

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

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“They Made It a Musical!” at Westport Country Playhouse Celebrates the Origins of Broadway Hit Shows, July 18-20

Through familiar songs and surprising stories, the concert celebrates the roots of “Oklahoma!,” “Fiddler on the Roof,” “Annie,” “Hamilton,” and more.

Westport Country Playhouse will present “They Made It a Musical!,” a concert exploring the inspirations for Broadway’s best musicals through songs and stories, for four performances, Thursday and Friday, July 18 and 19 at 8 p.m.; and Saturday, July 20, at 3 and 8 p.m. Featuring six Broadway performers backed by a live band, the show is appropriate for all ages.

The tune-filled exploration of musical history will spotlight the plays, novels, works of art, short stories, and authentic events that inspired some of Broadway’s best musicals - from “Romeo and Juliet” sparking the idea for “West Side Story,” to Shaw’s “Pygmalion” laying the groundwork for “My Fair Lady.” Insightful anecdotes intertwined with song selections will reveal the creation of “Oklahoma!,” “Fiddler on the Roof,” “Annie,” “Sweeney Todd,” “Sunday in the Park with George,” “Les Misérables,” “Hamilton,” and more.

“Have you ever wondered how the genius composers and writers of your favorite musicals got the idea for their work?,” asked **Mark Shanahan**, Westport Country Playhouse artistic director. “You’ll be delighted to join us as we examine the inspirations for many of the greatest Broadway musicals of all time.”

From a concept by Shanahan and Broadway historian **Laurence Maslon**, the concert is created and directed by Maslon. It offers, according to Shanahan, “a treasure trove of surprising tales.” He noted, ““They Made It a Musical!” is sure to be a perfect, fun-filled, moving night of summer entertainment at the Playhouse!”

Maslon added, “Great Broadway shows began as puzzles until our most esteemed writers, such as Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, and Lin-Manuel Miranda, to name just a few, unlocked their secrets and beautiful shows sprang out to enchant us all.”

Maslon co-wrote two episodes of the Emmy Award-winning PBS series, “Broadway: The American Musical,” as well as its companion book. He wrote a history of Broadway’s recorded music, “Broadway to Main Street: How Show Music Enchanted America,” and for Library of America, he edited “American Musicals (1927-1969).” For PBS’ “American Masters” documentary series, he wrote and co-produced “Sammy Davis, Jr.: I’ve Gotta Be Me” and “Richard Rodgers: The Sweetest Sounds.” He is host and producer of the NPR radio series, “Broadway to Main Street,” winner of the 2019 ASCAP Foundation/Deems Taylor Award for Radio Broadcast. His book, “I’ll Drink to That!: Broadway Cocktails” was the basis for a Barnstormer cabaret at Westport Country Playhouse last year. Maslon is an arts professor at the Graduate Acting Program at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts.

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Maslon previews “They Made It a Musical!” on his “Broadway to Main Street”/WLIW-FM podcast: <https://broadwaytomainstreet.libsyn.com/they-turned-it-into-a-musical>

Performers are **Maria Bilbao** (Broadway: “Sweeney Todd” as Johanna; Regional: “Evita” at Bucks County Playhouse, “Anna in the Tropics” at Bay Street Theatre, “On Your Feet” at Westchester Broadway Theatre; @themariabilbao); **Christian DeMarais** (Off-Broadway: “Hamlet,” “School for Scandal”; Regional: The Guthrie, Huntington Theatre Company, McCarter Theatre Center, Chautauqua Theatre Company; TV/Film: “FBI: Most Wanted,” “Elsbeth,” “Mr. Robot,” “The Equalizer,” “Elementary,” Netflix’ “Maniac”; MFA in Acting NYU Graduate Acting Program at Tisch School of the Arts); **Kristen Hahn** (Westport Country Playhouse: “Our Town,” starring Paul Newman, four Script In Hand readings, Laurence Maslon’s “I’ll Drink To That!”; Broadway and National Tours: “Our Town,” “A Gentleman’s Guide to Love & Murder,” “Hello, Dolly!”; Regional: “The 39 Steps”; BFA Carnegie Mellon University).

Guy Lockard (Westport Country Playhouse: “A Night for Swifties”; “Jelly’s Last Jam” at Signature Theater; “Chicago” as Billy Flynn at Drury Lane Theatre; “Chicago Med” as Dr. Dylan Scott, recurring roles on “The Village,” “The Blacklist,” guest-starred on “Chicago Fire,” “Law & Order: SVU,” “Gossip Girl”); **John Rapson** (Westport Country Playhouse: Script in Hand playreadings “The Outsider,” “Agatha Christie’s The Murder of Roger Ackroyd,” “Theatre People”; Broadway: 2023 revival of “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street” as Beadle Bamford; National Tour: “A Gentleman’s Guide to Love & Murder”; University of Michigan); and **Sophia Tzougros** (“The Thugs,” “The Hypochondriac,” “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” “Nine,” “Follies in Concert,” “The House of Blue Leaves,” “Yerma,” “Two by Two: The 50th Anniversary Concert”; Jimmy Awards finalist; “Heartbreak County” cast recording; BA Wagner College, MFA NYU Grad Acting; sophiatzougros.com).

Michael Stapleton is music director; **Benedict Braxton-Smith** is arranger/music supervisor. **James J. Fenton** is scenic advisor.

For full details, visit: <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/they-made-it-a-musical/>

Tickets are \$45, \$55, and \$65. Running time is approximately 90 minutes, no intermission. Appropriate for all ages.

Together at the Table, an evening for families and groups to enjoy a communal dinner and casual conversation before attending the performance, will be on Thursday, July 18, at 6:30 p.m., followed by an 8 p.m. performance. Tickets for dinner and show are \$15.

Pride Night, a pre-show cocktail party for the LGBTQ+ community and friends, featuring live entertainment by Sienna Rose, a limited open bar from Trevi Lounge, and appetizers from local restaurants, will be on Saturday, July 20, at 7 p.m., followed by an 8 p.m. performance. Tickets for party and show are \$40.

“They Made It a Musical” Event Sponsor is The Maurer Family Foundation. Event Supporters are Alison and Mark Smith. Together at the Table is sponsored by Jodi and Paige Couture and Westport Rotary. 2024 Programming and Season Sponsor is Barbara Streicker. Media sponsors are Mofly Media and WSHU Public Radio. Westport Country Playhouse is a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit organization.

A complete schedule of Playhouse events is available at westportplayhouse.org. All play titles, artists, dates, and times are subject to change.

For Westport Country Playhouse information and tickets, visit westportplayhouse.org or call the box office at (203) 227-4177, toll-free at 1-888-927-7529. Stay connected to the Playhouse on Facebook (Westport Country Playhouse), Instagram ([wcplayhouse](https://www.instagram.com/wcplayhouse)), and YouTube (WestportPlayhouse). Westport Country Playhouse is located at 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport.

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