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Full Cast Announced for The 5th Avenue Theatre's New Production of *West Side Story*

May 31 – June 23, 2019

Music by Leonard Bernstein; Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by Arthur Laurents

Based on a conception of Jerome Robbins

Directed by Bill Berry

Original Choreography Reproduced by Bob Richard

Music Direction by Matt Perri

Presented in association with Spectrum Dance Theater

(Thursday, May 9, 2019—SEATTLE) **The 5th Avenue Theatre** has announced the full cast for ***West Side Story***, the sweeping musical version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* set in the turbulent streets of New York City, where a star-crossed love blossoms between rival gangs. **William Branner** (National Tour: *Bat Out Of Hell*, Off-Broadway: *Kragtar: An American Monster Musical*) joins the cast to star as Tony, replacing the previously announced CJ Eldred. The multitaled 45-person cast also features **Jim Gall** (The 5th: *1776*, *Wonderful Town*) as Lieutenant Schrank, **Gabriel Corey** (The 5th: *A Chorus Line*, *Spamalot*) as Action, **Christopher Lopez** (5th Avenue Theatre debut) as Chino, **Nik Hagen** (The 5th: *Rock of Ages*, *Mamma Mia!*) as A-Rab, **Kyle Nicholas Anderson** (National Tour: *Something Rotten!*) as Snowboy, **Blair Jolly Elliot** (a member of Spectrum Dance Theater, The 5th: *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel*) as Anybodys, **Jordan Jackson** (The 5th: *Irving Berlin's Holiday Inn*, *Annie*) as Diesel, **Nathan Brockett** (The 5th: *Assassins*, ArtsWest: *Peter and the Starcatcher*) as Glad Hand/Voice of Maria's Father, **Brandon Weglin** (The 5th: Rising Star Project *The Pajama Game*) as Baby John, and **Trevor Hansen** (Village Theatre: *Newsies*, Seattle Opera: *Aida*) as Big Deal.

Also newly announced is **Jeremy Cline** (Gee-tar), **Lindsay Elvig** (Pauline), **Sapphire Goetz** (Carmen), **Diego Guevara** (Moose), **Laura Elizabeth Henning** (Velma), **Danny Kam** (Offstage Adult Men, Understudy), **Rico Lastrapes** (Nibbles), **Carlos Narvaez** (Juano), **Taylor Niemeyer** (Trina), **Kayden Oliver** (Pepe), and **Tia Petersen** (Graziella).

West Side Story's cast also features members of **Spectrum Dance Theater**, which was founded by Donald Byrd in 1982 to bring dance of the highest merit to a diverse audience composed of people from different social, cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Spectrum Dance Theatre has previously collaborated with The 5th on four productions: *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!*, *On the Town*, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel*, and *West Side Story* in 2007. Joining the cast from Spectrum is

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Mikhail Calliste (Anxious), **Michele Dooley** (Teresita), **Marco Farroni** (Luis), **Paul Giarratano** (Swing), **Hutch Hagendorf** (Mouth Piece), **Marte Osiris Madera** (Indio), **Nia-Amina Minor** (Marguerita), **Emily Pihlaja** (Clarice), **Andrew Pontius** (Tiger), **Fausto Rivera** (Toro), **Olivia Schmid** (Estella), **Mary Sigward** (Jeanie), and **Jaclyn Wheatley** (Minnie).

Previously announced casting includes **Rebbekah Vega-Romero**, who makes her 5th Avenue Theatre debut to star as Maria, **Danielle Marie Gonzalez** as Anita, Seattle local **Sophie Franco** as Rosalia, **Karma Jenkins** as Consuela, **Iliana Garcia** as Francisca, and **Dan Lusardi** as Riff, all also making their 5th Avenue Theatre debuts. Returning to The 5th is **Alexander Gil Cruz**, making his stage debut as Bernardo, and 5th Avenue Theatre favorites **Seán G. Griffin** as Doc and **Richard Gray** as Officer Krupke.

“There are very few shows that can consistently elicit a tearful response from the audience and then release that sadness into a moment of hope; *West Side Story* does that. It leaves us changed,” said The 5th Avenue Theatre’s Producing Artistic Director and director of *West Side Story* **Bill Berry**. “You may go to see the incredible dancing and a beautiful story told beautifully, but when it ends, you are slightly changed as you walk out the door. It does it magically. And that’s the subversive power of musical theater.”

Berry, who helmed The 5th’s most recent production of the musical in 2007, will direct this beloved tale once again. The iconic choreography by **Jerome Robbins** will be taught to the cast by returning choreographer **Bob Richard** (*Mamma Mia!*, *The Pajama Game*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*).

Playing **May 31 – June 23, 2019** (press opening Friday, June 7), tickets for *West Side Story* are on sale now at www.5thavenue.org, by phone at **206.625.1900**, or in person at the **Box Office** at 1308 5th Avenue in Downtown Seattle.

The 5th Avenue Theatre is calling on the full breadth and depth of its artistic resources to stage this unforgettable production. This is musical theater as only The 5th can do it: with a sensational cast of the finest performers ever to grace its stage, a 25-piece orchestra, the highest levels of talent, and artistic dedication bar none. The dancing will bring you to the edge of your seat; the music will resonate deep in your soul; the story will lift you to the heights of passion.

About the Cast

William Branner makes his 5th Avenue Theatre debut to star as Tony. He was seen in the National Tour of *Bat Out Of Hell* (Ledoux, Original North American Company), Off-Broadway in *Kragtar: An American Monster Musical*, and regionally at The Old Globe (*October Sky*), Barrington Stage (*West Side Story*, BTCA nomination), PCLO, Music Theatre Wichita, and Adirondack Theatre Festival. Branner received a B.F.A from the University Of Michigan.

Rebbekah Vega-Romero makes her 5th Avenue Theatre debut to star as Maria. She dedicates this performance to her abuelita, a seamstress from Habana who encouraged her to “cante desde el corazón.” Vega-Romero is an award-winning poet and screenwriter who hopes that her work will inspire other mixed-race girls to realize that “there’s a place for us.” If you would like to join her in creating that place, check out MixedRemixed.org.

Danielle Marie Gonzalez makes her 5th Avenue Theatre debut as Anita. Gonzalez just came from the Off-Broadway premiere of *Clueless: The Musical* where she originated the role of Lucy. Gonzalez has been in

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national tours of *Rock of Ages*, *Flashdance The Musical*, *Saturday Night Fever* (Stephanie Mangano). Upcoming TV credits include *Katy Keene* (CW).

Alexander Gil Cruz makes his 5th Avenue Theatre stage debut as Bernardo. He was the Associate Choreographer for *Irving Berlin's Holiday Inn* at The 5th. National Tour credits include *A Chorus Line* (Paul) and *West Side Story*, and his regional credits include *West Side Story* (Bernardo), *In the Heights* (Ensemble/Usnavi u/s), *La Cage Aux Folles*, and *Peter Pan*. Cruz was featured as a dancer on *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *The Get Down*, *Vinyl*, and *Saturday Night Live*.

Gabriel Corey returns to The 5th as Action. Past 5th Avenue Theatre shows include *A Chorus Line*, *Spamalot*, *Oliver!*, *ELF-The Musical*, *Damn Yankees* and *The Music Man* (Tommy Djilas).

Dan Lusardi makes his 5th Avenue Theatre debut as Riff. Favorite regional credits include *Footloose* (Ren) at Cortland Rep; *42nd Street* (Andy Lee) at North Shore Music Theatre; *Crazy for You* (Sam) at Arrow Rock Lyceum; *West Side Story* with the Sioux City Symphony; *Gypsy* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* at Flat Rock Playhouse; and *Hello, Dolly!* (Cornelius) at Interlakes Theatre. Lusardi holds a BFA from Elon University.

Richard Gray returns to The 5th Avenue Theatre as Officer Krupke. He was last seen at The 5th in *Irving Berlin's Holiday Inn*. Favorite 5th Avenue Theatre appearances include *The Music Man*, *Spamalot*, *A Room with a View* and ACT co-productions of *First Date*, *Assassins*, and *Murder for Two* (Gregory Award winner). Other favorite productions include *The Producers* and *Chicago* at the Village Theatre and *The Nance* at ArtsWest. As a composer, Gray is currently developing two new musicals, *Cold Turkey* and *The Long Game*.

Seán G. Griffin joins the cast as Doc. He has been seen in The 5th Avenue Theatre productions of *The Secret Garden*, *Carousel*, *ELF*, *Aladdin*, *Mame*, *West Side Story*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, and *My Fair Lady* and on Broadway in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Ned and Jack*, *The National Health*, *Ah! Wilderness*, *Poor Murderer*, *The Queen and The Rebels*. Griffin has appeared at all of the professional theaters in Seattle, as well as the major repertory companies across the US. He has toured nationally and internationally. He has appeared in several films, television series, and commercials. He has been a proud member of Actors' Equity since 1968.

Christopher Lopez makes his debut at The 5th Avenue Theatre as Chino. He is currently a third year student at Cornish College of the Arts. His regional credits include *Evita* (San Diego Rep), and *42nd Street* (San Diego Musical Theatre).

Sophie Franco (they/them) makes their 5th Avenue Theatre debut as Rosalia. Franco is a Latinx performance artist working in the Seattle area. Regional credits include *Native Gardens*, *B*, *JUAN PALMIERI*, *Proof*, *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Las Mariposas y Los Muertos*, and *Bernie's Apartment*. Franco is also a resident actor with Washington Ensemble Theatre.

Iliana Garcia makes her debut at The 5th as Francisca and the understudy for Maria. She was recently seen in *The Mistress* at Riverside Theatre and her regional credits include *In the Heights* (Nina, Vanessa, Carla); *You're...Charlie Brown* (Sally), *The Music Man*, *Annie*, *9 to 5*. Her TV/film credits include *Younger*, *High Fidelity*, *Blue Bloods*, and *Around and Around*.

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Karma Jenkins makes her 5th Avenue Theatre debut as Consuela and understudy for Anita. She has been seen in the national tour of *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* and regionally in *In the Heights*, *The Wiz*, *West Side Story*, *Oklahoma*, and *Cats*. She has performed at The MUNY, The John W. Engeman, North Shore Music Theatre, and Phoenix Theatre.

Kyle Nicholas Anderson makes his 5th Avenue Theatre debut as Snowboy. National Tour: *Something Rotten!* Regional highlights: Paper Mill Playhouse, The MUNY, Dallas Theater Center, Syracuse Stage, Village Theatre. Proud graduate of Syracuse University!

Nik Hagen joins the cast as A-Rab. Previous 5th Avenue Theatre credits include *Rock of Ages* (Franz), *Mamma Mia!*, *Holiday Inn*, and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. He has a BA in Theatre from Whitman College and has performed at Village Theatre (*Mary Poppins*, *Neleus*), STAGEright (*Into the Woods*, *Baker*), and the Can Can Cabaret.

Blair Jolly Elliott joins the cast as Anybodys. She received her BFA from The University of The Arts in Philadelphia. Recently, Elliot was featured in a film by Alex Crozier, *The Millennial Experience*, in partnership with CD Forum. Elliot returns to The 5th, four years after performing in her first 5th Avenue Theatre production *Carousel* with Spectrum Dance Theater. This is Elliot's fifth season with Spectrum Dance Theater.

Jordan Jackson returns to The 5th Avenue Theatre as Diesel. He was seen in The 5th's productions of *Irving Berlin's Holiday Inn* and *Annie*. Jackson is a Wisconsin native and an AMDA NYC graduate.

About the Director

Bill Berry's credits include *First Date* (Broadway and The 5th Avenue Theatre/ACT Theatre), *Little Shop of Horrors* (co-production with ACT Theatre) which received the *Seattle Times* Footlight Award for Best Musical of 2014, and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* which received the *Seattle Times* Footlight Award for Best Musical of 2016. Berry is the Producing Artistic Director of The 5th Avenue Theatre, where he has directed acclaimed productions of *Mamma Mia!*, *The Pajama Game*, *On the Town*, *West Side Story* (Footlight Award), *Wonderful Town* (Footlight Award), *Smokey Joe's Café*, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* and *The Wizard of Oz*. His reimagined production of *Cabaret* received awards in St. Paul and Houston and has been performed at The 5th Avenue Theatre, The Ordway (St. Paul), American Musical Theatre of San Jose and Theatre Under the Stars (Houston).

About the Choreographers

Jerome Robbins (*Choreography*) is world-renowned for his work as a choreographer of ballets as well as his work as a director and choreographer in theater, movies, and television. His Broadway shows include *On the Town*, *Billion Dollar Baby*, *High Button Shoes*, *West Side Story*, *The King and I*, *Gypsy*, *Peter Pan*, *Miss Liberty*, *Call Me Madam*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. His last Broadway production in 1989, *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*, won six Tony Awards® including Best Musical and Best Director. Among the more than 60 ballets he created are *Fancy Free*; *Afternoon of a Faun*; *The Concert*; *Dances at a Gathering*; *In the Night*; *In G Major*; *Other Dances*; *Glass Pieces*; and *Ives, Songs*, which are in the repertoires of New York City Ballet and other major dance companies throughout the world. His last ballets include *A Suite of Dances* created for Mikhail Baryshnikov (1994), *2 & 3 Part Inventions* (1994), *West Side Story Suite* (1995), and *Brandenburg* (1996). In addition to two Academy Awards for the film *West Side Story*, Robbins received four Tony Awards®, five Donaldson Awards, two Emmy Awards, the Screen Directors Guild Award, and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. He was a 1981 Kennedy Center Honors

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recipient and was awarded the French Chevalier dans l'Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur. Robbins died in 1998.

Bob Richard (*Reproduction Choreography*) is the choreographer of Broadway's top selling Christmas show *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* Richard was the Resident Choreographer for Sacramento Music Circus and staged over 40 productions across 19 years. At The 5th, Richard has worked on *Mamma Mia!*, *The Pajama Game*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, *On the Town*, and *Cabaret*. Regional work includes Theatre Under the Stars, Ordway, Madison Square Garden, North Shore Music Theatre, Theatre By The Sea, American Musical Theatre of San Jose, and Old Globe. He has choreographed several national and international tours including *Hello, Dolly!* with Sally Struthers; *Guys and Dolls*; and *Legally Blonde*, which played Shanghai, Singapore, and the US. Richard will be mounting a new National Tour of *An American in Paris* in 2020. Richard and his wife, Diane, are the Co-Founding Artistic Directors of The American Musical Theatre Dance Company.

About the Music Director

Matt Perri was the Music Director of The 5th Avenue Theatre's recent production of *Rock of Ages*. Perri is currently the Resident Music Supervisor for The 5th Avenue Theatre. He was recently the conductor for the Broadway musical *Bandstand*, including the film version. Other Broadway credits: *Come From Away*; *Finding Neverland*; *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella*; *Scandalous*; *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (2011); *Promises, Promises* (2010); *Rock of Ages*; *White Christmas*; and *The Drowsy Chaperone*. Off-Broadway: *Cagney*. Perri also coproduced the original cast recording of *Cagney*. Television credits: *The Sound of Music Live* and *Peter Pan Live*, both on NBC; *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*; *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *The View*. In concert, he has served as music director and performed with Bette Midler, Kristin Chenoweth, and Mario Cantone.

About Spectrum Dance Theater

Donald Byrd's 5th Avenue Theatre credits include *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*. Byrd, Tony nominated/Bessie Award winner, is the Artistic Director of Spectrum Dance Theater, formerly Artistic Director of the New York based Donald Byrd/The Group. He is credited with over 100 dance works for his own groups plus Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Philadanco, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Joffrey Ballet and Dance Theater of Harlem, among others. He's worked with The New York Shakespeare Festival/Public Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, SF Opera, Seattle Opera, Israeli Opera, Dutch National Opera, and NYC Opera. Honors include an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Cornish College of the Arts, a Masters of Choreography Award (Kennedy Center), Fellow of The American Academy of Jerusalem, James Baldwin Fellow of US Artists, Mayor's Art's Award, and Fellow at the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue. He was a NEA and Princess Grace Awards panelist, and served as Cultural Envoy for The US Dept. of State. He currently serves on the SDC Diversity Task Force, and recently completed a fellowship at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center in Bellagio, Italy on Lake Como.

The dancers of Spectrum Dance Theater are a select group of unique dance artists individually chosen and trained in Donald Byrd's singular approach to dance/theater – physically demanding and emotionally charged. They occupy the space where the classical, contemporary, intuitive, cerebral, visceral, right brain, left brain, control and abandonment converge. These are dancers exploring the boundaries of movement – inside and outside of the prescribed. They explore the known and the unknowns of movement with focus, enthusiasm, and a voracious appetite for the authentic and the truthfulness of movement.

About the Writers

Leonard Bernstein (*Music*) (1918–1990) Composer, conductor, author, teacher, and recording artist, Bernstein transformed the way Americans and people everywhere hear and appreciate music. A few of his many compositions include the symphonies *Jeremiah* and *The Age of Anxiety*, the theater piece *Mass*, *Chichester Psalms*, *Divertimento*, the film score for *On the Waterfront*, the ballets *Fancy Free* and *Facsimile*, and the operas *Trouble in Tahiti* and *A Quiet Place*. He was music director of the New York Philharmonic from 1958–1969 and, over his lifetime, conducted many of the major orchestras of the world. His Broadway musicals include *Wonderful Town*, *Candide*, *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, and the immensely popular *West Side Story*.

Stephen Sondheim (*Lyrics*) wrote the music and lyrics for *Saturday Night* (1954), *A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum* (1962), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *The Frogs* (1974), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987), *Assassins* (1991), *Passion* (1994), and *Road Show* (2008), as well as lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959), and *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (1965), and additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973). Anthologies of his work include *Side by Side by Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me a Little* (1981), *You're Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983), *Putting It Together* (1993/99) and *Sondheim on Sondheim* (2010). He composed the scores of the films *Stavinsky* (1974) and *Reds* (1981) and songs for *Dick Tracy* (1990) and the television production *Evening Primrose* (1966). His collected lyrics with attendant essays have been published in two volumes: *Finishing the Hat* (2010) and *Look, I Made A Hat* (2011). In 2010, the Broadway theater formerly known as Henry Miller's Theatre was renamed in his honor.

Arthur Laurents (*Book*) An award-winning playwright, screenwriter, librettist, director, and producer, Laurents has been responsible for creating the librettos of many Broadway shows including *Gypsy*; *Anyone Can Whistle*; *Do I Hear A Waltz?*; *Hallelujah, Baby!*; and *Nick & Nora*. He wrote the screenplays for *The Snake Pit*, *Anna Lucasta*, *Anastasia*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *The Way We Were*, and *The Turning Point*. He also wrote the plays *Home of the Brave*, *The Time of the Cuckoo*, and *A Clearing in the Woods*. He directed *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Gypsy*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *Birds of Paradise*, and *Nick & Nora*.

About the Creative Team

West Side Story showcases scenic design by **Martin Christoffel**, lighting design by **Mary Louise Geiger**, costume design by **Rose Pederson**, sound design by **Justin Stasiw**, and hair and wig design by **Mary Pyanowski Jones**.

Additional staff includes **James A. Rocco** (associate director), **Trina Mills** (associate choreographer), **Josh Archibald-Seiffer** (associate music director), **Connie Yun** (assistant lighting designer), **Michael Notestine** (assistant costume designer), **Haley Parcher** (assistant sound designer), **Alyssa Keene** (dialect coach), **JR Welden** (production stage manager), and **Rachael Dorman** and **Erin B. Zatloka** (assistant stage managers).

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS

WHEN: *Previews begin Friday, May 31, 2019*
 Opening Night: Friday, June 7, 2019 (press night)
 Closing Performance: Sunday, June 23, 2019
 Tuesdays – Thursdays at 7:30pm
 Fridays at 8:00pm

West Side Story at The 5th Avenue Theatre

Saturdays at 2:00pm and 8:00pm

Sundays at 1:30pm and 7:00pm (no 7:00pm performance on June 23)

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

TICKETS: Please visit www.5thavenue.org or call the Box Office at 206.625.1900 for tickets (starting at \$29).

About The 5th Avenue Theatre

The 5th Avenue Theatre is one of America's leading musical theater companies. We enrich the community we love with the art form we love—giving the Pacific Northwest a front-row seat to original powerhouse productions that go on to light up marquees and audiences all the way to Broadway. From the page to the stage, we bring passion and epic scale to every musical we create. With big talent. Bigger-than-life productions. And did we mention dazzle? As a nonprofit theater company and our region's largest performing arts employer, we spread the joy of great musicals with people of all ages across our region and state. Each year, we reach 75,000 young people through our nationally acclaimed education programs. Programs designed to develop new musicals ensure that the next generation of great musicals will be there to tell the stories that captivate tomorrow's audiences. On the national stage, we are a leading voice for the power of this American art form to lift the human spirit.

For more information about The 5th Avenue Theatre, its season and its programs, please visit www.5thavenue.org.

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