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OLNEY THEATRE CENTER BRINGS TOGETHER DEAF, HEARING, AND HARD OF HEARING ARTISTS TO CREATE A RADICAL AND JOYOUS *MUSIC MAN*

Only Murders in the Building's James Caverly stars as Harold Hill, Sandra Mae Frank and Michael Baron co-direct; lead Deaf and hearing creative team. *A.D. 16* stand-out Adelina Mitchell returns as Marian the Librarian

Olney, MD — May 18, 2022 — Olney Theatre Center once again bets big on musical theatre, with a revolutionary production of Meredith Willson's *The Music Man* that not only casts a Deaf actor, James Caverly in the lead role of Harold Hill, but is generated by a company and creative team that consists of half Deaf and half hearing artists. This project has been gestating at Olney Theatre for four years, long before Hugh Jackman's traditional revival on Broadway, and transforms Willson's utopian vision of River City, into a place where **Deaf and hearing people coexist in community**. Co-directed by renowned Deaf performer **Sandra Mae Frank** and Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma's artistic director **Michael Baron**, *The Music Man* begins previews in Olney's Mainstage on June 17, and opens officially on June 23 with a scheduled run through July 24, 2022. **The invited press performance is Thursday, June 23 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. All performances of *The Music Man* are performed in **ASL and Spoken English and are open captioned.**

James Caverly, who plays Harold Hill, is now best known for his breakthrough performance as Theo Dimas, the son of **Nathan Lane**'s Teddy Dimas on the hit Hulu show *Only Murders in the Building*. However, he was a staff carpenter in Olney Theatre's scene shop for several years, while he also pursued his acting career. It was as a carpenter and after seeing DeafWest's production of *Spring Awakening* on Broadway that Caverly approached Jason Loewith about the prospect of a Deaf-centered musical at Olney. When Loewith asked which one he had in mind, Caverly suggested *The Music Man*. It took several years and the creation of a new Vanguard Arts Fund at the theatre to mount an exploratory workshop in March, 2019.

The week-long workshop brought together a mix of 25 Deaf and hearing artists to serve as a “proof of concept” that involved staging several numbers from the show. A short video about that workshop is viewable [here](#). From the success of that workshop, the decision was made to move forward with a full production in the 20-21 Season that was then pushed back to 21-22 after the pandemic.

Participants in that workshop returning to work on the production include Music Director **Christopher Youstra**, Olney’s Associate Artistic Director for Music Theatre, acclaimed choreographer **Karma Camp**, and **Michelle Banks, as the Director of Artistic Sign Language** – frequently referred to as the DASL (pronounced: dazzle). It falls to Ms. Banks to translate the English script for *The Music Man* into ASL and gestural language. But a DASL is much more than an interpreter – and also provides important artistic contributions informed by their experience of Deaf Culture and interweave it throughout the production. Along with Ms. Frank, and set designer **Ethan Sinnott**, Ms. Banks is one of **three Deaf artists on the creative team, leading a company that is 50% Deaf or hard of hearing and 50% hearing actors**. More than a dozen sign-interpreters are being employed for the rehearsal period to facilitate a truly intercultural artistic process.

During pandemic downtime, **Sandra Mae Frank**, who played Wendla in the Deaf West production of *Spring Awakening*, and also played Marian in the workshop, was brought on as a co-director with her frequent collaborator **Michael Baron**, the Artistic Director of the Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma, where Frank had acted in several musicals. Frank is perhaps best known for her television appearances on shows including *Zoe’s Extraordinary Playlist*, and as the recurring character **Dr. Elizabeth Wilder** on *New Amsterdam*. Baron, in addition to his work at the Lyric, is best known by DC-area audiences for his direction of the current version of ***A Christmas Carol*** at Ford’s Theater as well as a stint as Associate Director of Signature Theatre where he directed several productions.

Returning to the Olney stage in the cast are **Adelina Mitchell** (*A.D. 16*) as Marian, **Vishal Vaidya** (*Godspell* and Broadway’s *Groundhog Day*) as Marcellus and also the vocalizations in the songs of Harold Hill, **Florrie Bagel** (*Peter Pan*) as Ethel Toffelmeier and Understudy Marian, **Heather Marie Beck** (*Joseph...*) as Alma Hicks, along with ensemble members **Jay Frisby** (*Miss You Like Hell*) and **Sarah Ann Sillers** (*Singin’ in the Rain*). Appearing at Olney for the first time is another veteran of the DeafWest Broadway production of *Spring Awakening*, **Amelia Hensley** as Eulalie Shinn. Other cast includes **Matthew August** as Tommy, **Gregor Lopes** as Olinn Britt, **Andrew Morrill** as Mayor Shinn, **Anjel Piñero** as Woman #1, **Mervin Primeaux-OBryant** as Maude Dunlap, **Nicki Runge** as Mrs. Paroo, **Christopher Tester** as Oliver Hicks and

Dylan Toms as Ewart Dunlop. Swings include **Sophia Early, Aarron Loggins, Jane Enabore** and **Stephen Russell Murray**. Youstra conducts a 10-piece orchestra that also chips-in on the barbershop quartet for “Lida Rose.”

On the creative team, joining co-directors Baron and Frank, music director Youstra, choreographer Camp, and set designer Sinnott are costume designer **Rosemary Pardee**, lighting designer **Jesse Belsky**, Olney’s resident sound designer **Matt Rowe**, projections designer **Sean Preston**, and stage manager **Ben Walsh**.

As part of Olney Theatre’s innovative **First Time Free program**, new patrons to Olney Theatre who have never attended an event before, can receive up to **four free tickets to preview performances between June 17 - 22, 2022 by using the code 1stTimeFree** at checkout. They must be a new patron to qualify. Subject to availability.

VACCINATION POLICY

Proof of vaccination or negative Covid test is **no longer required** for performances at the Mainstage, the 1938 Original Theatre or the Root Family Stage. This includes performances of *The Music Man*. Patrons are required to wear masks in performance spaces regardless of vaccination status at all times. Masks are not required while consuming concession in lobby areas only. No food or drink is allowed in the theatre. As public health advice and government mandates may change, patrons are encouraged to visit [OlneyTheatre.org/vax](https://olneytheatre.org/vax) for the most current policies and procedures.

EVENT DETAILS

Meredith Willson’s

The Music Man

Book, Music & Lyrics by Meredith Willson

Story by Meredith Willson & Franklin Lacey

Direction of Artistic Sign Language: Michelle Banks

Music Director: Christopher Youstra

Choreographer: Karma Camp

Co-Directors: Michael Baron & Sandra Mae Frank

Previews: June 17 - 22

Opening Night: June 18, 2022

Runs through: July 11, 2022

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

Behind-the-Scenes Events

The Directors and Creative Team of *The Music Man*

In Conversation With Jason Loewith

Thursday, June 18th - 5:00 - 6:00 PM

Mainstage

Free For Members/\$10 General Public

Also available via Livestream on Olney's Facebook and YouTube pages

Prior to opening night Jason sits down to talk about the collaboration between the hearing and Deaf artists of *The Music Man*.

Panel Discussion: Should Classic Musicals Be Canceled?

Saturday, July 2 at 5:00 pm

Free with RSVP

Also available via Livestream on Olney's Facebook and YouTube pages

As culture rapidly shifts to be more equitable and inclusive, classic musicals that don't fit contemporary sensibilities are either wholly reworked or left to history. Will we ever see productions of 80 year-old shows like *South Pacific*, *Carousel* or *Guys and Dolls* again? Does it matter? Our panel will debate whether classic musicals have an expiration date.

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 reimaginings 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

Follow Olney Theatre Center on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok @olneytheatre and on Facebook at facebook.com/olneytheatre.

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