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**BROADWAY'S BRIGHTEST MINGLE WITH SEATTLE'S STARS IN
SAVING AIMEE
A SOUL-STIRRING NEW MUSICAL AT THE 5TH AVENUE THEATRE
FEATURING CAROLEE CARMELLO, JUDY KAYE, AND ROZ RYAN**

*Book and Lyrics by Kathie Lee Gifford; Music by David Pomeranz & David Friedman
Additional Music by Kathie Lee Gifford; Directed by David Armstrong*

September 30, 2011 – October 29, 2011

(Tuesday, July 26, 2011 – SEATTLE, WA) Broadway luminaries **Carolee Carmello, Judy Kaye, and Roz Ryan** will grace **The 5th Avenue Theatre** stage under the direction of **David Armstrong** in the West Coast premiere of ***Saving Aimee***, a soul-stirring new musical with book and lyrics by **Kathie Lee Gifford**, and music by **David Pomeranz** and **David Friedman**. Also joining the cast are Broadway veterans **Ed Dixon** and **Ed Watts**, and Seattle stars **Charles Leggett** and **Brandon O'Neill**. This is the powerful true story of 1920's evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, who catapulted to unexpected stardom as the founder of the first mega-church and a media empire. The rise and fall of a woman cloaked in intrigue, embroiled in scandal, and at the heart of one of the nation's first sensationalized trials, ***Saving Aimee***, celebrates the unstoppable force of a powerful woman inspired to great heights in a man's world.

Saving Aimee plays **September 30-October 29** (*press opening October 20*) at **The 5th Avenue Theatre** (1308 5th Avenue, Seattle). Tickets (starting at \$28.00) may be purchased at www.5thavenue.org, by phone at 206-625-1900, or at the box office at 1308 5th Avenue in downtown Seattle.

"I've been fascinated by Aimee Semple McPherson for many years," says Executive Producer and Artistic Director David Armstrong. "Aimee's remarkable, and truly American story as the original celebrity evangelist, the first true media darling, and a seemingly untouchable moral figure disgraced in the public eye, make her the ideal focus for an epic musical. We are thrilled and honored to have such talented and respected performers join us to bring this incredibly controversial woman's life to the stage."

Saving Aimee is the astonishing true story of Aimee Semple McPherson, the 1920's celebrity evangelist who ascended from a spirited farm girl to the founder of a church attended by thousands, and brought the gospel to the masses through her radio station KFSG, at a time

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when most women were not allowed to work, let alone lead. Hounded by the press, plagued by rumors of scandalous affairs, and driven to addiction by her frenetic lifestyle, the true intrigue of this mysterious, thrice-married media maven was her 5 week disappearance in 1926, branded by Aimee as a kidnapping and the newspapers as a cover-up for her affair with a married man. The true nature of the disappearance of Aimee Semple McPherson ballooned into the trial of the century, calling to the forefront of public conversation “Was she a woman of God, or the devil in a dress?”

Broadway powerhouse **Carolee Carmello** returns to the role of the titular character Aimee Semple McPherson after playing the character in an earlier incarnation at the prestigious Signature Theatre. Ms. Carmello was most recently seen in Broadway's *The Addams Family* where she played Alice Beineke. Her Broadway credits include Donna Sheridan in *Mama Mia!*, Gabrielle de Lioncourt in *Lestat* (for which she received a Tony Award nomination for Featured Actress), Penelope Pennywater in *Urinetown*, Lucille Frank in *Parade* (for which she received a Tony nomination), and Abigail Adams in *1776*. Additional Broadway credits include roles in *Kiss Me Kate*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Falsettos*, and *City of Angels*. Ms. Carmello has appeared Off-Broadway in *The Vagina Monologues*; *Elegies for Angels*, *Punks*, and *Raging Queens*; and *A Class Act*, among others. She has also been seen in national tours of *Chess*, *Big River*, *Les Misérables*, and *Falsettos*.

The incomparable Tony Award-winning actress **Judy Kaye** joins the cast as Minnie Kennedy, Aimee's domineering mother. This renowned Broadway performer has been nominated for Tony Awards three times and won a Tony for her performance as Carlotta in the original Broadway cast of *Phantom of the Opera*. She has also received four Drama Desk Award nominations across her career. She has a dazzling array of credits including Rizzo in *Grease*, Carlotta in *Phantom of the Opera*, Rosie in *Mama Mia!* (Tony Award nomination), Emma Goldman in *Ragtime*, Mrs. Lovett in the national tour of Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, and Florence Foster Jenkins in *Souvenir* (Tony Award nomination), among others. She has also appeared as a featured performer at Santa Fe Opera, New York Opera Repertory Theatre, and New York City Opera, in addition to performances with the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Pops Orchestra, and the London Symphony.

Joining the cast as Emma Jo Schaffer, a reformed Kansas City madam, is **Roz Ryan**. Ms. Ryan's Broadway credits include Effie White in *Dreamgirls*, Mabel in *The Pajama Game*, *Ain't Misbehavin*, and numerous engagements with the Broadway cast of *Chicago: The Musical* as Matron Mama Morton. Ms. Ryan was the first woman to ever perform the role of The Ghost of Christmas Present in *A Christmas Carol* at Madison Square Garden. Ms. Ryan is well known for her television roles as Amelia Hetebrink on *Amen*, Mrs. Dixon on *Good News*, and Flo Anderson on *All About the Andersons*. She has done extensive voicework in film and television including Thalia, the Muse of Comedy in Disney's animated film *Hercules* and *Hercules: The Animated Series*. Her most recent work is the voice of Bubbie the whale in *The Marvelous Misadventures*

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of *Flapjack*. Her feature film work includes *I Think I Love My Wife*, *The Invention of Lying*, and *Waiting Forever*.

Kathie Lee Gifford (book, lyrics and contributing composer) is best known as the 2 time Emmy-winning co-host of the 4th hour of NBC's *Today Show*, alongside Hoda Kotb. Also celebrated for her fifteen-year run on the talk show *Live with Regis and Kathie Lee*, Ms. Gifford is an experienced singer, songwriter and actress. As a lyricist she contributed many musical numbers to *Hats!*, inspired by the experiences, philosophies, and mission of the Red Hat Society. She has collaborated twice with composer David Pomeranz, first with *Under the Bridge*, based on the children's book *The Family Under The Bridge* by Natalie Savage Carlson and again with ***Saving Aimee***. She has also collaborated with composer David Friedman twice, beginning with ***Saving Aimee***, and again in 2008 with a musical for young audiences entitled *KeyPin.It.Real*. She is currently working on a musical adaptation of *It's A Wonderful Life* with composer John McDaniel. She has recorded and released 16 albums of popular music. She appeared as Miss Hannigan in *Annie* at Madison Square Garden and appeared on Broadway in *Putting It Together*.

Composer **David Pomeranz** is a well-loved singer, composer, and lyricist, who has written songs for pop singers including Barry Manilow's #1 hit singles "Tryin' To Get The Feeling Again" and "The Old Songs." His work has been performed by artists as diverse as Bette Midler, Phoebe Snow, Freddie Mercury, Richie Sambora, Missy Elliott, The Carpenters, Harry Belafonte, Andrea Marcovicci, Donna Summer, Lillias White, and Cliff Richard, and his various songwriting projects have amassed a total of twenty-two platinum and eighteen gold albums. His compositions for the stage include the West End hit musical *Time; Little Tramp*, based on the life and career of Charles Chaplin, staged for the Eugene O'Neill Theater Festival and presented in a concert version in St. Petersburg, Russia; and a musical adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities* for the Theatre Royal, Windsor, and the Alexandria Theatre in Birmingham. With Kathie Lee Gifford he has written two projects, *Under The Bridge*, which premiered Off-Broadway in January 2005, and ***Saving Aimee***, which debuted at the White Plains Performing Arts Center in October 2005 and was staged at the Signature Theatre in Arlington, Virginia in April–May 2007.

Composer **David Friedman** has written songs for pop artists including Diana Ross, Barry Manilow, Petula Clark, Allison Kraus, Laura Branigan, and cult star Nancy LaMott, among many others. Mr. Friedman was the Musical Supervisor and Vocal Arranger for the Broadway presentation of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, and has acted as the musical director on Broadway productions including *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *The Little Prince and the Aviator*, and *Saravá*. He was the conductor of scores for Disney's animated features that include *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and vocal contractor for *Mulan*. Mr. Friedman has worked twice previously with Seattle's Village Theatre to create musicals including *Stunt Girl* and *Chasing Nicholette*. He is a regular on the *Today Show*'s "Everyone Has a Story" series, and writes a new song with Kathie Lee Gifford

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each month, which he performs with a current Broadway star on the first Thursday of each month.

Starring as the numerous men in McPherson's life are New York actors **Ed Dixon** and **Ed Watts**, and Seattle stars **Charles Leggett** and **Brandon O'Neill**. Mr. Dixon makes his 5th Avenue debut in *Saving Aimee* as Aimee's religious rival, Brother Bob, and Aimee's father, a farmer named James Kennedy. His Broadway credits include *Mary Poppins*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *The Best Man*, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Les Misérables*, and many others. Mr. Watts returns to The 5th Avenue Theatre in the roles of Aimee's first husband Robert Semple, a reverend who brought her to a life of ministry, and Aimee's lead actor and third husband David Hutton; Mr. Watts starred previously in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. Most recently seen in *The Fantasticks* Off-Broadway, he has also performed in the Broadway revival of *Finian's Rainbow*, *The Most Happy Fella* at The New York City Opera, the national tour of *Les Misérables*.

Mr. Leggett makes his 5th Avenue Theatre debut as Los Angeles prosecutor Asa Keyes, with credits at regional houses including Seattle Repertory Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, ACT Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Portland Center Stage, and Book-It Repertory Theatre. Mr. O'Neill was most recently seen as Sky Masterson in *Guys and Dolls* and Kassim in Disney's *Aladdin* at The 5th Avenue Theatre where he has appeared many times before. He plays the roles of Aimee's second husband, Harold McPherson and her sound engineer Keith Ormiston.

Populating the world of early 20th century New York to Los Angeles are ensemble members **Jared Michael Brown**, **Christian Duhamel**, **Richard Gray**, **Cayman Ilika**, **Brandi Chavonne Massey**, **Cheryl Massey-Peters**, **Corrina Lapid-Munter**, **Heath Saunders**, **Aaron Shanks**, **Tim Shew**, **Mara Solar**, **Billie Wildrick**, and **Matt Wolfe**.

Special thanks to The 5th's 2011-2012 season co-sponsors Safeco Insurance and US Bank.

More about The 5th Avenue Theatre

The 5th Avenue Theatre is one of the nation's premier incubators for new musicals. In the past decade, it has produced ten premiere musicals, five of which have been produced on Broadway, and two of which have won Tony® Awards for Best Musical (*Hairspray* and *Memphis*). The 5th Avenue Theatre is also known for its world class, critically acclaimed productions of musicals chosen from both the contemporary canon and the Golden Age of Broadway.

Unique in its Chinese-inspired design, this exquisite theater opened in 1926 as a venue for vaudeville and film. In 1980, the non-profit 5th Avenue Theatre began producing and presenting top-quality live musical theater. Today, under the leadership of Executive Producer and Artistic Director David Armstrong, Managing Director Bernadine Griffin and Producing

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Director Bill Berry, The 5th Avenue Theatre attracts an annual attendance of more than 287,000 and ranks among the nation's largest and most respected musical theater companies.

In addition to its main stage productions, The 5th Avenue Theatre is also committed to encouraging the next generation of theatergoers through its extensive Educational Outreach Program which includes: The Adventure Musical Theatre Touring Company, The 5th Avenue Awards Honoring High School Musical Theatre, the Student Matinee Program, and Spotlight Nights. For more information about The 5th Avenue Theatre, its season and its programs, please visit www.5thavenue.org.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: Broadway luminaries **Carolee Carmello**, **Judy Kaye**, and **Roz Ryan** will grace **The 5th Avenue Theatre** stage under the direction of **David Armstrong** in the West Coast premiere of ***Saving Aimee***, a soul-stirring new musical with book and lyrics by **Kathie Lee Gifford**, and music by **David Pomeranz** and **David Friedman**. Also joining the cast are Broadway veterans **Ed Dixon** and **Ed Watts**, and Seattle stars **Charles Leggett** and **Brandon O'Neill**. This is the powerful true story of 1920's evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, who catapulted to unexpected stardom as the founder of the first mega-church and a media empire. The rise and fall of a woman cloaked in intrigue, embroiled in scandal, and at the heart of one of the nation's first sensationalized trials, ***Saving Aimee***, celebrates the unstoppable force of a powerful woman inspired to great heights in a man's world.

WHEN: *Previews: September 30-October October 19, 2011*
Opening Night: October 20, 2011 (press night)
Closing Performance: October 29

SHOW Tuesdays & Wednesdays – 7:30 PM

TIMES: Thursdays & Fridays – 8:00 PM
Saturdays – 2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sundays – 1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

WHERE: **The 5th Avenue Theatre** (1308 5th Avenue, Seattle)

TICKETS: For single tickets (starting at \$28.00) and information, please visit www.5thavenue.org or call the box office at (206) 625-1900. Tickets may also be purchased at (888) 5TH-4TIX.

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