

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Patricia Blaufuss, Public Relations Manager

(203) 227-5137 x197 | (203) 571-1287 | pblaufuss@westportplayhouse.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 16, 2024

Westport Country Playhouse Announces More Talent for Annual Fundraiser on Saturday, Sept. 14

F. Murray Abraham, Raúl Esparza, Norm Lewis, Bonnie Milligan, Debra Monk, and Lillias White will join previously announced performers Kristin Chenoweth and Mary-Mitchell Campbell for “The Best Is Yet to Come” benefit.

Westport Country Playhouse fundraising concert, “The Best Is Yet to Come,” on Saturday, September 14, has added to its talent lineup Academy Award winner F. Murray Abraham, who will host; Tony nominee Raúl Esparza; Tony nominee Norm Lewis; Tony Award winner Bonnie Milligan; Emmy and Tony Award winner Debra Monk; and Tony Award winner Lillias White. They will join previously announced Emmy and Tony Award winner Kristin Chenoweth and Drama Desk Award-winning conductor and music director Mary-Mitchell Campbell. In addition to performing, Chenoweth and Campbell will be saluted for their past work at the Playhouse.

“We are honored to have such extraordinary talent on our stage for the gala,” said Athena Adamson, chair, Playhouse board of trustees. “This annual event plays a big part in our fundraising efforts for the year, and we are grateful to our community for coming to the Playhouse and supporting us September 14th.”

The benefit will celebrate the music of multi-Emmy, Grammy, and Tony Award-winning composer Cy Coleman, with the artists performing Coleman’s hits, including “The Best Is Yet to Come,” which is the evening’s theme, and music from his Broadway shows “Sweet Charity,” “Barnum,” “On the Twentieth Century,” and more.

The 2024 Westport Country Playhouse Leadership Award will be presented to Westporters Harold Bailey, Jr. and Bernicestine McLeod Bailey.

Newly announced benefit cast:

F. Murray Abraham’s diverse performances include leading roles in “Amadeus,” “The Grand Budapest Hotel,” “Scarface,” “Homeland,” “The Ritz,” “The Threepenny Opera,” “Triumph of Love,” and “The Queen of Versailles.” He has performed plays by Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Chekhov, Pirandello, McNally, Pinter, Albee, Williams, Kushner, and Mamet and has received an Academy Award, Golden Globe, two Obies, and the Moscow Art Theater Stanislavsky Medal.

Raúl Esparza’s Broadway credits include “Speed-the-Plow” (Tony nom., Drama Desk nom.), “The Homecoming” (Tony nom., Drama Desk Award for Ensemble Performance), “Company” (Tony nom.; Drama Desk Award for Best Actor), “Taboo” (Tony nom.; Drama Desk Award for Best Featured Actor), and “The Rocky Horror Show” (Theatre World Award). He appeared Off-Broadway in “tick, tick...BOOM!” (Obie Award, Drama Desk nom.), and the National Tour of “Evita” (Joseph Jefferson nom.).

-more-

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

25 POWERS COURT WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT 06880
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE T (203) 227-5137 | BOX OFFICE T (203) 227-4177
westportplayhouse.org

Norm Lewis, an Emmy, Tony, and SAG Award nominee, starred in Spike Lee's "Da 5 Bloods," the FX series, "Pose," and NBC's "Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert!." On Broadway, he starred in "The Phantom of the Opera" as the first African American in the title role. He received Tony, Drama Desk, Drama League, and Outer Critics Circle award nominations for his performance as Porgy in "Porgy & Bess."

Bonnie Milligan won the 2023 Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical for "Kimberly Akimbo." She made her Broadway debut in "Head Over Heels," after originating the role at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Off-Broadway credits include the Encores! production of "God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater." She was in the 1st National Tour of "Kinky Boots." On television, she plays the recurring role of Kathryn on "Search Party" (TBS).

Debra Monk's Broadway credits include "Redwood Curtain" (Tony Award), "Curtains" (Drama Desk, Tony nomination), "Steel Pier" (Tony nomination), and "Picnic" (Tony nomination). She co-wrote and co-starred in the Tony-nominated "Pump Boys and Dinettes." TV credits include "The Gilded Age," "American Horror Story," and "New Amsterdam." She won the Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actress as Katie Sipowicz in "NYPD Blue."

Lillias White has appeared on Broadway in "Barnum," "Dreamgirls," "Once on This Island," "Chicago," "How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying," "Fela!" (Tony nomination), "Hadestown," and Cy Coleman's "The Life" (Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, Tony awards). Films include "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." She can be heard in Disney's animated feature, "Hercules," as the voice of the Lead Muse.

Previously announced benefit cast/honorees:

Kristin Chenoweth is an Emmy and Tony Award-winning actress and singer. Her Broadway experience includes roles in "You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown" (Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards), "Wicked" (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle nominations), "The Apple Tree" (Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle nominations), "On the Twentieth Century" (Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle awards, Tony nomination), and others.

Mary-Mitchell Campbell is a conductor, music director, orchestrator, composer, and arranger who easily crosses genres between Broadway, pop, and classical styles of music. She has served as music director for many Broadway shows, including "The Prom," "Mean Girls," "Company," "Sweeney Todd," and "Some Like It Hot," and is the newly announced music director for New York City Center's "Encores!"

Bernicestine McLeod Bailey is president and founder of McLeod Associates, Inc., an information technology consulting firm, and previously was a Systems Engineer with IBM. She is also vice president for operations of Aisha & Co. LLC, a family gift company whose signature product is Ishababies®, a line of multicultural plush dolls. She has served extensively in the local volunteer arena.

Harold Bailey, Jr. is executive vice president of McLeod Associates, Inc. Prior to his retirement, he was vice president of Lotus Marketing Integration. He has been chair of T.E.A.M. Westport, the Town of Westport, CT's council on diversity, since its inception in 2003. He is a member of the board of Westport Country Playhouse and served as its vice president from 2004-2006.

The benefit salutes composer **Cy Coleman**, who teamed with Carolyn Leigh on the musical "Wildcat" (1960), followed by "Little Me." He collaborated with Dorothy Fields on "Sweet Charity" (1965) and "Seesaw" (1973). He composed the score for "I Love My Wife" (1977) with lyrics by Michael Stewart, and "On the Twentieth Century" (1978) with Betty Comden and Adolph Green. In 1980, Coleman served as producer and composer for "Barnum," with Michael Stewart's lyrics, and collaborated on "City of Angels" (1989) with David Zippel. "The Will Rogers Follies" (1991) teamed him again with Comden and Green, and "The Life" (1997) with lyricist Ira Gasman. Coleman's career in popular music includes

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

25 POWERS COURT WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT 06880
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE T (203) 227-5137 | BOX OFFICE T (203) 227-4177
westportplayhouse.org

“Witchcraft” and “The Best Is Yet to Come.” He has received three Grammy Awards, three Tony Awards, and induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

“The Best Is Yet to Come” fundraising event is produced by **Kevin Duncan**.

Tickets for prime seating at the performance and post-show reception are \$1,000; performance-only tickets are \$300 and \$500. A portion of ticket prices is tax deductible. Tickets may be reserved by contacting the Playhouse box office at 203-227-4177; or online at <https://tickets.westportplayhouse.org/6581>

All proceeds from this event will support Westport Country Playhouse, a non-profit performing arts center and professional, producing theater, its work on stage and throughout the community.

More information at: <https://www.westportplayhouse.org/show/gala2024/>

2024 Programming and Season Sponsor is Barbara Streicker. Media sponsors are Moffly 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), and YouTube (WestportPlayhouse). Westport Country Playhouse is located at 25 Powers Court, off Route 1, Westport.

###

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

25 POWERS COURT WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT 06880
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE T (203) 227-5137 | BOX OFFICE T (203) 227-4177
westportplayhouse.org