Ensemble

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

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

Director/Choreographer	Joey McKneely
Librettists	Ellen Weston & Mark Hampton
Composer	Stephen Dorff
Lyricist	John Bettis

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Musical Supervisor, Arranger, Orchestrator.....Steve Orich
Music Director/Additional Arrangements.....Sinai Tabak
Scenic Designer.....Paul Tate dePoo III
Costume Designer.....Eduardo Sicangco
Lighting Designer.....Brian Nason
Sound Designer.....Justin Stasiw
Projection Designer..... Alex Basco Koch
Hair/Wig & Make-Up Designer.....Michelle Hart
Voice & Dialect Coach.....Patricia Delorey

SELECTED CAST BIOS

(In Alphabetical Order)

MARK CAMPBELL* FIRST SEASON (Prince Gustav VI of Sweden/Herr Goering) grew up in the Midwest and at any given time was often the tallest object in any direction. He fell in love with theatre at 7, but hated singing until he saw *Les Misérables* at 14 and realized how exciting two men singing loudly at each other about a loaf of bread could be. Specializing in tortured baritones, Mark created the role of the Phantom for the 25th Anniversary tour. He has toured the country in *Mamma Mia* and *Guys and Dolls*. Mark can be seen from time to time in the Fox show *Sleepy Hollow* as George Washington.

DEBORAH COX* FIRST SEASON (Josephine) GRAMMY Award-nominated and multi-platinum R&B/pop recording artist Deborah Cox made her Broadway debut in the lead role in Elton John and Tim Rice's musical, *Aida*. She returned to Broadway in *Jekyll & Hyde* (Lucy) and will star in *The Bodyguard* musical (Rachel Marron). Cox began her recording career as a background singer with Celine Dion, before securing her first recording contract with Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Clive Davis. She has recorded six award-winning and critically-acclaimed albums, and has written and recorded on numerous celebrated soundtracks. Known around the world for her diverse music style, which includes R&B, pop, jazz and gospel, Cox has collaborated with such artists as Whitney Houston, Andrea Bocelli, David Foster, Josh Groban, The Isley Brothers, Cyndi Lauper, Sarah McLachlan, and numerous others. The Canadian-born star has an impressive list of #1 *Billboard* hit records, including twelve #1 songs on *Billboard's* Hot Dance Club Play chart. <http://www.deborahcox.com/>

KEVIN EARLEY* FIRST SEASON (Jo Bouillon) arriving from La Mirada Theater in *Empire, The Musical* and thrilled to be making his Asolo Rep debut. Kevin's Broadway/National Tour credits include *Les Misérables*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. In addition to receiving a NY Drama Desk Nomination for the title role in *Death Takes a Holiday* for the Roundabout, Kevin also received the L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award for *1776*, a Joseph Jefferson Award for *Assassins* and four Ovation Nominations for leading roles in *Can-Can*, *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*, *It Came From Beyond*, and *Side Show*. Original cast recordings include *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Ten Commandments*, and *Death Takes a Holiday*. More at <http://www.kevinearley.com/>

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM BIOS

(In Alphabetical Order)

JOHN BETTIS (Lyrics) has written songs that have been sung by Michael Jackson, Madonna, Diana Ross, Whitney Houston, and The Carpenters, among others. His songs include "Human Nature," "Top of the World," "Yesterday Once More," "Good-Bye to Love," "One Moment in Time," "Crazy for You," and "Slow Hand." John received a Los Angeles Drama Critics' Award for Best Musical Score for *The Last Session. Svengali*, with Frank Wildhorn, opened at the Houston Alley Theater. The musicals *Pure Country* and *Lunch* were also written with Steve Dorff. John has served as Chairman of the Board of the National Academy of Songwriters, Member of The Board of Directors of ASCAP, and the Nashville Ballet, and on the Film, Entertainment and Music Commission of the State of Tennessee.

STEVE DORFF (Music) Three-time Grammy, six-time Emmy nominated award-winning composer Steve Dorff has enjoyed success in every musical field. His diversity includes scoring major motion pictures, television, and an array of #1 hit songs. Dorff has also been honored with more than 40 BMI, and 12 *Billboard* #1 Chart Songs. Some of his classics include the Kenny Rogers' hit "Through the Years," as well as "I Just Fall in Love Again," Anne Murray's #1 Song Of The Year. His many songs have been sung by some of the greatest artists of our time — Barbra Streisand, Celine Dion, Whitney Houston, George Strait, Vanessa Williams, and countless others.

MARK HAMPTON (Book) wrote *Full Gallop* with Mary Louise Wilson who also starred as fashion icon, Diana Vreeland, playing New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Rome, Brussels, South Africa, Sweden, and Spain. Subsequent plays include: *Paper Doll*, starring Marlo Thomas and F. Murray Abraham at Pittsburgh Public Theater, and Dixie Carter at Long Wharf Theater. With Michael Sharp he wrote *The Secret Letters of Jackie and Marilyn*, directed by Leonard Foglia, Pittsburgh Public Theater. With Jeannie Berlin he has recently completed the screenplay for a romantic comedy, *Crackpot. Kiki/Suzanne*, starring Barbara Schulz, will premier in Paris next season. He is currently working on *You'd Cry Too*, the life and music of Lesley Gore.

JOEY McKNEELY FIRST SEASON (Director/Choreographer) has directed/choreographed *West Side Story* throughout the world including the recent production at Asolo Rep, London's Sadler's Wells (Olivier Nom/Best Musical Revival), Paris's Théâtre du Châtelet and Milan's LaScala. On Broadway, Joey's choreographic debut was *Smokey Joe's Café*, followed by *The Life, Twelfth Night* at Lincoln Center, *The Wild Party*, *The Boy From Oz* starring Hugh Jackman, and *West Side Story*. He has earned two Tony Award Nominations, two Outer Critics Circle Nominations, an NAACP Image Award, and an LA Ovation Award. He has also directed/choreographed U.S. National Tours of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Crazy For You*, and *Smokey Joe's Café*. Internationally, *The Beautiful Game* in Japan; the world premiere of *Love U, Teresa*, and *Ah, Kuling!* in China; and *Evita* and *Dusty* in London.

KENNETH WAISSMAN (Producer/Original Story) 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 developed and produced the original Broadway production of *Grease* as well as the long running iconic hits *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.'

ELLEN WESTON (Book) began her career as an actress. Broadway: *A Far Country*, starring Kim Stanley; *Toys In The Attic*, by Lillian Hellman; and *Mary Mary*. Guest starred in multiple TV episodes, appearing opposite Jimmy Stewart and Bette Davis, and continuing roles in *Get Smart* and *S.W.A.T.* She has written and produced over 20 TV movies, including: *And The Beat Goes On*, *The Sonny And Cher Story*, *Holiday In Your Heart*, starring Bernadette Peters and LeAnn Rimes; *Outrage*, starring Rob Lowe; *Fear Stalk*, starring Jill Clayburgh. She wrote lyrics for two albums with Lesley Gore, *Love Me By Name* produced by Quincy Jones, and *Someplace Else Now*. Their songs have been recorded by Patti Austin, Dusty Springfield, Bernadette Peters, and Carmen McRae. She wrote book and lyrics to an original musical, *A House In The Woods*, performed at Goodspeed Musicals.

JOSEPHINE PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

JOSEPHINE IllumiNation Event

Tuesday, May 10 at 6:30pm

Pre-show cocktail reception and a post-show discussion held on the Mezzanine

Performance in the Mertz Theatre

Contact Asolo Rep's Box Office for series package information and single performance tickets.

IllumiNation is Asolo Rep's new series of performances and events promoting cross-cultural conversations in the community. IllumiNation evenings begin with a cocktail hour at 6:30pm, continue with that evening's performance at 7:30pm and conclude with a moderated panel discussion where audience members can further explore the topical and social issues that they have just seen played out on stage. **IllumiNation is sponsored by Morton's Gourmet Market & Catering.**

OUT@AsoloRep: JOSEPHINE

Thursday, May 12 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 seventh 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, gain personal insight into **JOSEPHINE** from the creative team and cast members, and mingle with the actors and other OUT attendees after the performance. **OUT@AsoloRep is sponsored by U.S. Trust, Visit Sarasota County, Morton's Gourmet Market & Catering, Community Foundation of Sarasota County - Our Sarasota Fund and McCauley Brown Fund, and Watermark Media.**

The Scoop

One hour prior to every performance of **JOSEPHINE**

Asolo Rep's Mertz Theatre, orchestra level

Arrive one hour before curtain to hear the ideas and inspirations that contributed to the making of **JOSEPHINE**. (Opening Night, May 6, is excluded.)

Tuesday Talkbacks

Every Tuesday throughout the run

Asolo Rep's Mezzanine

Join us for an intimate post-show discussion with featured actors or guests following every Tuesday performance of **JOSEPHINE**.

Meet the Actors

Sunday, May 15 at 2pm

Asolo Rep's Mertz Theatre

Immediately following the 2pm matinee, ask questions and learn more from members of the cast in a facilitated discussion.

TICKETS

New this Season: Start times for Wednesday & Thursday performances will be moved one-half hour earlier to 1:30pm and 7:30pm. **JOSEPHINE** preview performances on April 27 and 28 begin at 8pm.

Tickets for **JOSEPHINE** and the entire 2015-2016 Asolo Repertory Theatre season are on sale now. Tickets for **JOSEPHINE** start at \$24. 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 currently open Monday 10am – 4pm, 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.

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SPONSORS

Asolo Rep is able to present **JOSEPHINE** because of the generosity of its sponsors. Corporate sponsors for **JOSEPHINE** are Scene Magazine, ABC 7, Herald-Tribune Media Group, and Residence Inn. **JOSEPHINE** is made possible by Asolo Rep's Artistic Excellence Society. Asolo Rep 2015-2016 Major Season Sponsors are Florida State University, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, The Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, Designing Women Boutique, Woman's Exchange, Inc., and Sunset Cadillac of Bradenton. Asolo Rep's artistic programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues. Asolo Rep is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

ABOUT ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

Now in its 57th season, Asolo Rep 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.

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Asolo Rep presents up to fifteen 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 outreach programming engage audiences and ensure its lasting legacy for future generations.

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