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## The Festival Begins!

### Alabama Shakespeare Festival launches extended spring festival repertory with Great American classic *OUR TOWN* and Shakespeare's *ROMEO & JULIET*

**MONTGOMERY, Ala.,** (February 11, 2019) — Alabama Shakespeare Festival presents Thornton Wilder's great American classic, *Our Town*, on the Festival Stage February 21 – April 27 in repertory with Shakespeare's most famous play, *Romeo & Juliet*, February 28 – April 29.

Tickets start at \$28 and are available by calling 334.271.5353 or visiting the ASF Box Office, open Monday through Saturday 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., or anytime online at [asf.net](http://asf.net). Evening performances begin at 7:00 p.m.; matinee performances begin at 2:00 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays and at 3:00 p.m. on Sundays.

Edward Albee called Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, "A masterpiece. Probably the greatest American play ever written." This Pulitzer Prize-winning drama explores the relationship between two young Grover's Corners neighbors, George Gibbs and Emily Webb, whose childhood friendship blossoms into a romance that culminates in marriage. With humor, wit, and exceptionally powerful storytelling, *Our Town* illuminates the powerful bonds that hold communities together through everyday life and moments of crisis, delivering truths about what it means to be human and encouraging all to live life to its fullest.

Guest director Bruce Longworth said, "Seventy-five years after it was written, Thornton Wilder's play still resonates on a deeply human level. It speaks to what we all have in common. We're born, we live, we die. We have triumphs and disappointments, joys and griefs, moments of contentment, fascination, frustration, boredom, and doubt. We fall in love, have our hearts broken, and do it all over again. These things transcend culture, race, politics, religion, and geography. *Our Town* is about the human community, and it's good to be reminded of what binds us together rather than what divides us."

Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, the iconic story of a forbidden romance is produced with vivid and dynamic direction by Rick Dildine, ASF's artistic director. This is the first Shakespearean play Dildine will direct at Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Dildine received national acclaim for his visionary direction of Shakespeare's works at Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, where he was artistic director for eight seasons. Kevin Moriarty, chairman of the board of Theatre Communications Group, shared, "Rick has the ability to tell a story with clarity, energy, and creativity. His work is theatrically entertaining, smart, original, and engaging for broad audiences. He has the unique ability to create productions of classics that respect the text while also speaking powerfully to contemporary audiences."

"When I'm directing Shakespeare, I regularly draw upon live music, imaginative storytelling, and diverse ensembles of multitalented actors. The show is fast-paced and feels fresh in the hands of these actors," said Dildine. "I want to make plays that allow young people to fall in love with theatre."

The two productions share a large repertory cast. Cassia Thompson, a New York-based actor making her Alabama Shakespeare Festival debut, was recently seen at American Players Theatre, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, and Shakespeare Festival St. Louis. Cassia plays Juliet (*Romeo & Juliet*) and Emily Webb (*Our Town*). Also making his ASF debut, Matt Lytle plays Romeo (*Romeo & Juliet*) and Sam Craig (*Our Town*). Matt has appeared at Trinity Repertory Company, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, Saratoga Shakespeare Company, Nashville Shakespeare Festival, Cincinnati

Shakespeare Company, and Kentucky Shakespeare, as well as on national tour in *Romeo & Juliet*. Michael Williams, seen off-Broadway in *Cruel Intentions*, in the National Tour of *Bullets Over Broadway*, and at the St. Louis Rep and Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, plays Paris (*Romeo & Juliet*) and George Gibbs (*Our Town*). Douglas Rees, who has appeared at numerous theaters around the country, as well as many theaters in New York City and on television (*30 Rock*), appears as Friar Lawrence (*Romeo & Juliet*) and the Stage Manager (*Our Town*). Ann Arvia recently played Mother Abbess in ASF's *The Sound of Music* and returns to the Festival Stage as Nurse (*Romeo & Juliet*) and Mrs. Soames (*Our Town*); Ann's New York credits include *Mary Poppins*, *Les Misérables*, and *Beauty and the Beast*, along with national tours of *Les Misérables* and *Ragtime*. Billy Finn appears as Mercutio (*Romeo & Juliet*) and Howie Newsome (*Our Town*). His New York credits include Irish Rep, ARS NOVA, Roundabout Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, and his regional credits include McCarter Theatre Center, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Trinity Rep, Folger Theatre, and Shakespeare Theatre Company.

The company of actors for *Our Town* also includes Toree Alexandre (Rebecca Gibbs/Choir), Brik Berkes (Joe Stoddard), Tyshon Boone (Si Crowell/Choir/Mourner), Grant Chapman (Simon Stimson), Katrina Clark (Woman in the Balcony/Choir/Woman Among Dead), Nehassaiu deGannes (Mrs. Gibbs), Christopher Gerson (Dr. Gibbs), James Judy (Constable Warren), Chris Marth (Baseball Player/Choir/Mourner), Dane McMichael (Joe Crowell/Choir/Mourner), Tony Pellegrino (Belligerent Man/Choir/Man Among Dead), Erick Pinnick (Professor Willard), Eduardo Ruiz (Baseball Player/Choir/Mourner), Louis Sallan (Mr. Carter Among Dead/Choir), Michelle Shupe (Mrs. Webb), Chauncy Thomas (Mr. Webb), and Sigrid Wise (Wally Webb/Lady in the Box).

The company of actors for *Romeo & Juliet* include Toree Alexandre (Apothecary), Brik Berkes (Prince), Tyshon Boone (1<sup>st</sup> Watchman), Katrina Clark (Paris' Page), Nehassaiu deGannes (Lady Capulet), Christopher Gerson (Capulet), Chris Marth (3<sup>rd</sup> Watchman), Dane McMichael (Sampson/Peter), Tony Pellegrino (Abraham/Friar John), Erick Pinnick (Montague), Eduardo Ruiz (Pertruchio/2<sup>nd</sup> Watchman), Louis Sallan (Tybalt), Michelle Shupe (Lady Montague), Chauncy Thomas (Benvolio), and Sigrid Wise (Gregory/Balthasar).

The artistic and design teams for both *Our Town* and *Romeo & Juliet* include scenic design by Josh Smith, costume design by Theresa Ham, and lighting design by Masha Tsimring. The *Our Town* artistic team also includes Director Bruce Longworth, Sound Designer Amy Altadonna, Stage Manager Ruth E. Kramer, Assistant Stage Manager Victoria Broyles, Assistant Costume Designer Matthew Carl, and Production Assistant Alena Efremova. The *Romeo & Juliet* artistic team includes Director Rick Dildine, Fight Choreographer Paul Dennhardt, Choreographer Lindsay Renea Benton, Sound Designer Melanie Chen Cole, Stage Manager Victoria Broyles, Assistant Stage Manager Ruth E. Kramer, Assistant Costume Designer Matthew Carl, Production Assistant Madison Rutledge, and Fight Captain Tony Pellegrino.

Special events presented in conjunction with these productions include a Conversation at Kress on Dexter on March 2, 2019, at 10:00 a.m., which will be a panel discussion hosted by ASF about the Montgomery community with a focus on what there is to celebrate and where we are failing. On March 30, ASF's technical director and artisans invite the public to experience a Narrated Changeover on the Festival Stage, which allows the audience to watch the stage crew transition the set from one show to the other while the crew shares details about developing the designs for *Our Town* and *Romeo & Juliet*. Forty-five minutes before each performance of *Romeo & Juliet*, Resident Dramaturg Dr. Susan Willis will present an engaging 20-minute summary of the production's themes, plot points, and story in the Octagon Lobby.

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**EMBRACING OUR COMMUNITY – ONE STORY AT A TIME.**

***Alabama Shakespeare Festival is a not-for-profit organization under the direction of Artistic Director Rick Dildine and Executive Director Todd Schmidt. Designated as The State Theatre of Alabama, ASF is a leader in education and outreach, serving more than 40,000 students annually with artistic programming. ASF is supported by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.***