

THE PUBLIC THEATER  
ANNOUNCES  
CASTING AND CAMEO GROUPS  
FOR FREE PUBLIC WORKS  
MUSICAL ADAPTATION OF HOMER'S  
*THE ODYSSEY*

Conceived and Directed by Lear deBessonet  
Music, Lyrics, & Book by Todd Almond

200 New Yorkers From All Five Boroughs  
Will Share The Delacorte Stage

With Todd Almond, Brandon Victor Dixon, Karen Olivo,  
Lucas Caleb Rooney and Community Partners  
September 4-7

July 16, 2015 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director, Oskar Eustis; Executive Director, Patrick Willingham) will kick off the 2015-16 season in September with a free Public Works musical adaptation of Homer's *THE ODYSSEY*, conceived and directed by Public Works Director **Lear deBessonet**, with music, lyrics and book by **Todd Almond**. *THE ODYSSEY* will once again feature over 200 actors and community members alongside five equity actors, including this year **Brandon Victor Dixon** as Odysseus, and **Karen Olivo** as Penelope. This unforgettable Public Works event will run for four nights, September 4-7, at the Delacorte Theater with free tickets being distributed, two per person, at 12:00 p.m. on the day of the show at the Delacorte Theater and via the Virtual Ticketing lottery at [www.publictheater.org](http://www.publictheater.org).

Now in its third year, Public Works annually creates ambitious works of participatory theater in partnership with community organizations from all five boroughs of New York City. This year, Obie Award-winning director Lear deBessonet and lyricist/composer Todd Almond, the team behind the acclaimed Public Works productions of *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*, will create a breathtaking new musical adaptation, *THE ODYSSEY*. Inspired by the historical pageantry movement of the early 1900s—known for blending mass spectacle with community engagement—this latest work in deBessonet and Almond's grand trilogy reimagines the Greek epic with Public Works' signature blend of professional actors, community members and special guests. Man-eating Cyclops, a sorceress that turns sailors to beasts, and the deadly sweet song of the Sirens explode onto the stage with spectacular dance numbers in this joyful, larger-than-life musical about finding your way home—no matter where fate may lead you. This adaptation of *THE ODYSSEY*, conceived and directed by deBessonet, first premiered at The Old Globe in San Diego in 2011.

*THE ODYSSEY* will feature equity actors **Todd Almond** (*Singer*); **Brandon Victor Dixon** (*Odysseus*); **Karen Olivo** (*Penelope*); and **Lucas Caleb Rooney** (*Antinous*); along with cameo group performances by **The Bobby Lewis Ensemble**; **The D.R.E.A.M. Ring**; **Flamenco Vivo Carlota Santana II**; **The Marching Cobras**; **The New York Youth Symphony**; and **TADA! Youth Theater**. The five Public Works community partner organizations are **Children's Aid Society** (Manhattan); **DreamYard Project** (Bronx); **Fortune Society** (Queens); **Brownsville Recreation Center** (Brooklyn); and **Domestic Workers United** (all boroughs, including Staten Island).

“Amid the glory and celebration of *Fun Home* and *Hamilton*, Public Works remains at the heart of The Public Theater's mission,” said **Artistic Director Oskar Eustis**. “For the last two summers, Lear deBessonnet and Todd Almond have given us euphoric, magical re-workings of Shakespeare's late romances. This year, they are reaching back to the first great Western writer, Homer. Their version of *The Odyssey* is a thrilling and visionary journey home, for Odysseus and for us.”

“Public Works invites us to radically re-think how we make theater and who has a stake in the work we do,” said **Public Works Director Lear deBessonnet**. “Exploring the genre of civic pageantry has given Todd and me a chance to collaborate with literally hundreds of New Yorkers in bringing these beautiful epics to life, and I couldn't be more proud to celebrate three years of immersive community work with *The Odyssey*.”

DeBessonnet is the recent recipient of two prestigious awards in 2015: the Doris Duke Impact Award, part of the Doris Duke foundation's 10-year initiative to empower, invest and celebrate artists; and the Peter Zeisler Memorial Award, presented at the Theatre Communications Group conference in June, which recognizes an individual or organization whose work reflects and promotes the ingenuity and artistic integrity prized by Peter Zeisler, late executive director of TCG. The honorees exemplify pioneering practices in theatre, are dedicated to the freedom of expression and are unafraid of taking risks for the advancement of the art form.

**THE ODYSSEY** features scenic and lighting design by **Justin Townsend**; costume design by **Paul Carey**; sound design by **Acme Sound Partners**; wig and make-up design by **Dave Bova**; and choreography by **Lorin Latarro**.

Tickets to **THE ODYSSEY** are free, continuing The Public Theater's long-standing tradition of free programming and community engagement. Since the opening of the Delacorte in 1962, more than five million people have enjoyed more than 150 free productions of Shakespeare and other classical works and musicals at The Public's Central Park venue. Free tickets will be distributed, two per person, at 12:00 p.m. on the day of the show at the Delacorte Theater. Free tickets will also be available via the Virtual Ticketing lottery at [www.publictheater.org](http://www.publictheater.org) on the day of the performance. You may become a Summer Supporter for a \$75 tax-deductible donation and receive a reserved seat to the event. For information and to donate, call 212-967-7555.

The Public Theater, founded nearly 60 years ago by Joe Papp as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, has been an advocate for theater as an essential cultural force and forum for dialogue about issues of the day. As the only theater in New York producing Shakespeare and the classics, musicals, contemporary and experimental works in equal measure, The Public continues its long tradition of engaging a wide range of audiences and artists. Public Works exemplifies The Public's long-standing commitment to community engagement that is at the core of the theater's mission. It is animated by the idea that theater is a place of possibility, where the boundaries that separate us from each other in the rest of life can fall away

Lead support for Public Works is provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation, New York City Theater Subdistrict Council, The Tow Foundation, and The Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Additional support is provided by the New York Community Trust, New York State Regional Economic Development Council, David Rockefeller Fund, and Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, LLP. Special thanks to The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation's leadership support for The Public's year-round access and engagement programming.

### **ABOUT PUBLIC WORKS:**

**PUBLIC WORKS** is an ongoing initiative of The Public Theater that seeks to engage the people of New York by making them creators and not just spectators. **PUBLIC WORKS** deliberately blurs the line between professional artists and community members, creating theater that is not only for the people, but by and of the people as well. Working deeply with partner organizations in all five boroughs, **PUBLIC WORKS** invites members of diverse communities to participate in workshops, take classes, attend performances at The Public, and, most importantly, to join in the creation of ambitious works of participatory theater.

**PUBLIC WORKS** is founded on a 360° transformational experience of theater: making theater, seeing theater, discussing theater. The five community partner organizations that have worked with The Public for the first two years of **PUBLIC WORKS** have taken part in the full range of Public Theater programming, including Joe's Pub, Shakespeare in the Park, Public Forum, and the Mobile Shakespeare Unit. Additionally the Public Works family gathers for monthly potluck dinners and ongoing intergenerational activities.

**BROWNSVILLE RECREATION CENTER** (*Brooklyn*) is a branch of the New York City Parks Department. With extensive resources for youth and seniors, the center offers a vibrant space to tap into pursuits artistic and athletic alike. Over the course of three years partnering with Public Works, senior citizens participated in dance, theater, storytelling, and scene study classes led by Public Theater teaching artists. The group has performed featured dances in both *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* at the Delacorte Theater. The seniors also performed various pieces they've developed in classes many times at The Public Theater and the BRC. In the spring of 2015, the center hosted the first ever Public Works Palooza, featuring community performances from all the Public Works partner classes, including their own adaptation of *Steel Magnolias*. The Brownsville Recreation Center received the Mobile Shakespeare Unit tours of *Richard III* (Summer 2012), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Fall 2013), *Pericles* (Fall 2014), and *Macbeth* (Spring 2015).

**THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY** (*Manhattan*) helps children in poverty to succeed and thrive by providing comprehensive support and critical services to children and their families in targeted high-needs New York City neighborhoods. As part of Public Works, the Children's Aid Society Chorus (a group of teenage girls led by Kelly Campbell) attended shows at Joe's Pub, attended regular Public Theater performances, and received master classes in singing, songwriting, movement, and acting. The chorus performed various songs they've developed in classes many times at The Public Theater and other events. In 2015, Public Works also partnered with the CAS Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teen program, where deaf and hard of hearing youth studied the intersection of Shakespeare poetry and sign language. Their work culminated in a community performance of excerpts from *Romeo and Juliet*.

**DREAMYARD PROJECT** (*Bronx*) was recognized by President Obama with a 2012 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award. The organization provides transformative arts education for youth in the Bronx through school-based and out-of-school programs and supports young people as they work toward higher learning, meaningful careers and social action. As part of Public Works, DreamYard youth participate in workshops and intensives in performing Shakespeare, and in generative movement led by artists from The Public, along with attending performances in The Public's season. The parents of DreamYard students also participate in weekly Shakespeare scene study classes led by Public Theater artists. The group has studied, rehearsed and performed scenes from *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. This group has performed excerpts from both plays multiple times at The Public Theater, the DreamYard Art Center, and other partner sites. The DreamYard Project received the Mobile Shakespeare Unit tours of *Much Ado About Nothing* (Fall 2013), *Pericles* (Fall 2014), and *Macbeth* (Spring 2015).

**DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED** (*all boroughs, including Staten Island*) is a city-wide organization of Caribbean, Latina and African nannies, housekeepers, and elderly caregivers in New York, organizing for power, respect, and fair labor standards, and to help build a movement to end exploitation and oppression for all. As part of Public Works, members have read and discussed dozens of plays in a monthly play reading and luncheon group. Plays have included *Eurydice*, *For Colored Girls...*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Antigone*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and many others. Members also attend regular performances at The Public.

**FORTUNE SOCIETY** (*Queens*) is a nonprofit social service and advocacy organization, founded in 1967, whose mission is to support successful reentry from prison and promote alternatives to incarceration thus strengthening the fabric of their communities. Drawing upon the life experience of Fortune's formerly incarcerated staff and clients, they offer a holistic, "one-stop" model which includes: alternatives to incarceration, counseling, career development, education, housing services, HIV/AIDS-case management, substance abuse treatment, family services, and lifetime aftercare, among other services. As part of Public

Works, members participate in a full year of classes in playwriting, acting, improvisation, storytelling, clown, and production. The Fortune Tellers, the group that has emerged from these classes, has performed their original pieces many times at The Public Theater, the Fortune Society campuses, and other partner sites. The Fortune Society received the Mobile Shakespeare Unit tours of *Richard III* (Summer 2012), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Fall 2013), *Pericles* (Fall 2014), and *Macbeth* (Spring 2015).

### **THE ODYSSEY COMPANY:**

**LEAR deBESSONET** (*Public Works Director/The Odyssey Director*) directed the previous free Public Works productions of *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, and has created large-scale theatrical events pairing artistic excellence with community organizing in New York, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Kazakhstan. Her previous large-scale community projects include *The Odyssey* at the Old Globe (2011) and her site-specific *Don Quixote*, a collaboration with homeless shelter Broad Street Ministry and the punk-gypsy ensemble The Psalters (2009). Her additional recent work includes *Good Person of Szechwan* featuring Taylor Mac for The Foundry Theatre at LaMaMa and The Public Theater (Obie Award, Drama Desk nom., Lilly Award, Lortel Award for Best Revival). She has directed shows for City Center Encores! Off-Center, LCT3, the Old Globe, the Intiman, the Guthrie, Joe's Pub, Women's Project, Performance Space 122, 13p, and Clubbed Thumb. For Ten Thousand Things in Minneapolis, she has directed productions of *My Fair Lady*, *As You Like It*, and *The Music Man* that toured to prisons, community centers, and homeless shelters. Recipient of the Doris Duke Impact Award, TCG's Peter Zeisler Award, the Meadow's Prize, and LMCC's Presidential Award for Artistic Excellence, she has also acted as a visiting professor at NYU-Tisch School of the Arts.

**TODD ALMOND** (*Music, Lyrics, & Book, Singer in The Odyssey*) is a composer, lyricist and playwright, whose recent collaborations with Lear deBessonnet include the free Public Works productions of *The Winter's Tale*, for which he wrote the book, music and lyrics and performed the role of Antigonus, and *The Tempest*, for which he also wrote the book, music, and lyrics and performed the role of Ariel at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. Almond's most recent musical *Iowa*, a collaboration with playwright Jenny Schwartz, received its world premiere at Playwrights Horizons this past March. His musical *Girlfriend* (using new arrangements of Matthew Sweet's eponymous cult album) will be produced at Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles under the direction of Les Waters. He starred alongside Courtney Love in the rock opera *Kansas City Choir Boy* at the Prototype Festival, composed by Almond and directed by Kevin Newbury. Almond recently wrote the music for, and performed in, Sarah Ruhl's *Stage Kiss* at Playwrights Horizons. Almond's other credits include a musical version of Sarah Ruhl's *Melancholy Play*, and music and lyrics for *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Almond was the music director/arranger for Laura Benanti's acclaimed solo show at 54 Below (NYC); and for Sherie Rene Scott's lauded *Piece of Meat*, also at 54 Below, and at the Hippodrome (London). Almond's albums include "Mexico City" and his newly released "Memorial Day."

**LORIN LATARRO** (*Choreography*) choreographed Broadway's *Waiting For Godot* with Sirs Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen, Ira Glass's *This American Life* at BAM for Michael Mayer and Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Peter and The Wolf* at BAM, *Beaches the Musical* (Drury Lane), *Jasper In Deadland*, and Encore's *Fanny*. Broadway's *Curious Incident...*, *American Idiot* and The Met Opera's *Rigoletto* (Associate to Michael Mayer and Steven Hoggett), Cy Coleman's *The Best Is Yet To Come* (Drama Desk Award), *Hands On A Hard Body* (Associate to Sergio Trujillo). Latarro is an Artistic Associate for Robyn Goodman at Bucks County Playhouse and has starred in 14 Broadway shows.

**BRANDON VICTOR DIXON** (*Odysseus*) originated the role of Berry Gordy in Broadway's *Motown the Musical* and has also appeared in *The Color Purple*, earning a Tony Award nomination. His additional credits include *The Scottsboro Boys*, both Off-Broadway and West End; *Cotton Club Parade* at New York City Center; *Rent*; and *Far From Heaven*. He has appeared in film and on television in *The Warrior and the Savior*, "Law & Order: Criminal Intent"; "One Life to Live"; and "The Good Wife."

**KAREN OLIVO** (*Penelope*) has appeared on Broadway in *West Side Story* (Tony Award), *In the Heights*, *Brooklyn*, and *Rent*. Her Off-Broadway credits include *Murder Ballad*; *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*; *In the Heights*; and *Miracle Brothers*. She has appeared in film and on television in *Holiday Spin*; *Generation*

*Um...; Shanghai Hotel; The New Twenty*; “Harry’s Law”; “The Good Wife”; “Law & Order: SVU”; and “Criminal Minds.”

**LUCAS CALEB ROONEY** (*Antinous*) has appeared at The Public Theater in The Mobile Shakespeare Unit’s *Much Ado About Nothing*; *Measure for Measure*; *All’s Well That Ends Well*; and *Yellowface*. His Broadway credits include *Golden Boy*, *The Country Girl*, and *Henry IV*. His additional Off-Broadway credits include *Regrets*, *The Orphans’ Home Cycle*, and *an oak tree*. His film and television credits include *The Magic of Belle Isle*, “Elementary,” “The Good Wife,” “Boardwalk Empire,” and “Person of Interest.”

### **CAMEO APPEARANCES:**

**THE BOBBY LEWIS ENSEMBLE** is a group of singers based out of The New Light Baptist Church in Harlem. The Senior Pastor of that church, Bobby Lewis, is the group’s founder and director. The Bobby Lewis Ensemble has been singing together almost 20 years in churches, nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, youth shelters, street fairs, and much more. They have traveled the world singing everything from Gospel to recently performing their “Soulful Beatles Celebration” in Harlem. They have toured Taiwan and annually tour Spain, performing their incredible Gospel show to packed audiences. They love performing all styles of music from Southern gospel, to the great classics, to beautiful patriotic medleys, to Negro Spirituals, to contemporary gospel, and more. They recently performed with Norm Lewis at Lincoln Center in his cabaret, *Who Am I*, and have recorded three CD projects including “It Cometh from the Lord,” “Live in New York City,” and “Christmas in July.”

**THE D.R.E.A.M. RING (DANCE RULES EVERYTHING AROUND ME)** strives to provide quality competitions that honor the culture of the Brooklyn community, encourages artistic and character development, provides youth with a safe environment to express their artistry, ensures a wealth of opportunities such as performing in schools and teaching in after school programs, displays the young artist and their talents through social media marketing and branding through artists reels, dance videos, performances, and helps young artists gain the skills needed to build careers in the dance industry. The team-oriented company’s purpose is to gain global popularity by exposing audiences to the various styles of street dance and inspiring them to embrace and join their distinctive aesthetic and cultural dance competition company, “THE D.R.E.A.M. RING.”

**FLAMENCO VIVO CARLOTA SANTANA II** is one of America’s premier Spanish dance companies, dedicated to the belief that the universal spirit of flamenco, a multicultural art form, has the power to build bridges between cultures. Their mission includes raising public awareness of flamenco as an integral part of Hispanic heritage, creating and presenting new works and nurturing the next generations of flamenco artists. Founded in 1983, the company tours extensively nationwide, and serves New York audiences with an annual home season. Flamenco Vivo Carlota Santana II is known for its innovative performances, community programs (including an annual “Flamenco in the Boros” tour which brings free performances to new audiences) and high-quality arts education projects in public schools. Flamenco Vivo also operates the Center for Flamenco Arts, one of only two NYC dance studios dedicated to the specific requirements of flamenco, and produces the NYS Flamenco Certamen, a competition for pre-professional dancers.

**THE MARCHING COBRAS** is New York’s most exciting youth non-profit organization and has performed for the NFL Superbowl 48, and in the Oscar-winning 2015 movie, *Birdman* starring Michael Keaton and Emma Stone. The Marching Cobras perform in many parades in many cities and feature the beautiful Sapphire Danceline. The Marching Cobras is offered to all communities in New York City and is currently a year-round program. This summer they will take part in the 2015 Steve Harvey Awards in Atlanta, GA. The program open to ages 10 and up. For more information, visit [www.marchingcobrasny.org](http://www.marchingcobrasny.org).

**THE NEW YORK YOUTH SYMPHONY** is the most awarded youth program of its kind in the nation, recognized for its innovative, tuition-free educational programs for talented young musicians. Founded in 1963 as an orchestra to showcase the metropolitan area’s most gifted musicians ages 12-22, its activities have since grown to encompass programs in chamber music, conducting, composition, and jazz, with performances at world class venues including Carnegie Hall and Jazz at Lincoln Center. Through its commissioning program, *First Music*, the NYYS has commissioned over 100 works from young composers

since 1984. The careers of world-renowned conductors, musicians, and composers have been assisted by their experiences with the New York Youth Symphony. Former music directors and program alumni include Leonard Slatkin, Myung-Whun Chung, David Alan, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Marin Alsop, Gary Levinson, Michael Tiscione, Lawrence Dutton, Kenneth Mirkin, Joel Smirnoff, and Pedro Diaz among many others.

**TADA! YOUTH THEATER.** Celebrating 30 years, TADA! – the first youth theater to win a Drama Desk Award – is one of NYC’s leading producers of high-quality musical theater productions performed by NYC’s talented kids and teens for family audiences; as well as Arts Education residencies, classes and camps. TADA! has produced 79 mainstage musicals for over 150,000 audience members, and has reached 750,000 kids in arts education and theater programs in and out of school. TADA!’s programs – which reach 30,000 people annually – provide a safe and creative place for kids and teens to grow emotionally, intellectually and socially through musical theater. At the heart of TADA! is the Resident Youth Ensemble Program, a unique, completely free, pre-professional program, which annually serves 80 talented children aged 8-18 from all different backgrounds. Once accepted, members receive free training and perform in all of TADA!’s mainstage productions and special events.

### **ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER:**

Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public Theater is the only theater in New York that produces Shakespeare, the classics, musicals, contemporary and experimental pieces in equal measure. The Public continues the work of its visionary founder, Joe Papp, by acting as an advocate for the theater as an essential cultural force, and leading and framing dialogue on some of the most important issues of our day. Creating theater for one of the largest and most diverse audience bases in New York City for nearly 60 years, today the Company engages audiences in a variety of venues—including its landmark downtown home at Astor Place, which houses five theaters and Joe’s Pub; the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, home to its beloved, free Shakespeare in the Park; and the Mobile Unit, which tours Shakespearean productions for underserved audiences throughout New York City’s five boroughs. The Public’s wide range of programming includes free Shakespeare in the Park, the bedrock of the Company’s dedication to making theater accessible to all; Public Works, a new initiative that is designed to cultivate new connections and new models of engagement with artists, audiences and the community each year; new and experimental stagings at The Public at Astor Place, including Public Lab; and a range of artist and audience development initiatives including its Public Forum series, which brings together theater artists and professionals from a variety of disciplines for discussions that shed light on social issues explored in Public productions. The Public Theater is located on property owned by the City of New York and receives annual support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; and in October 2012 the landmark building downtown at Astor Place was revitalized to physically manifest the Company’s core mission of sparking new dialogues and increasing accessibility for artists and audiences, by dramatically opening up the building to the street and community, and transforming the lobby into a public piazza for artists, students, and audiences. Key elements of the revitalization an expanded and refurbished lobby; the addition of a mezzanine level with a new restaurant lounge, The Library, designed by the Rockwell Group. [www.publictheater.org](http://www.publictheater.org)

The LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust provides leadership support for The Public Theater’s year-round activities; Bank of America, Proud Season Sponsor of Shakespeare in the Park; The Harold & Mimi Steinberg New Play Development Fund at The Public Theater Supports the Creation and Development of New Plays; The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation - Lead Supporter of The Public’s Access and Engagement Programming; The Time Warner Foundation, Founding Sponsor of The Emerging Writers Group; Delta Air Lines, Official Airline of The Public Theater; *New York Magazine* is the official print sponsor of The Public Theater’s 2014-2015 downtown season; Public support is provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency; and the National Endowment for the Arts, an independent federal agency.

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