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OLNEY THEATRE CENTER GIVES NEW LIFE TO DISNEY'S *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Director Marcia Milgrom Dodge returns to Olney Theatre; Jade Jones stars as Belle; Cancer survivor Evan "Lord Pegleg" Ruggiero cast as the Beast

Olney, MD — October 4, 2021 — Resuming its tradition of big, family musicals for the holidays, Olney Theatre Center produces *Disney's Beauty and the Beast* (**November 5, 2021 - January 2, 2022**). Directed by **Marcia Milgrom Dodge**, who wowed Olney audiences with her Helen Hayes Award-nominated production of *Once*, this Broadway hit gets a fresh perspective with two performers who challenge our expectations of a Disney Princess and her Prince. **Jade Jones**, who in 2020 received two Helen Hayes Award nominations for her performances in *School Girls, or the African Mean Girls Play* (Round House Theatre) and *Into the Woods* (Ford's Theatre) stars as Belle. **Evan Ruggiero** co-stars as the Beast; after losing a leg to cancer in his teenage years, Ruggiero continued to pursue a dancing career and has gone on to become a Drama Desk-nominated performer and the self-proclaimed "[Lord Pegleg](#)."

The invited press performance is Thursday, November 11 at 8:00 pm. Interested critics may reserve two tickets by emailing sstraub@olneytheatre.org. Tickets are available from \$42 - \$99 and can be purchased at olneytheatre.org or 301-924-3400.

For decades, Disney and specifically its *Beauty and the Beast* have defined "beauty" for children all over the world. **Marcia Milgrom Dodge's production aims to celebrate "beauty" in all its forms.** Milgrom Dodge has a long track record of "smuggling in" a deeper meaning to classic stories, and uncovering the burning, contemporary truths beneath them. She explained, "**Our production celebrates community, authenticity, acceptance, and kindness; and with the help of a few magic spells, provides a thoroughly inclusive, 2021 'Happily Ever After.'**"

Says Olney Theatre's Artistic Director **Jason Loewith**, "**Throughout the years, media in all its forms have defined western notions of 'beauty.'** As cultural arts workers, we recognize these definitions are limiting and have caused immeasurable harm particularly for women and those differently-abled. Under Marcia's visionary

leadership, this production marks a titanic shift, reimagining a beloved family classic for the time we're in."

Nominated for a Tony Award for her 2009 **Broadway revival of *Ragtime***, Milgrom Dodge's work has been seen throughout the United States, in Canada, England, Asia, Denmark, and the Middle East, in theatres both on Broadway and Off-Broadway, and at acclaimed regional theatres such as the New York City Opera, the Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, Goodman Theatre, and Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. Her work has won Helen Hayes, Carbonell, Los Angeles Drama Critics, Backstage Garland, Dora Mavor, New York Outer Critics Circle, and Daytime Emmy Awards and she has been nominated for Tony, Drama Desk, Astaire, Drama League, Barrymore, and Edgar Awards. She is an executive board member of the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society and a published and produced playwright. Dodge is also a featured director on the new Disney+ reality show, *Encore!*

Choreographer **Josh Walden** reunites with Milgrom Dodge after serving as Associate Director/Choreographer on the 2009 revival of *Ragtime*. He has choreographed an episode of *Encore!* on Disney+, as well as various productions at the Kennedy Center, Drury Lane Theatre, Signature Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and the Tisch School of the Arts. Walden's Director/Choreographer credits include *A Chorus Line* (Maltz Jupiter Theatre, Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, and Theatre Memphis), *Legally Blonde* (Merry-Go-Round Playhouse), *On the Town* (Capital City Theatre), and the rock opera *Fallen Angel*, which won Best Musical at the International Fringe Festival. As a performer, Walden has been seen in the Broadway revivals of *42nd Street*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *A Chorus Line*, and *Ragtime*. His dance company, Josh Walden Dance Theatre, received an honorable mention for Direction and Choreography at the New York Musical Theatre Festival for its production of *All Is Love*.

Award-winning music director **Walter "Bobby" McCoy** currently works with young artists as a faculty member with both Adventure Theatre MTC and Levine Music School. His music direction credits include *The Wild Party* at Constellation Theatre Company, *Caroline, or Change* and *Once On This Island* at Creative Cauldron, *A Christmas Story*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Mame* at Riverside Center for the Performing Arts, and *American Idiot* and *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* at Little Butterfly Theatre. McCoy earned a Helen Hayes Award in 2017 for his music direction of *In the Heights* at GALA Hispanic Theatre, as well as a nomination for his work on *Old Wicked Songs* at 1st Stage in 2015.

Performer **Jade Jones** is sure to enchant audiences in the role of **Belle** as she makes her return to the Olney stage. DC theatre-goers have recently seen her in *The Amen*

Corner at Shakespeare Theatre Company, *School Girls; or, The African Mean Girls Play* at Round House Theatre, *Into The Woods* and *The Wiz* at Ford's Theatre, *As You Like It* at The Keegan Theatre, and *Sweeney Todd* at Rep Stage. She has been nominated for three Helen Hayes Awards, including two in 2020 for her roles in *School Girls* (Nana) and *Into the Woods* (Little Red Ridinghood).

Evan Ruggiero will play opposite Jones in his role as **the Beast**. Ruggiero began dancing at the age of five in his hometown studio and by age ten, was accepted into the New Jersey Tap Ensemble. **Upon being diagnosed with Osteosarcoma in his right leg during his sophomore year at Montclair State University, he was suddenly faced with amputation in order to stop the cancer and save his life. Eighteen months after the amputation, and only two days after receiving his “peg-leg,” Evan was tap dancing again.** In 2018 he received a Drama Desk Nomination for Best Actor in a Musical, a Chita Rivera Award Nomination for Best Dancer in a Musical, and was awarded a Clive Barnes Award in Theatre for his portrayal of Tom Jones in NYC's **off-broadway hit *Bastard Jones***. That year, he also performed at Carnegie Hall and the 90th Oscars. He has performed for notable individuals such as Ellen Degeneres, President Joe Biden and his wife Dr. Jill Biden, Egypt's sixth and current president, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and recently performed alongside Grammy winning artist Jason Mraz.

Olney Theatre's *Beauty and the Beast* will also feature **Michael Burrell** as Gaston, **Bobby Smith (*Elf*)** as Lumiere, **Dylan Arredondo** (National Players Alumnus) as Cogsworth, **John Sygar (*Once*)** as Lefou, and **Iyona Blake** as Mrs. Potts and **Miranda Pepin** (National Players Alumna) as Chip Jessica Lauren Ball (*Cabaret*) as Madame de la Grande Bouche **Sasha Olinick** as Maurice and **Hailey Ibberson** as Babette. The ensemble includes: **Conor James Reilly, Rick Westerkamp, Ariel Messeca, Michael Wood, Selena Clyne-Galindo, Erica Leigh Hansen, Quynh-My Luu, Tyler White,** and **Megan Tatum**; with **Shiloh Orr** and **Graciela Rey** as swings. The production showcases fight choreography by **Robb Hunter**, scenic design by **Narelle Sissons**, costume design by **Ivania Stack**, wig design by **Ali Pohanka**, lighting design by **Colin K. Bills**, and sound design by **Matt Rowe**. **John Keith Hall** is the Stage Manager.

VACCINATION POLICY

Masks and proof of COVID vaccination are required at all Olney Theatre performances. Those under 12 who are not yet eligible for the COVID vaccine must be masked and accompanied by a vaccinated adult. We do not accept proof of a recent negative COVID test in lieu of vaccination. Visit OlneyTheatre.org/vax for more information.

EVENT DETAILS

Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*

Music by Alan Menken

Lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice

Book by Linda Woolverton

Directed by Marcia Milgrom Dodge

Music Direction by Walter "Bobby" McCoy

Choreography by Josh Walden

November 5, 2021 - January 2, 2022

Tickets: \$42-\$99 available at olneytheatre.org and 301-924-3400

Socially distanced seating is available in the Mezzanine at all performances

BEHIND THE SCENES EVENTS for BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

BEAUTY AND THE BODY

Monday, November 8th, 7:00 - 8:30pm, Free

online

What makes a body beautiful on stage or screen, and who decides? Casting Directors weigh in.

From Hollywood glamour to Disney princesses, western constructs of beauty are inextricably linked to the images we see on our screens and on our stages, and those images heavily impact us culturally. Is it possible for these media to help American culture expand its definition of beauty in a more inclusive way, taking into account race, body type and ability? We ask a panel of casting directors from LA, New York and DC to answer the question.

OPENING NIGHT DIALOGUE: A conversation with Director Marcia Milgrom Dodge

Thursday, November 11th, 5:00 - 6:00 pm,

Free for Olney Theatre members / \$10 General Public

Mainstage

Tony-nominee Marcia Milgrom Dodge, who helmed our award-winning production of *Once* back in 2018-19, is a nationally-recognized interpreter of the musical-theater canon. In her words, she "smuggles in" the deeper meaning of classic texts to uncover the burning, contemporary truths beneath them. Artistic Director Jason Loewith interviews Marcia onstage about her career, and how her production of *Beauty and the Beast* expands the definition of beauty for 2021.

EXPERIENCE THE MAGIC OF *BEAUTY & THE BEAST* BACKSTAGE!

Saturday, November 13th, 5:00 -6:00 pm,

Free for Olney Theatre members/\$10 General Public

Mainstage

Dancing candlesticks, magic roses, moving teacups... how does a professional theater bring the magic behind *Beauty & the Beast* to life? We want to show you! So we're inviting folks of every age to come on stage and see how we do it. Lighting demonstrations, costume and prop displays, scenery moves... our professional production staff leads you on an inspiring tour through the backstage magic. RSVP early; this annual event tends to sell out fast!

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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