

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR SUMMER: THE DONNA SUMMER MUSICAL

THREE ACCLAIMED ACTRESSES – TONY AWARD WINNER LACHANZE, ARIANA DEBOSE AND STORM LEVER – PORTRAY TITLE ROLE IN WORLD PREMIERE BASED ON LIFE OF MUSICAL ICON

La Jolla, CA – La Jolla Playhouse announces the cast and creative team for its world-premiere production of **SUMMER: The Donna Summer Musical**, featuring book by **Colman Domingo, Robert Cary** and **Playhouse Director Emeritus Des McAnuff** (*Jersey Boys, The Who's Tommy*); directed by **Des McAnuff**; choreographed by Olivier Award winner **Sergio Trujillo** (*Memphis, Jersey Boys*), with musical supervision by **Ron Melrose**. The production will run in the Mandell Weiss Theatre **November 7 – December 17**. Tickets are available by calling Playhouse Patron Services at **(858) 550-1010** or online at **LaJollaPlayhouse.org**.

The cast will feature three actresses in the role of Donna Summer: Tony Award winner **LaChanze** (*Broadway's The Color Purple, Once on This Island*) as "Diva Donna," **Ariana DeBose** (*Broadway's A Bronx Tale*) as "Disco Donna" and **Storm Lever** (*Playhouse's Freaky Friday*) as "Duckling Donna."

They are joined by **Mackenzie Bell** as "Giorgio," **Kimberly Dodson** as "Dara/Amanda," **Anissa Felix** as "Adult Mary Ellen," **Drew Foster** as "Brian," **Ari Groover** as "Ami," **Afra Hines** as "Maid/Michael," **Aaron Krohn** as "Neil," **Jenny Laroche** as "Pastor/Norm," **Wonu Ogunfowora** as "Mary Ellen/Brooklyn," **Rebecca Riker** as "Bob/Don," **Christina Robinson** as "Adult Dara," **Ken Robinson** as "Andrew Gaines," **Jessica Rush** as "Joyce," **Kaye Tuckerman** as "Pete" and **Jared Zirilli** (*Broadway's Lysistrata Jones*) as "Bruce Sudano," along with swings **Aurelia Michael** and **Andra Caston**.

The creative team includes former La Jolla Playhouse Artist-in-Residence and UC San Diego faculty member **Robert Brill** (*His Girl Friday, Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*), Scenic Design; Tony Award winner **Paul Tazewell** (*Side Show, Hollywood*), Costume Design; multiple Tony Award winner **Howell Binkley** (*Jersey Boys, Come From Away*), Lighting Design; Tony Award winner **Gareth Owen** (*Come From Away, The Hunchback of Notre Dame*), Sound Design; **Sean Nieuwenhuis**, Projection Design; **Bill Brendle**,

Orchestrations; **Victoria Theodore**, Music Director/Conductor; **Shirley Fishman**, Dramaturg; **Tara Rubin**, Casting; and **Andrew Neal**, Stage Manager.

“Led by three powerhouse actresses in the title role, the cast of this dazzling new musical is poised to give full, glorious voice to the story and music of Donna Summer,” said **Playhouse Artistic Director Christopher Ashley**. “In addition to our Director Emeritus Des McAnuff, *SUMMER* also reunites Playhouse audiences with a ‘dream team’ of designers whose work has been seen in dozens of memorable productions.”

This vibrant, world-premiere musical charts the incomparable life of Donna Summer, the undisputed Queen of Disco, from her modest Boston childhood to international stardom. Told through the dramatic lens of her final concert, ***SUMMER: The Donna Summer Musical*** presents the complexities and conflicts the iconic songwriter and singer faced in her meteoric rise – and descent. Featuring three actresses in the title role and a score with more than 20 of Summer’s classic hits including “Love to Love You, Baby,” “Bad Girls” and “Hot Stuff,” this electric experience is a moving tribute to the voice of a generation. Playhouse Director Emeritus Des McAnuff, acclaimed for creating unforgettable theatrical events from indelible popular music in such shows as *Jersey Boys* and *The Who’s Tommy*, returns to the Playhouse with a production that will combine stirring drama with the propulsive, kinetic heart of a rock concert.

LaChanze won the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical in 2006 for *The Color Purple*. Other Broadway credits include *Once on This Island* (Tony and Drama Desk nominations), *If/Then*, *Ragtime*, *Company* and *Uptown It’s Hot*. Off-Broadway, she has appeared in *Dessa Rose* (Obie Award and Drama Desk Award nomination), *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* (Drama Desk Award nomination) and *Inked Baby*. Other theatre credits: *The Wiz*, *Baby*, *From the Mississippi Delta* and *Spunk*. Film credits include *The Help* (SAG Award), *Side Effects*, *Breaking Upwards*, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, Disney’s *Hercules*, *For Love or Money* and *Leap of Faith*. TV credits include *Handel’s Messiah Rocks* (Emmy Award), *Lucy* (CBS TV movie), *Law & Order: SVU*, *Sex and the City*, *New York Undercover* and *The Cosby Show*. MsLaChanze.com; Twitter: @lachanze.

Ariana DeBose recently wrapped up her run as Jane in Chazz Palminteri’s *A Bronx Tale* directed by Jerry Zaks and Robert De Niro. Her other credits include *Hamilton* (Off-Broadway and original Broadway cast), Leading Player in the Tony-winning revival of *Pippin*, Mary Wilson of the Supremes (Diana Ross cover) in *Motown*, Nautica in *Andy*

Blankenhuhler's *Bring It On the Musical* and Sondheim's *Company* with the NY Philharmonic. Her TV credits include: *Blue Bloods* (CBS), *The Breaks* (VH1), *SYTYCD* top 20 season 6 (Fox) & *OLTL Star-Crossed Lovers Series*. Instagram & Twitter @arianadebose

Storm Lever recently appeared in La Jolla Playhouse's production of *Freaky Friday*. She has appeared off-Broadway as Dorothy in *The Wringer* (City Center). Other New York theatre includes Jade in *Fashion Academy* (Vital Theater) and Meredith in *Good Swimmer* (Prototype Festival). Workshop: *The Donna Summer Project*. Regional credits include Savannah in *Freaky Friday* (Signature Theater, VA); understudy in *Emotional Creature* (Berkeley Rep); Siren in *Kansas City Choir Boy* (Arsht Center, FL). Education: B.F.A., University of Michigan.

The Tony Award-winning **La Jolla Playhouse** is internationally-renowned for creating some of the most exciting and adventurous work in American theatre, through its new play development initiatives, its innovative Without Walls series, artist commissions and residencies. Currently led by Artistic Director and 2017 Tony Award winner Christopher Ashley and Managing Director Michael S. Rosenberg, the Playhouse was founded in 1947 by Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire and Mel Ferrer, and reborn in 1983 under the artistic leadership of Des McAnuff. La Jolla Playhouse has had 28 productions transfer to Broadway, garnering 38 Tony Awards, among them the currently-running, Tony Award-nominated hit *Come From Away*, along with *Jersey Boys*, *Memphis*, *The Who's Tommy*, *Big River*, as well as Billy Crystal's *700 Sundays* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *I Am My Own Wife*, both fostered as part of the Playhouse's Page To Stage Program. LaJollaPlayhouse.org.

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FACT SHEET

WHAT: *SUMMER: The Donna Summer Musical*

Book by Colman Domingo, Robert Cary and Des McAnuff

Directed by Des McAnuff

Choreographed by Sergio Trujillo

Musical Supervision by Ron Melrose

WHEN: November 7 – December 17

Tue/Wed at 7:30pm; Thu/Fri/Sat at 8pm; Sun at 7pm; Sat/Sun at 2pm

WHERE: Mandell Weiss Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse

2910 La Jolla Village Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037

WHO:

Music Director: Victoria Theodore

Scenic Design: Robert Brill

Lighting Design: Howell Binkley

Projection Design: Sean Nieuwenhuis

Dramaturg: Shirley Fishman

Orchestrations: Bill Brendle

Costume Design: Paul Tazewell

Sound Design: Gareth Owen

Casting: Tara Rubin Casting

Stage Manager: Andrew Neal

Cast:

Giorgio

Disco Donna

Dara/Amanda

Adult Mary Ellen

Brian

Ami

Maid/Michael

Neil

Diva Donna

Pastor/Norm

Duckling Donna

Mary Ellen/Brooklyn

Bob/Don

Adult Dara

Andrew Gaines

Joyce

Pete

Bruce Sudano

Swings

Mackenzie Bell

Ariana DeBose

Kimberly Dodson

Anissa Felix

Drew Foster

Ari Groover

Afra Hines

Aaron Krohn

LaChanze

Jenny Laroche

Storm Lever

Wonu Ogunfowora

Rebecca Riker

Christina Robinson

Ken Robinson

Jessica Rush

Kaye Tuckerman

Jared Zirilli

Aurelia Michael, Andra Caston

ADDITIONAL EVENTS:

- Foodie Fridays: Nov 10, 17, 24, Dec 1, 8, 15; pre-show food trucks starting at 6pm
- Sonic Saturdays: Nov 11, 18, 25, 30; Dec 2, 9, 16; pre-show, live band entertainment
- ACCESS Performance: Saturday, December 2 at 2pm
- Talkback Tuesdays: November 14 and 28, following the 7:30pm performance
- Insider Events: Wed, November 29 at 6:45pm; Sat, December 9 at 1:15pm
- Discovery Sunday: December 10, following the 2pm performance

SPONSORS: MSI Production Services; Melissa & Michael Bartel; Brian & Silvija Devine; Gurtin: Municipal Bond Management

Recipient of a 2017 Edgerton Foundation New Play Award

TICKETS: (858) 550-1010; LaJollaPlayhouse.org