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.”


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
Blankenbuhler’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
Orchestrations: Bill Brendle
Scenic Design: Robert Brill
Costume Design: Paul Tazewell
Lighting Design: Howell Binkley
Sound Design: Gareth Owen
Projection Design: Sean Nieuwenhuis
Casting: Tara Rubin Casting
Dramaturg: Shirley Fishman
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