



Richard Hillman

P U B L I C R E L A T I O N S

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, PLEASE

GREAT CIRCLE PRODUCTIONS
PRESENTS
THE WORLD PREMIERE
OF
"EDWIN, THE STORY OF EDWIN BOOTH"
A DRAMATIC MUSICAL

MUSIC BY MARIANNA ROSETT
BOOK AND LYRICS BY ERIC SWANSON
DIRECTED BY CHRISTOPHER SCOTT
AT THEATRE AT ST. CLEMENT'S

FEATURING DANA WATKINS AS EDWIN BOOTH
WITH ADAM BASHIAN, PAUL DE BOY, TODD LAWSON,
DEANNE LORETTE, BEN MAYNE, AND PATRICIA NOONAN

PERFORMANCES BEGIN SEPTEMBER 4
FOR A STRICTLY LIMITED ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SEPTEMBER 18

OPENING NIGHT SET FOR SEPTEMBER 8 AT 7PM

TICKETS NOW ON SALE

New York, NY (August 1, 2016) – For their inaugural offering, **Great Circle Productions** (Jane Kosminsky, Artistic/Executive Director) will present the world premiere of ***EDWIN, The Story of Edwin Booth***, a dramatic musical

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that commemorates the 150th Anniversary (1866-2016) of the legendary actor's return to the stage, as well as the 400th Anniversary of the birth of William Shakespeare, with music by **Marianna Rosett**, and book & lyrics by **Eric Swanson**.

EDWIN is a unique adventure in music, theater, and history. Edwin Booth was the most famous American actor of the nineteenth century, the Laurence Olivier of his day though his artistic triumphs were marred by public and private tragedy. *EDWIN* takes us backstage on the night of his courageous return to the stage after his brother assassinated President Lincoln—braving death threats, public outrage, and his own scarred past.

Great Circle Productions, Inc. is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization incorporated in the State of New York. Stepping into new territory Great Circle Productions is dedicated to supporting and developing projects created by mature artists in the performing, literary, visual, and film/video arts and committed to bringing to life projects that inspire, offer hope, and touch the human heart—an undertaking that is crucial during a period of divisiveness that hasn't been seen in this country since the Civil War. As a New York State organization, Great Circle Productions, Inc. is committed to adding to the rich cultural life of the City and the State, and a deep belief that in and through art they can assist unifying the heartbeat of the nation.

Performances of **EDWIN** are set to begin on Sunday September 4 for a limited engagement through September 18 at **Theatre at St. Clement's** (423 West 46th St.). Opening night is set for September 8.

Directed by **Christopher Scott** (*A Class Act*, Masterworks Theatre Company) the cast features **Dana Watkins** as Edwin Booth, with **Adam Bashian** (*Phantom of the Opera*, *On Your Toes*), **Paul DeBoy** (*A Dirty Shame*, *Red Dead Redemption*), **Todd Lawson** (*Summer and Smoke*, *Top Floor*), **Deanne Lorette** (*La Bete*, *Benefactors*), **Ben Mayne** (*Forever Plaid*, "Vinyl"), and **Patricia Noonan** (*Death Takes a Holiday*, *Jane Austen's Pride & Prejudice*).

The production team for **EDWIN** is **Chad McArver** (scenic/lighting design) and **David Zyla** (costume design). **Maxine Glorsky** is Production Stage Manager, **Paul Ziemer** is Technical Advisor and **Melanie Aponte** is Assistant Stage Manager. **Dailey-Monda Management** serves as the General Manager.

Describing her approach to writing the score for *EDWIN*, composer **Marianna Rosett** suggested that the music she'd written evokes the period of the Civil War. She went on to add, "It suggests the folk songs of the time and hints at the music of the period that people were listening to, like Schumann. It has weight and body and sometimes an 'incredible lightness of being.' It is full of color, melody and heart."

Jane Kosminsky, Artistic/Executive Director shared, "Finding a theater to produce a new work in New York City could be seen as a challenging task or a magnificent adventure. We've chosen to take the latter view. Finding a home for *EDWIN* has been an extraordinary journey. Though we've been surprised by the politics of supporting theater in a city supposedly renowned for its support for the performing arts, after a long search we've found the perfect home for *EDWIN*: St Clement's, one of the most storied Off-Broadway theaters in New York City."

Describing his own interest in creating the book and lyrics for *EDWIN*, librettist **Eric Swanson** noted that, "Most people, when they hear the name Booth, think 'Oh, the guy who shot Lincoln,'" and admitted that he responded the same way when first presented with the project. "As Jane outlined Edwin's story, I was by turns fascinated and surprised—and ultimately appalled. One of the greatest actors our country has ever produced had been all but erased from history. I found myself thinking, 'A hundred years from now, will Meryl Streep, Marlon Brando, or Paul Newman be similarly erased?' Probably not. None of the genuine legends of recent vintage have had their names stained by an appalling crime committed by a family member."

The performance schedule for **EDWIN** will be: Tuesday through Friday at 7:30PM, Saturday at 2PM & 7:30PM, and Sunday at 3PM. Opening night is scheduled for Thursday, September 8 at 7PM.

Tickets are **\$59** (adults), **\$29** (seniors), and **\$15** (students) and can be purchased through Great Circle Productions website www.greatcircleproductions.org or by calling OvationTix at 866-811-4111.

Bios

Marianna Rosett (*Composer*) began her piano and ballet studies at the age of five in her hometown of Transylvania, Romania. She made her solo piano debut at age seven and was the two-time winner of the International Youth Competition in Bucharest by age ten. Her career includes solo recitals, chamber music, and performances with the ensembles Mannekrianna and Skymusic. Marianna has performed in India, Japan, Canada, and throughout the United

States, Europe, and Africa in venues including La Scala Opera House (Milan), Lincoln Center, New York Shakespeare Festival, and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, where she was an artist-in-residence. In 2013, she composed *Songs for Then and Now* with co-lyricists Eric Swanson and Jane Kosminsky, which is available on CD and online at CDBaby, iTunes, and Amazon.com. Marianna's other recordings are available on La Mer Records (*Roseleaf*, 2002), and Roseleaf Records (*Parallelas*, 2010). Marianna studied at the Rubin Academy in Jerusalem and received her B.S. and M.S. at The Juilliard School. She became the youngest faculty member in Juilliard's history and has taught in the School's music, drama, and dance departments.

Eric Swanson (*Librettist*) trained as a classical singer from an early age and worked as a professional actor for more than fifteen years, appearing on Broadway in the world premiere of *La Bête* and in the acclaimed Circle in the Square production of *You Never Can Tell*, starring Uta Hagen and Philip Bosco. Off-Broadway and regionally, Eric has performed at Manhattan Theatre Club, Theatre for a New Audience, Yale Repertory Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, Hartford Stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, and Cleveland Play House. Tours include *The Lion in Winter* starring George Peppard. Film credits include *Under Heat*, starring Lee Grant, and *Edie and Pen* with Stockard Channing and Scott Glen. He also appeared on television in the PBS miniseries "Concealed Enemies" and the acclaimed public television children's series "Ghostwriter." Eric has recently turned to writing for theatre. He co-authored the lyrics for *Songs for Then and Now* with Jane Kosminsky and composer Marianna Rosett, which was released on CD and for download online. Eric graduated magna cum laude from Yale College with a B.A. in Theater Studies and attended the Drama Division of The Juilliard School.

Christopher Scott (*Director*) Now the Artistic Director for the Masterworks Theater Company, Christopher is a member of the Playwright Directors Workshop at the legendary Actor's Studio. Off-Broadway he has directed *Greed: A Musical For Our Times* produced by longtime collaborator Eric Krebs, as well as the hit musical *Golf: The Musical* by Michael Roberts and Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden* which he not only directed but also adapted from her ground-breaking bestseller. For many seasons, Christopher worked as Director for Theatreworks/USA, the nation's largest professional not-for-profit theatre for young audiences. He is an adjunct faculty member at Baruch College/CUNY where he teaches in the fine and performing arts department and serves as an Artistic Associate with Amas Musical Theatre, founded by Rosetta Lenoire.

Jane Kosminsky (*Artistic/Executive Director*) has had an extensive career as a dancer. She was a member of the May O'Donnell and Tamiris-Nagrin companies, a soloist with the Norman Walker Dance Company (1960-1965) and the Paul Taylor Dance Company (1965-1971). In 1971, she became Co-Artistic Director (with Bruce Becker) and Principal Dancer of 5 by 2 Dance Company and 5 by 2 Plus, a modern dance repertory company (1971-1982), one of the first three modern dance repertory companies in the United States. Jane was one of the first people to restage Paul Taylor's work and restaged his *Aureole* for productions of *Nureyev and Friends*. She also appeared as Mr. Nureyev's partner in Paris (1974), London (1976), and Madrid (1978). In 1986, she became the Director of Dance at the 92nd Street Y and created the program Fridays at Noon, a free event that celebrates the work of emerging and established choreographers. In 2014, Jane founded Great Circle Productions, Inc., a nonprofit organization for support and development of projects in the arts. Jane has served on the faculties of the American Center for Alexander Technique (1986-1994) and The Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre (1988-2012). She was a member of The Juilliard School Drama Faculty (1971-1986) and has been a member of the Dance Faculty since 1986. Through her organization, The Balance of Well-being, Jane has developed and produced three pioneer DVDs about the Alexander Technique, which are sold online and through select distributors. She is a graduate and dance award winner of the School of Performing Arts in New York City. Jane received her B.A. in Language and Literature from City College of New York and is a graduate of The American Center for the Alexander Technique.

Dana Watkins (*Edwin Booth*) has been performing since the age of seven. Throughout his nine years as a boy soprano—both in the chorus and as a soloist at the Metropolitan and New York City Operas—he performed in almost every opera that included roles for children, including *The Magic Flute*, *Tosca*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Wozzec*, and *Billy Budd*. During that period, he worked a number of renowned directors, including Frank Corsaro, John Dexter and Franco Zeffirelli. He toured annually with both the Metropolitan and New York City Operas companies, and performed with many East Coast opera companies as well, appearing in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* at BAM (directed by Giancarlo Menotti) and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Requiem*. More recently, he was last seen in New Federal Theatre's production of *In White America*. Other recent appearances include The Culture Project's production of Tennessee Williams' last full-length play *In Masks Outrageous and Austere*; Achilles and other roles in Verse Theatre Manhattan's production of *Kings*; and *My First Time*—which enjoyed a two and a half year run at New World Stages. He was featured as F. Scott Fitzgerald in the world premiere of Allan Knee's *The Jazz Age* at 59E59, and has appeared in a number of productions at the Classical Theatre of Harlem, including *Marat/Sade* (Charlotte Corday), *Native Son* (Jan Erlone), *Macbeth* (Banquo) and *The Cherry Orchard* (Trofimov). Other New York Theater credits include Kafka in the U.S. Premiere of Stanley Walden's *Letter to My Father* at the Kaye Playhouse Prince Hal in *Henry IV parts I and II* at The

Workshop Theatre, and Poe in the one-man show *An Evening with Edgar Allan Poe*. Regionally, he has appeared as Charles Smithson in the world premiere of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* at The Fulton Opera House; John Worthing in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Scapino in *Scapino!* He has also worked extensively with Naked Angels, the Westbeth Theatre Center, Expanded Arts, and the sketch comedy group Commedia Dell' Jilles. Dana's television work includes Hallmark's *Christmas With Holly*, *Once in A Lifetime*, *The City*, and featured/supporting roles on *One Life to Live* and *Guiding Light*. On film, he has appeared in *Sarah is Not Her Name*, *Falling to Pieces*, *How To Be A Man*, *The Empath*, *Dreamgirl*, and *Unbridled*. Dana is also a producer, whose credits include Allan Knee's *The Jazz Age* at 59E59 and *Black Nativity Now* at Theatre at St Clements with his company, Lost Generation productions.

Edwin Booth was born on November 13, 1833, under a sky lit by a meteor shower, which residents of the family farm in Maryland regarded as an omen of greatness. The second eldest of five surviving children of British-born actor Junius Brutus Booth, Edwin was sent on the road at the age of 13 to look after his father as he toured the major cities of the eastern United States; for although Junius was a gifted actor, he was also a notorious alcoholic, frequently spending his earnings in taverns or failing to show up for performances. During the five years Edwin travelled with his father, he learned the craft of acting: first while watching and listening backstage, then appearing in minor roles. At 17, he triumphantly assumed the title role in Shakespeare's *Richard III* in New York City, substituting for his father, who was "indisposed." In 1852, he accompanied his father and his eldest brother, Junius Jr. (also an actor) to California, where new theatres were being built in the wake of the Gold Rush and fortunes could be made. But the California tour proved disappointing, and Junius Sr. chose to head home. Edwin, craving independence, decided to stay. Unattended for the first time in years, his father died on the trip home, an event that filled young Edwin with guilt and remorse. In 1856 Edwin returned east, and slowly built a reputation as the heir of his brilliant father, while bringing his own unique brand of naturalistic, quiet intensity to his roles. Four years later, he married a young actress, Mary Devlin—whom he'd met playing Romeo to her Juliet. They had a daughter, Edwina in 1861; but weakened by childbirth and troubled by Edwin's own plunge into alcoholism, Mary died in 1863. Battling another round of grief and guilt, Edwin gave up drinking and threw himself into work, assuming management of the Winter Garden Theater in New York, where he solidified his reputation with a record-breaking run of 100 performances of *Hamlet*. In 1864, he and his brothers, Junius Jr. and John Wilkes, appeared together onstage for the first and only time, in a production of *Julius Caesar*, a benefit to raise funds for the statue of Shakespeare in Central Park. His place in the theatrical firmament seemed assured—until catastrophe struck again, when his younger brother assassinated President Lincoln. Public outrage and death threats forced Edwin to retire from the stage; but, faced with the responsibility of supporting not only his daughter, but his mother and sisters, as well, he braved the dangers and returned to the Winter Garden as *Hamlet* in January, 1866. On the night he died, a wild thunderstorm caused a blackout in the Gramercy Park area where Edwin had made his home—a fitting and dramatic signal of the departure of a remarkable performer, whose birth had been heralded by a rain of shooting stars.

