

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL DONALD EDWARDS • MANAGING DIRECTOR LINDA DIGABRIELE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 21, 2016

**ASOLO REP PRESENTS *THE ORIGINALIST*;
JOHN STRAND'S GRIPPING POLITICAL MASTERPIECE
OPENS INAUGURATION DAY, JANUARY 20, 2017**

**"A timely, almost revolutionary work."
— *The Economist***

(SARASOTA, December 21, 2016) — Asolo Rep continues its winter rep season and the fifth and final year of its American Character Project with ***THE ORIGINALIST***, Charles MacArthur Award-winner John Strand's gripping political masterpiece that spotlights the late polarizing judicial titan, Justice Antonin Scalia. The play had its record breaking world premiere at Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater in 2015, which was helmed by the theatre's Artistic Director Molly Smith and starred four-time Helen Hayes Award-winning actor Edward Gero as Antonin Scalia. Molly Smith directs Asolo Rep's production and Edward Gero reprises the role he originated to much acclaim. ***THE ORIGINALIST*** previews January 18 and 19, opens on Inauguration Day, January 20, and runs in rotating repertory through March 7 in the Mertz Theatre, located in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts.

When Justice Scalia, a decidedly steadfast conservative Supreme Court Justice and, to many Americans, an epic villain of Shakespearean proportions, hires Cat, an equally strong-willed liberal law clerk, ideals inherently clash. But what begins as a fiery sparring match soon becomes an unexpected mentorship and friendship. At its core, acclaimed American playwright John Strand's sharp and poignant new play is an artful examination of how and if people can ever get beyond their political differences in order to meet somewhere in the middle.

"Given our current political climate, it is extraordinarily serendipitous to be opening John Strand's brilliant new play on Inauguration Day," said Asolo Rep Producing Artistic Director

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Michael Donald Edwards. "When Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith and I initially discussed the play, I knew immediately that it would be an essential and fascinating addition to the final season of our American Character Project. With Edward Gero, one of our country's finest actors, leading the production, it is certain to be a thrilling, not-to-miss event with tremendous ingenuity and heart."

Four-time Helen Hayes Award-winner Edward Gero has appeared in theaters all over the country, including Goodman Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, where he has portrayed 75 roles since 1983, Signature Theatre, and more. He is a professor of theater at George Mason University, and a 2015 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow. Actress Jade Wheeler plays law clerk Cat, and has appeared off-Broadway in *Who is Earth Mae?*, and in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at Shakespeare Theatre Company, and *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* at GableStage. Third-year FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training student Brett Mack rounds out the cast as Brad, Cat's passionately conservative Harvard Law peer who also works for the Justice. Brett Mack also portrays Senator Robert F. Kennedy in *The Great Society* at Asolo Rep this season.

THE ORIGINALIST playwright John Strand, who was named Playwright of the Year by Broadway Play Publishing, is also a journalist, drama critic and author. His regional works include the Charles MacArthur Award-winning *Lovers and Executioners* (Arena Stage), and *Our War*, *Tom Walker*, *The Miser*, *Three Nights in Tehran*, and more.

Director Molly Smith previously founded and led Alaska's Perseverance Theatre. She has helmed productions on Broadway, at Arena Stage, Shaw Festival Theatre, the Old Globe, Berkeley Repertory Theatre and more. Under her leadership at Arena Stage, the theatre has workshopped more than 100 productions, produced 39 world premieres, and been a significant contributor to the creative growth of nine projects that went to Broadway.

"Right now is a really powerful time to direct a piece about a conservative Supreme Court Justice," said Director Molly Smith. "Within the play, a new era is born with the Windsor case and the beginning of marriage equality, and in real life we enter a new era with a different administration and a divided nation. This play is about understanding each side politically and taking the time to listen, so I intend to make that message even stronger."

CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

EDWARD GERO*.....Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia

JADE WHEELER*.....Cat

BRETT MACK+.....Brad

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

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

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

Director.....	Molly Smith
Scenic Designer.....	Misha Kachman
Costume Designer.....	Joseph P. Salasovich
Lighting Designer.....	Colin K. Bills
Sound Designer.....	Eric Shimelonis
Hair/Wig & Make-up Designer.....	Michelle Hart

SELECTED ARTISTIC BIOS

(In Alphabetical Order)

EDWARD GERO* (**Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, *THE ORIGINALIST***) is the recipient of four Helen Hayes awards and 16 nominations, including Justice Scalia. Other: Mark Rothko – *Red*, Goodman Theatre/Arena Stage; Gloucester (*King Lear*) with Stacy Keach, Goodman Theatre/Shakespeare Theatre Company; Richard Nixon (*Nixon's Nixon*), Salieri (*Amadeus*), Round House Theatre; Scrooge (*A Christmas Carol*), Ford's Theatre; Sweeney Todd (*Sweeney Todd*), Signature Theatre. 75 roles since 1983 with Shakespeare Theatre Company, most recently King – *Henry IV* with Stacy Keach. Film and TV: *House of Cards*, *Turn: Washington's Spies*, *Striking Distance* and *Die Hard II*. Professor of Theater – George Mason University; 2015 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow.

BRETT MACK+ (**Brad, *THE ORIGINALIST*; Sen. Robert F. Kennedy/Ensemble, *The Great Society***) is honored to be making his Asolo Rep debut. His professional credits include: *Leveling Up* and *The Tempest* at the Hippodrome, the Pittsburgh City Theater's productions *Mezzulah 1946* and *The Muckle Man*, and *The Illusion* with the Chautauqua Theater Company. Brett made his film debut in *Knight to D7*, opposite Héctor Elizondo, and guest starred in Season 2 of ABC's *Scandal*. He owes everything to the support of his family and sponsors: Diana and Howard Armbrust, Nancy Stevenson and Ron Banyay.

MOLLY SMITH (Director, *THE ORIGINALIST*) has been a leader in new play development for over 30 years. She is a great believer in first, second and third productions. She has worked alongside playwrights Sarah Ruhl, Paula Vogel, Wendy Wasserstein, Lawrence Wright, Karen Zacarías, Eric Coble, and many others. She is currently Artistic Director at Arena Stage and previously founded and led Perseverance Theatre. Under her leadership, Arena Stage is a national center for American voices, has workshopped more than 100 productions, produced 39 world premieres, and been an important part of nurturing nine projects that went on to Broadway. Her directorial work has been seen at Arena Stage, Shaw Festival Theatre, The Old Globe, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Trinity Repertory Company, Tarragon Theatre, Centaur Theatre, and on Broadway.

JOHN STRAND (Playwright, *THE ORIGINALIST*) is an American playwright, journalist, drama critic, and author. Regional works include *Our War*, *Tom Walker*, *The Miser*, *Three Nights in Tehran*, *Charity Royal*, his Charles MacArthur Award-winning *Lovers and Executioners* (Arena Stage); *An Italian Straw Hat* (South Coast Repertory);

Lorenzaccio (Lansburgh Theatre); *Lincolnesque* (Burstein Family Stage); *Highest Yellow*, *The Diaries*, *Otabenga* (Signature Theatre); and *The Cockburn Rituals* (Woolly Mammoth Theatre). Strand has received multiple playwriting commissions from South Coast Repertory, Arena Stage, Shakespeare Theatre, and Signature Theatre. He was also named Playwright of the Year by Broadway Play Publishing. Strand is also the author of *Commieland*, a novel about a popular but aging theme park in rural Pennsylvania that re-creates Communism for Americans through thrice daily performed musical-historical revues.

JADE WHEELER* (Cat, **THE ORIGINALIST**) New York – Off Broadway: *Who is Eartha Mae?* (Theatre Row, United Solo Fest); Florida: *Race*, *Ruined* (Carbonell nominee, Miami New Times Best Supporting Actress), *Vanya & Sonia & Masha & Spike* (GableStage), *Art Thou Not Fair: KKK* (ArtBasel); Washington, D.C.: *Lost in the Stars*, *Alex in Wonderland* (John F. Kennedy Center), *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Shakespeare Theatre Company), *Ruined* (Everyman Theatre), *Metamorphoses* (Constellation Theatre); Boston: *Lucky Stiff* (Stoneham Theatre), *Arcadia* (The Nora Theatre). Training: George Mason University, BA Theater & French. La Ferme de Trielle (Auvergne, France). The Actors Space (Barcelona, Spain). <http://jadewheeleractor.wixsite.com/home>

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

THE ORIGINALIST IllumiNation Event

Tuesday, January 24 at 6:30pm; show starts at 7:30pm

Pre-show 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 series of performances and events promoting cross-cultural conversations in the community. IllumiNation events begin with a reception one hour before the performance, continue with the featured performance 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.

Inside Asolo Rep: THE GREAT SOCIETY and THE ORIGINALIST

Wednesday, January 25 at 11am

Cook Theatre

Panel discussions are \$5; and free for all donors and Asolo Rep Guild Members

Get rare insights into the artistic process, hear directly from the people responsible for producing **THE GREAT SOCIETY** and **THE ORIGINALIST**, and engage in stimulating discussion inspired by the plays' themes and issues.

Inside Asolo Rep is sponsored by Hotel Indigo and the Observer

OUT@AsoloRep: THE ORIGINALIST

Thursday, February 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 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 **THE ORIGINALIST** 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, and Community Foundation of Sarasota County - Our Sarasota Fund and McCauley Brown Fund.

The Scoop

One hour prior to every performance of **THE ORIGINALIST**
Asolo Rep's Mertz Theatre, orchestra level

Arrive one hour before curtain to hear the ideas and inspirations that contributed to the making of **THE ORIGINALIST**. (Opening Night, January 20, 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 **THE ORIGINALIST**.

Meet the Actors

Sunday, February 12 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

Tickets for **THE ORIGINALIST** and the entire 2016-2017 Asolo Repertory Theatre season are on sale now. Tickets for **THE ORIGINALIST** start at \$26.

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 subscription packages are also available online and by visiting or calling the box office.

SPONSORS

Asolo Rep is able to present **THE ORIGINALIST** because of the generosity of its sponsors. Corporate sponsors for **THE ORIGINALIST** are the Observer and Modern Events. Asolo Rep 2016-17 Major Season Sponsors are Florida State University, Charles & Margery

Barancik Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, The Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, the Huisling 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 REP

Now in its 58th 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 15 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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