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**THE ICONIC AMERICAN MUSICAL *WEST SIDE STORY* COMES TO THE GUTHRIE STAGE
FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS SUMMER**

**A bold revival with new choreography
Directed by Guthrie Theater Artistic Director Joseph Haj**

(*Minneapolis/St. Paul*) – The Guthrie Theater (Joseph Haj, artistic director) proudly announced the cast and creative team for the theater’s summer musical, *West Side Story*. Directed by Haj, this major revival of a timeless classic will play June 16 – August 26, 2018, on the Wurtele Thrust Stage. Single tickets for *West Side Story* start at \$15 for preview performances (June 16–21) and are on sale now through the Box Office at 612.377.2224, 877.44.STAGE (toll-free), 612.225.6244 (group sales) and online at guthrietheater.org.

Based on a conception of Jerome Robbins with a book by Arthur Laurents, *West Side Story* is considered one of the great love stories of all time. Featuring music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, the score is often heralded as one of Broadway’s finest and includes beloved American musical theater classics such as “Somewhere,” “Maria,” “Tonight” and “I Feel Pretty.” This year marks the Leonard Bernstein centenary – a worldwide celebration of the 100th birthday of the composer, conductor, educator, musician, humanitarian and titan in the world of classical music. Bernstein’s daughter reflected that her father believed if he “just wrote a good enough melody that maybe he could heal the world.”

West Side Story has made a palpable impact on the musical theater world for decades. The Tony Award-winning original Broadway production opened in 1957 to great acclaim and ran for more than 700 performances. The subsequent film, released four years later in 1961, won 10 Academy Awards (including Best Picture, Best Director and Best Supporting Actress and Actor), several Golden Globes (including Best Motion Picture – Musical) and a Grammy for Recording of Original Cast from Motion Picture or Television.

This summer, this iconic American musical takes to the Guthrie stage for the first time. Set in 1957, two rival gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, are prowling the streets of Manhattan’s West Side. When Tony falls for Maria, the sister of a rival gang member, a rumble is planned. Like Romeo and Juliet, they’re caught in an ongoing feud with no escape, even as they pledge their love for each other.

Last fall, Joseph Haj directed *Romeo and Juliet* to open the Guthrie’s 2017–2018 Season, and he will complete this season in the Wurtele Thrust stage by helming *West Side Story*, an urban retelling of the classic tale of star-crossed lovers. “It has long been a dream of mine to direct *West Side Story*, and I couldn’t be more excited to embark on this journey with a dream team of collaborators,” Haj recently shared. “When I think of *West Side Story*, I think of immigration tensions and a community divided in a brutal and violent world. I also think of love, dreams and ambitions, and my own family’s journey to become ‘American.’”

According to the *West Side Story* script, the Jets are “an anthology of what it means to be American,” and Haj has responded to that guidance by casting the show to reflect the Jets as an amalgam of the cultures

in New York City, most of them immigrants from prior immigrant waves. The Puerto Rican Sharks belong to the latest wave of immigrants, and so the angers of the assimilated community are focused on the new arrivals, who are treated with fear and contempt.

Choreographer Maija Garcia stated, “In my first conversation with [Director] Joseph Haj, his one directive was to create a *West Side Story* where we truly believe these kids are gang members. I have incredible reverence for [original choreographer] Jerome Robbins and the cast who defined the roles. But it’s 2018, and the idea of what it means to be an American has changed. Our relationship with race and immigration has evolved. So how do these kids move? How do they express their anger and frustration with the world? The answers led us to a more grounded, gritty style of movement that reflects their real experiences and identities.”

Haj summed up his thoughts by adding, “It is such a timely moment for a major revival of *West Side Story*, which explores the immigrant experience with all the passion, yearning, humanity and heart that we know it to hold.”

West Side Story tells the tragic tale of lovers Tony, played by **Marc Koeck**, and Maria, played by **Mia Pinero**, both making their Guthrie debuts. A native of Fargo, North Dakota, Koeck starred as Tony in the 50th anniversary international company of *West Side Story*. Other recent credits include *South Pacific* (Gulf Coast Symphony), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (New London Barn Playhouse) and *Camelot* (New Repertory Theatre). Pinero has previously starred as Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* (PlayMakers Repertory Company) and *West Side Story*’s Maria at Ivoryton Playhouse in Connecticut. Additional recent credits include *In the Heights* (Geva Theatre Center) and *Three Penny Opera*.

Rounding out the cast are **Adam Brian Ali** (Guthrie: debut) as A-Rab, **Leah Anderson** (Guthrie: *A Christmas Carol*) as Anybodys, **Fabio Angelo** (Guthrie: debut) as Indio, **Raye Birk** (Guthrie: *Othello*, *Uncle Vanya*) as Doc, **Brendon Chan** (Guthrie: debut) as Gee-Tar, **Fernando Collado** (Guthrie: debut) as Nibbles, **Mark Deler** (Guthrie: debut) as Pepe, **Kendra ‘Vie Boheme’ Dennard** (Guthrie: *Refugia*) as Graziella, **Gabrielle Dominique** (Guthrie: *A Christmas Carol*, *Romeo and Juliet*) as Francisca, **Andy Frye** (Guthrie: *The Great Work: A New Musical*) as Big Deal, **Terry Hempleman** (Guthrie: *The Parchman Hour*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*) as Schrank, **Marissa Lynn Horton** (Guthrie: debut) as Velma, **Jordan Fife Hunt** (Guthrie: debut) as Anxious, **Ana Isabelle** (Guthrie: debut) as Anita, **Lamar Jefferson** (Guthrie: *A Christmas Carol*, *Romeo and Juliet*) as Action, **James E. Johnson V** (Guthrie: debut) as Juano, **Celeste Lanuza** (Guthrie: debut) as Consuelo, **Darius Jordan Lee** (Guthrie: debut) as Riff, **Joel Liestman** (Guthrie: *A Christmas Carol*, *King Lear*) as Glad Hand, **Tomas Matos** (Guthrie: debut) as Luis, **Bill McCallum** (Guthrie: *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Christmas Carol*) as Krupke, **Tyler Michaels** (Guthrie: *A Christmas Carol*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) as Snowboy, **Andrea Mislan** (Guthrie: debut) as Clarice, **Christian Elán Ortiz** (Guthrie: debut) as Chino, **Jocelyn Iris Rajkumar** (Guthrie: debut) as Minnie, **Devin L. Roberts** (Guthrie: debut) as Diesel, **Carley Villanueva Rosefelt** (Guthrie: *South Pacific*) as Rosalia / “Somewhere” Soloist, **Marco Antonio Santiago** (Guthrie: debut) as Bernardo, **Tovi Wayne** (Guthrie: debut) as Baby John and **Kristin Yancy** (Guthrie: debut) as Teresita.

The creative team for *West Side Story* includes **Joseph Haj** (Director), **Mark Hartman** (Music Director/Conductor), **Maija Garcia** (Choreographer), **Christopher Acebo** (Scenic Designer), **Jen Caprio** (Costume Designer), **Bradley King** (Lighting Designer), **Elisheba Ittoop** (Sound Designer), **Carla Steen** (Dramaturg), **Robert Ramirez** (Vocal Coach), **U. Jonathan Toppo** (Fight Director), **Michele Hossle** (Stage Manager), **Katherine Kenfield** (Assistant Stage Manager), **Nate Stanger** (Assistant Stage Manager), **Christopher Garza** (Assistant Director) and **Omar Nieves** (Assistant Choreographer).

JOSEPH HAJ was appointed the eighth artistic director of the Guthrie Theater in 2015. Within a year of his arrival, he announced the Level Nine Initiative supported by a \$1 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The Level Nine Initiative emphasizes the creation of a theater that wrestles with urgent questions, inspires dynamic dialogue with its audiences, expands the diversity of voices, visions and styles on its stages and engages community members currently underserved by its work. Since his appointment, Haj has directed several shows at the Guthrie, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Sunday in the*

Park with George, King Lear, South Pacific and *Pericles* (also Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Folger Theatre).

Prior to his appointment at the Guthrie, Haj was the producing artistic director at PlayMakers Repertory Company where he presented the world premiere of *Surviving Twin* by Loudon Wainwright III, Mike Daisey's *The Story of the Gun* and UNIVERSES' *Spring Training* and produced the premiere of *The Parchman Hour* by Mike Wiley. While at PlayMakers, Haj also directed *The Tempest, Metamorphoses, Cabaret, Henry IV* (Parts I and II), *Henry V, Nicholas Nickleby, The Illusion, Amadeus, Pericles, Big River, As You Like It, Cyrano de Bergerac* (Haj's adaptation) and *Into the Woods*.

Other directing projects include *Hamlet* (Folger Theatre, Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Production) and *Henry V* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), as well as directing maximum-security inmates in a production of *Henry V*, creating and directing *Voices* with the rural community of Batesburg-Leesville, S.C., and conducting workshops in the West Bank and Gaza.

Haj received an M.F.A. from The University of North Carolina before beginning a career in acting and has worked as an actor with many internationally known directors, including Garland Wright, JoAnne Akalaitis, Anne Bogart (as an original member of SITI Company), Peter Sellars, Sir Peter Hall and Robert Woodruff. He has been named one of 25 theater artists who will have a significant impact on the field over the next quarter-century by *American Theatre* magazine and is the recipient of the 2014 Zelda Fichandler Award (SDCF) and 2017 Rosetta LeNoire Award (AEA). Haj currently serves on the executive board of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

MAIJA GARCIA is a Cuban-American director, choreographer, educator and producer based in Harlem, New York. Garcia's signature storytelling integrates live music and interactive design with visceral movement. Most recently, she served as director of movement for the Spike Lee film *Chi-Raq* and directed *Salsa, Mambo, Cha Cha Cha* with music director Isaac Delgado in Havana, Cuba. She choreographed the new hit musical *Cuba Libre* at Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland and *Another Word for Beauty* by José Rivera at Goodman Theatre in Chicago.

As creative director of *FELA!*, Garcia worked alongside Bill T. Jones as associate choreographer to develop the Tony award-winning musical off-Broadway (2008), on Broadway (2009), at National Theatre of London (2010) and in Lagos, Nigeria (2011). In 2006, Garcia founded Organic Magnetics to engage cross-cultural dialogue and sustainable practice in the arts. She devises original work, produces live installations to generate urban folklore for the future and engages students in a transformative creative process through theater arts curriculum. Garcia's work evokes a spiritual connection among artistic collaborators and audiences, encouraging interaction and participation. organicmagnetics.com

Supporting Events

Actors from the Guthrie Theater production of *West Side Story* will be performing the national anthem at the following Minnesota sporting events:

Minnesota Lynx – Wednesday, 5/23 at 7 p.m.

St. Paul Saints – Saturday, 5/26 at 7:05 p.m.

Opportunities to sing the national anthem at other sporting events are pending.

The Guthrie Theater is partnering with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board for this summer's Music and Movies in the Parks series to present two screenings of the 1961 *West Side Story* film:

Father Hennepin Bluff Park – Tuesday, 6/5 starting at 9 p.m.

Kenwood Park – Sunday, 7/8 starting at 9:15 p.m.

Post-play discussions and access services (ASL, Audio Described and Open Captioned performances) are available on select dates. Visit guthrietheater.org or call the Box Office at 612.377.2224 for more information.

West Side Story is sponsored by RBC Wealth Management and City National Bank with special support from Platinum Producers Penny and Bill George and the George Family Foundation.

THE GUTHRIE THEATER (Joseph Haj, artistic director) was founded by Sir Tyrone Guthrie in 1963 and is an American center for theater performance, production, education and professional training, dedicated to producing the great works of dramatic literature and cultivating the next generation of theater artists. Under Haj's leadership, the Guthrie is guided by four core values: Artistic Excellence; Community; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; and Fiscal Responsibility. The Guthrie produces a mix of classic and contemporary plays on three stages and continues to set a national standard for excellence in theatrical production and performance, serving nearly 400,000 patrons annually. In 2006, the Guthrie opened a new home, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Jean Nouvel, located on the banks of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Open to the public year-round, it houses three state-of-the-art stages, production facilities, classrooms, full-service restaurants and dramatic public lobbies. guthrietheater.org

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