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Memphis Takes the Tonys !

5th Avenue co-production from last season wins prestigious Broadway awards

SEATTLE, WA –*Memphis*, the high-octane musical about the early days of rock ‘n roll, has added to its critical reputation by receiving four Tonys at this year’s Tony Awards®: Best Musical, Best Book, Best Score, and Best Orchestration. The musical was produced at Seattle’s 5th Avenue Theatre in 2009 (in collaboration with the La Jolla Playhouse) where it was acclaimed by audiences and critics alike. *Memphis* is one of nine new musicals that have been developed and produced by The 5th Avenue over the past nine years, along with the Tony Award-winning *Hairspray* and *Catch Me If You Can*, which will open on Broadway next season.

Memphis tells the fictional story of a white DJ who falls in love with a black singer in 1950s Tennessee and helps to usher in the birth of a new popular music. Opening on Broadway to ecstatic reviews (“exhilarating...the very essence of what a Broadway musical should be.” **AP**; “*Memphis* is a musical you have to see even if you have to bribe somebody to get tickets,” **WOR Radio**), the show has already won three Drama Desk awards, including Best Musical, and four Outer Critics Circle Awards, including Best Broadway Musical.

In addition to winning the Best Musical Tony, awards went to Joe DiPietro (best known for *I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change*) for Best Book, to David Bryan (a founding member of Bon Jovi) for Best Score, and Daryl Waters & David Bryan for Best Orchestration. Seattle native (and Tony nominee) Chad Kimball stars in the show as white DJ Huey Calhoun; Kimball grew up in West Seattle and is a graduate of Roosevelt High School. The Broadway production is directed by Christopher Ashley (*Xanadu*) and choreographed by Sergio Trujillo (*Jersey Boys*).

Seattle’s connection also includes the involvement of two long-time 5th Avenue supporters, Kenny and Marleen Alhadeff. Both were introduced to the *Memphis* producing team of Sue Frost and Randy Adams early on by Marilyn Sheldon, The 5th’s former Managing Director. “In addition to being great supporters of The 5th (Kenny had been our Board Chairman for four years, and together they serve as our ‘Producing Partners’), we knew that Kenny and Marleen were interested in getting into commercial theatre production as well,” recalls The 5th’s Executive Producer and Artistic Director David Armstrong. “This was, as I suspected, a match made in heaven, and Kenny and Marleen eventually become full partners in Junkyard Dog, the production company that Sue and Randy founded. Most importantly the Alhadeffs fell deeply in love with *Memphis*.”

“Kenny and Marleen have been at the center of all of that activity and effort, including raising a significant portion of the Broadway capitalization,” continues Armstrong. “Of course they drew many of their investors from the Puget Sound region including other 5th Avenue Board members and donors. Junkyard Dog has now established itself as a new and significant force on Broadway, and I’m certain that *Memphis* is only the first of many great shows that they will produce.”

We at The 5th congratulate the artists and producers of *Memphis*, as well as Village Theatre for *Million Dollar Quartet*, a show that had an early incarnation at their Theatre and won a Tony for actor Levi Kreis’s portrayal of Jerry Lee Lewis.

The 5th Avenue Theatre is Seattle’s premier musical theater. In 1980, the non-profit 5th Avenue Theatre began producing and presenting top-quality live musical theater for the cultural enrichment of the Northwest community. The 5th Avenue Theatre maintains a subscription audience of over 25,000 and an annual attendance of more than 287,000. It ranks among the nation’s largest and most respected musical theater companies. The Theatre is committed to encouraging the next generation of theatergoers through its Educational Outreach Program which includes: The Adventure Musical Theatre Touring Company, The 5th Avenue High School Musical Theatre Awards, the Student Matinee Program and Spotlight Nights. Unique in its Chinese-inspired design, the exquisite theater opened in 1926 as a venue for vaudeville and film. Today, under the leadership of Executive Producer and Artistic Director David Armstrong, Managing Director Bernadine C. Griffin and Producing Director Bill Berry, The 5th Avenue Theatre continues to achieve the highest standards in all aspects of artistic endeavors and facility operations, while preserving its artistic, architectural and historic legacy. Visit www.5thavenue.org.

Special thanks to The 5th’s 2011 Season Co-Sponsors Safeco Insurance and US Bank.

Please contact **John Longenbaugh**, Public Relations Manager, at **(206) 625-1418** with questions or to schedule individual interviews.

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