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OLNEY THEATRE CENTER TO PRODUCE THE WORLD PREMIERE OF *A.D. 16*, A NEW MUSICAL FROM CINCO PAUL AND BEKAH BRUNSTETTER

Original staging by Broadway director Stephen Brackett in his Olney Theatre Center debut; Phoenix Best (*Dear Evan Hansen*) and Ben Fankhauser (*Disney's Newsies*) to star as teenaged Mary Magdalene and Jesus

Olney, MD — January 11, 2022 — Olney Theatre Center is proud to launch the world premiere of ***A.D. 16 (February 4 - March 6, 2022)***, a new musical from writers **Cinco Paul** (co-creator of *Despicable Me* and *Schmigadoon!*) and **Bekah Brunstetter** (producer and writer on *This Is Us*). Both heartwarming and hilarious, *A.D. 16* follows the story of a teenaged Mary Magdalene as she falls in love with the carpenter's son next door... who happens to be a kid named Jesus. The show features an original score inspired by 90s R&B, hip hop, and pop, and is directed by award-winning Broadway veteran **Stephen Brackett**, who staged the first productions of *Be More Chill*, *The Lightning Thief* and next heads to NYC for the Broadway production of *A Strange Loop*. **Phoenix Best**, whose past roles include Alana Beck in *Dear Evan Hansen* on Broadway and Eponine in the *Les Miserables* National Tour, will star as the lovestruck Mary Magdalene. Best known for his role as Davey in *Disney's Newsies*, **Ben Fankhauser** will star opposite Best as the young and idealistic Jesus. **Three-time Tony Award-winner Doug Besterman provides the orchestrations.** The show was workshopped at Olney Theatre Center in 2019, and is now mounted in association with **Sloane Productions, LLC** which has provided enhancement funds with an eye towards a possible New York production.

The invited press performance is Thursday, February 10 at 8:00 pm. Interested critics may reserve two tickets by emailing sstraub@olneytheatre.org. Tickets are available from \$42 - \$85 and can be purchased at olneytheatre.org or 301-924-3400.

"Once in a very great while, a new musical comes along that promises to heal a fractured world," said Artistic Director Jason Loewith. "I felt that four years ago, when I attended a showcase of musicals-in-process and heard excerpts from the show. Four

years later, after all we've been through, I believe it even more, in my bones. We are all in need of joy, and we are all in need of healing. And no matter your religious background, no matter your experience of musical theater, this show will delight the most intellectual brain and melt the most cynical heart as it calls each and every one of us to be our best selves, for the good of our community.”

Loewith continued, “As his hilarious AppleTV+ hit *Schmigadoon* proved, there's no funnier songwriter than Cinco Paul, who is best known for the mega-hit franchise *Despicable Me*. And Bekah Brunstetter is that ever-rarer breed of playwright with real credibility as a person of faith and a top-tier writer. And at the helm we're lucky to have director Stephen Brackett, whose track record mounting joyous new musicals is unparalleled. This is the team and this is the musical we've been waiting for.” ”

A.D. 16 asks the question, what if your crush really was perfect? Both inspiring and delightfully witty, the musical comedy follows Mary Magdalene's quest to impress the boy next door, Jesus. In the process, she fends off a trio of 1st-Century Mean Girls and a bunch of Beastie Boys-inspired wiseguys from the Sanhedrin. She learns that getting Jesus to love you back is both easier – and harder – than she ever imagined. With a lush R&B score and a riotous cast of characters, *A.D. 16* achieves the rare feat of being both funny and sincere. **A winner of the Edgerton Foundation New Play Award**, *A.D. 16* is a thrilling and fun musical for people of all faiths, or no faith at all.

Cinco Paul, along with his long-time writing partner Ken Daurio, has co-authored the screenplays for numerous animated feature films, including *Despicable Me* and its sequels, *Dr. Suess' The Lorax*, and *The Secret Life of Pets*. Additionally, he is the creator, executive producer, and songwriter for the musical comedy series *Schmigadoon!* on Apple TV+, a parody of and homage to Golden Age musicals of the 1940s and 50s.

Bekah Brunstetter is a playwright and screenwriter, whose published plays include *F*cking Art*, *The Cake*, *I Used to Write on Walls*, *Oohrah!*, *Be a Good Little Widow*, and the upcoming musical *Notebook*. Her television work includes writing for *Maid*, *This Is Us*, *American Gods*, *Switched At Birth*, and *Underemployed*. She is a co-founder of *The Kilroys' List*, a gender parity initiative that releases an annual list of highly recommended contemporary plays by female and transgender authors.

Director **Stephen Brackett** staged the original Broadway productions of *Be More Chill* and *The Lightning Thief*. He also directed the original production of the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *A Strange Loop*, first at Playwrights Horizons and recently at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in D.C., for which he himself won a Drama Desk

Award for Outstanding Director of a Musical. *A Strange Loop* is expected to premiere on Broadway this year at the Lyceum Theatre. Brackett's Off-Broadway directing credits include *Buyer & Cellar* (Rattlestick/Barrow Street/National Tour/Menier Chocolate Factory), *The Mad Ones* (Prospect Theater), *Ultimate Beauty Bible* (Page 73), *Carnival Kids* (Lesser America), *After* (Partial Comfort), *Be A Good Little Widow* (Ars Nova), and *The Tenant* (Woodshed Collective). His upcoming work includes *To My Girls* at Second Stage and *Radiant Baby* at Two River.

In addition to her role as Alana Beck in *Dear Evan Hansen* on Broadway, **Phoenix Best** has been seen in the Tony, Emmy, and Grammy Award-winning revival of *The Color Purple*. She portrayed Eponine in the National Tour of *Les Miserables*, and her screen credits include Ogechi in *Love Life* on HBO Max, and Mercy & Charity in *Estella Scrooge* on Broadway On Demand.

Ben Fankhauser originated the role of Davey in the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical *Newsies*. He has also appeared in the first National Tours of *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* and *Spring Awakening*. In addition to his work onstage, he co-authored the musical *A Commercial Jingle for Regina Comet*, currently playing at the Off-Broadway DR2 Theatre.

The world premiere of *A.D. 16* will also feature **Kelli Blackwell** as Diana, **Alan H. Green** as Jacob, **Jade Jones** as Jessica, **Jared Loftin** as Nicholas, **Calvin McCullough** as Matthias, **Adelina Mitchell** as Ruth, **Christian Montgomery** as Bartimaeus, **Da'Von Moody** as Simeon, and **Chani Wereley** as Esther. The ensemble includes **Alex De Bard**, **Sylvern Grooms**, **RJ Pavel**, **John Sygar**, and **Kanysha Williams**; with **Tiffany Lyn Royster** and **Chris Urquiaga** as swings. The production showcases orchestrations and music supervision by **Doug Besterman**, music direction by **Christopher Youstra**, choreography by **Katie Spelman**, scenic design by **Walt Spangler**, costume design by **Emilio Sosa**, sound design by **Matt Rowe**, lighting design by **Colin K. Bills** and Wig Design by **Anne Nesmith**. **Karen Currie** serves as Production Stage Manager.

A.D. 16 was developed, in part, at SPACE on Ryder Farm, and at Rhinebeck Writers Retreat.

VACCINATION POLICY

Masks and proof of COVID vaccination are required to attend for all patrons. Exemptions may be made for those who are not vaccinated, such as children under 5, people with certain medical conditions preventing vaccination, or those with closely held religious beliefs. These patrons must provide proof of a timely negative Covid-19 PCR

test taken within 48 hours or a rapid antigen test taken within six hours of showtime. Visit OlneyTheatre.org/vax for more information.

EVENT DETAILS

A.D. 16

Book by Bekah Brunstetter

Music & Lyrics by Cinco Paul

Directed by Stephen Brackett

Music Direction by Christopher Youstra

Choreography by Katie Spelman

February 4 - March 6, 2022

Tickets: \$42-\$85 available at olneytheatre.org and 301-924-3400

Behind-the-Scenes Events

Cinco Paul And Bekah Brunstetter

In Conversation With Jason Loewith

Thursday, February 10th - 5:00 - 6:00 PM

Mainstage

Free For Members/\$10 General Public

Prior to opening night Jason sits down with creators *A.D. 16.*, Cinco Paul (Lyrics and Music) and Bekah Brunstetter (Book) to talk about the process of creating their new musical.

Who Were the Women of the Gospels?

Saturday, February 19 at 5:00 pm

Free with RSVP

In addition to being the teenaged heroine of *A.D. 16*, Mary Magdalene is prominent among the few women mentioned in the Christian canonical Gospels and perhaps the most complex. She was present at the Crucifixion, and sent by Jesus to announce his resurrection to the Apostles. Her story provides vital clues about Jesus' nameless female disciples, and the status of women two thousand years ago. Behind the Scenes brings together a powerhouse panel of Biblical scholars to discuss the intersection of gender, culture and faith through the portrayal of women in the Hebrew and Christian Bible.

Speakers: **Reverend Diane Dixon-Proctor** (Sharp Street United Methodist Church), **Dr. Annalisa Buttici** (Georgetown University), and **Cantor Stephanie Weishaar** (Kol Nefresh).

ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER

Mission

Olney Theatre Center for the Arts produces and curates theatrical performance for the diverse audiences in our community, and educates, learns from, supports and inspires a more inclusive generation of theater-makers.

Vision

We strive to become an arts and culture powerhouse, redefining the American regional theater movement by cultivating and sharing the creativity of our community.

History

Founded in 1938 as a summer playhouse, Olney Theatre Center (OTC) now produces world and American premieres of plays and musicals, and reimaginations of familiar titles year-round; presents the work of leading companies and artists; tours nationally and locally; teaches students of all ages; and mentors a more inclusive generation of theatremakers. For more than 8 decades, OTC has brought impactful theater performance and education to our community, helping to grow the vibrancy and vitality of our home in the Washington, DC region.

Over the years, some of the biggest names in theater and film have appeared on our stages, including Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Bob Fosse, Phillip Bosco, Eve Arden, Eva Gabor, Burl Ives, Jose Ferrer, Carol Channing, Olivia d'Havilland, Tony Randall, Paulette Goddard, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Jane Seymour, Anne Revere, Frances Sternhagen, Arthur Treacher, James Broderick, Olympia Dukakis, Sir Ian McKellen, Marica Gay Harden, John Colicos, Uzo Aduba, Alan Cumming, Cheyenne Jackson, Robin de Jesus, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, among many, many others.

Olney Theatre is now the cultural anchor of a rapidly changing region and serves one of the most diverse, best educated, and wealthiest counties in the country. Situated on the unceded land of the Piscataway-Conoy people, the Olney area was once a rural farming community with a unique Quaker heritage. Now the area is occupied by every kind of family that makes up 21st Century America, along with major corporations, shopping

districts, civic associations, non profit organizations and a diverse collection of houses of worship. Montgomery County's 1 million residents play a dynamic role in the Baltimore-Washington corridor, and are a driving force behind the region's creative economy.

Olney Theatre Center employs 40 full time staff, 20 part-time positions, 26 early career apprentices and players, and more than 400 professional artists annually. The Theatre intends to continue expanding to better meet the needs of our community.

For more information, please visit olneytheatre.org/history

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