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A TIMELY SOUTH PACIFIC OPENS OLNEY THEATRE'S 2018-19 SEASON

Director Alan Muraoka and Choreographer Darren Lee team with Lincoln Center vet William Michals and local favorite Jessica Lauren Ball

Olney, MD – August 2, 2018 – Olney Theatre Center opens its 81st season on the Mainstage with the **Rodgers and Hammerstein classic, *South Pacific***, running August 31 - October 7, 2018. **Alan Muraoka**, best known as a long-time cast member on *Sesame Street*, returns to Olney Theatre to direct and re-teams with **Darren Lee**, his choreographer from their 2014 production of *Once On This Island*. Invited press night is Thursday, September 6, 2018 at 8:00pm.

South Pacific broke new ground in 1949 by combining unforgettable songs with incisive social commentary about racism and prejudice wrapped up in a story about love and war. Director Alan Muraoka maintains the story has lost none of its edge and says, "At first glance *South Pacific* seems to be this old, quaint chestnut of a musical written by the original masters of American Musical Theatre, Rodgers & Hammerstein. But ***South Pacific's* story of a young American woman's journey to overcome her learned prejudice in order to find true love seems entirely necessary in our current times.**"

William Michals, a veteran of the 2010 Lincoln Center Theater production of *South Pacific*, returns to the role of Emile de Becque, the French planter with two mixed-race children and in-love with the American nurse, **Nellie Forbush, portrayed by Olney veteran and Helen Hayes Award-nominee Jessica Lauren Ball** (*Guys and Dolls*). **Alex Prakken** makes his Olney Theatre Center debut (following turns on the National tour of *Newsies*) as Marine Lieutenant Joe Cable who, like Nellie, finds himself in a romance sure to bring condemnation back home. **David Schlumpf** makes the first of two consecutive appearances on the Olney Mainstage as Seabee Luther Billis (he'll be back for the holidays in the

title role of *Elf the Musical*). **Cheryl J. Campo** makes her professional debut as the island merchant **Bloody Mary** while **Alexandra Palting** (Imagination Stage's *The Princess and the Pauper*) comes to Olney as her daughter Liat.

South Pacific arrived on Broadway less than a year after President Truman's Executive Order desegregating the Armed Forces. Its progressive message was ahead of its time even as, in retrospect, some of its dramatic devices were thoroughly of its time. Director Muraoka observes, "**As a 4th generation Japanese American, getting the opportunity to direct this show is such a blessing and a gift. But with this comes the great responsibility of tackling issues of racism, sexism, and Orientalism both with a modern eye but without negating the historical accuracy of the piece as a whole.** Bloody Mary, has been portrayed in the past as just a money grubbing opportunist, much like Fagin in *Oliver!* or The Engineer in *Miss Saigon*. But I definitely want to try to find the protective and mother-of-the-earth side to Bloody Mary, especially in her relationship with her daughter, Liat. She is providing for Liat's future and safety, and that is why she caters to the Seabees, Sailors, and Marines. I want to make sure that she is a three dimensional character."

Completing the cast are **Michael Bunce** as Commander Harbison, **Stephen Schmidt** as Captain Brackett, and de Becque's children Ngana and Jerome are played by **Daniela Martinez and Nathan Pham** and siblings **Eliza and Hudson Prymak**. The 10-actor ensemble consists of **Jessica Bennett, Kurt Boehm, Ryan Burke, Jay Frisby, Amanda Kaplan, Christina Kidd, Calvin Malone, Calvin McCullough, Chris Rudy, and Megan Tatum. Tiziano D'Affuso** and **Teresa Danskey** serve as swings.

Muraoka and Lee are joined on the creative team by Music Director **Kristen Lee Rosenfeld**, Scenic Designer **Paige Hathaway**, Costume Designer **Ivania Stack**, Wig Designer **Ali Pohanka**, Lighting Designer **Max Doolittle** and Sound Designer **Ryan Hickey. Trevor A. Riley** is the Production Stage Manager. **Rachel S. Hamilton** is the Assistant Stage Manager.

South Pacific

Music by Richard Rodgers

Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II

Book by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan

Adapted from the Pulitzer Prize winning novel

Tales of the South Pacific by James A. Michener

Music Direction by Kristen Rosenfeld

Choreography by Darren Lee

Directed by Alan Muraoka

August 31 - October 7, 2018

Press Opening: Thursday, September 6, 2018 at 8:00 pm

Regular performances are Wednesday-Saturday at 8:00 pm; matinees on Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 pm; Wednesday matinees on at 2:00 pm. There is no Saturday matinee performance on September 1. There are no Wednesday matinee performances on September 12 and 26.

There will be an Audio-described performance for the blind and visually impaired on Wednesday, September 5 at 8:00 pm. There will be a Sign-interpreted performance on Thursday, September 27 at 8:00 pm.

Tickets begin at \$42. Discounts available for groups, seniors, military and students.

Special Events:

● **BEHIND-THE-SCENES: Alan Muraoka - From Sesame Street to the South Pacific**

Saturday, September 1 at 5:00 PM

\$10/Free for Olney Theatre Center Members

As an actor, Mr. Muraoka is most recognizable for his role in the Emmy Award winning series, ***Sesame Street***, where he has played "Alan," the proprietor of Hooper's Store for the past 18 seasons. He is also a critically acclaimed director for his all Asian production of the William Finn musical *Falsettoland* for the National Asian American Theatre Company (NAATCO), which enjoyed a sold-out run at the Vineyard Theatre in NYC. He returns to Olney for the first time since directing *Once On This Island* in 2013. Join him as he discusses his journey to *South Pacific* and his approach to this production.

- Post-show discussions will occur after the following Saturday matinee performances:
 - September 8, 15, 22, 29 and October 6

● **APPLAUSE! SERIES CONCERT**

ANYONE CAN WHISTLE

Book by Arthur Laurents

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Friday, October 12, 2018 at 8:00 pm

This marks the inaugural program of Olney Theatre's new series of concert recitals of musicals we believe deserve a second-look. Featuring a large orchestra and members of the *South Pacific* cast, the series begins with a less-frequently produced work of Oscar Hammerstein II's greatest pupil, Stephen Sondheim's *Anyone Can Whistle*. The story of a corrupt mayor (originally played by Angela Lansbury) who fakes a miracle to revitalize her bankrupt town. A legendary cult show, this wacky, intelligent, highly unconventional musical points ahead to Stephen Sondheim's groundbreaking work in the 1970s, even as it keeps a foot firmly rooted in musical theatre's "golden age." Tickets begin at \$60.

ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER

Olney Theatre Center for the Arts produces, presents and tours extraordinary performances for a diversity of audiences, and educates and inspires the next generation of theater-makers. We strive every day to unleash the creative potential of our artists and audiences, and in so doing, become a nationally-prominent destination for the most impactful theater performance and education. In the past five years, Olney Theatre has twice won the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Musical Production and produced 6 world premieres, including Andrew Hinderaker's *The Magic Play* and *Colossal* (2015 Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play or Musical), and Jennifer Hoppe-House's *Bad Dog* (2015 Steinberg Award nominee). Olney Theatre places a priority on engaging our community by ensuring that we remain affordable, accessible and inviting to new and returning audiences.

Located just north of Washington, D.C. in arts-rich Montgomery County, Maryland, is situated on 14 wooded acres in the heart of the beautiful Washington-Baltimore-Frederick "triangle," within easy access to all three cities, and is also home to National Players, America's longest-running touring company. Olney Theatre Center is led by Artistic Director Jason Loewith and Managing Director Debbie Ellinghaus. For more information, please visit olneytheatre.org.

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