

**Five-time Emmy Winner Wayne Brady,  
Whitney Bashor, Aaron Lazar, Saycon Sengbloh,  
Amir Talai, Donna Vivino Lead Stellar Ensemble Cast  
for Stephen Sondheim's *Merrily We Roll Along* at The Wallis**

**Tony Award Nominee Michael Arden Directs New Production**

**November 23 through December 18;  
Opening Night Set for Wednesday, November 30**

(Beverly Hills, CA October 17) Legendary American composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim's masterwork *Merrily We Roll Along* is revisited in a new production under the direction of Tony Award nominee **Michael Arden** (*Spring Awakening*) set for the Bram Goldsmith Theater stage at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts from November 23 through December 18. Five-time Emmy Award winner **Wayne Brady** (Broadway's *Kinky Boots*), Obie and Drama Desk Award winner and Tony Award nominee **Saycon Sengbloh** (Broadway's *Eclipsed*), **Whitney Bashor** (Broadway's *The Bridges of Madison County*), **Aaron Lazar** (Broadway's *The Light in the Piazza*, *The Last Ship*), Ovation Award nominee **Amir Talai** (*What To Expect When You're Expecting*; Pasadena Playhouse's *Can-Can* and *The Fantasticks*) and **Donna Vivino** (Broadway's *Wicked* as "Elphaba" and the original company of *Les Misérables* as "Young Cosette") lead the talented ensemble cast. *Merrily We Roll Along* is co-produced by The Wallis and Cody Lassen, and is made possible by the generous support from the Lauren B. Leichtman and Arthur E. Levine Family Foundation and Montage Beverly Hills.

"It was refreshing to spend time with Michael and the *Merrily* team during the casting of a company comprised of such extraordinarily talented actors," said Paul Crewes, The Wallis' Artistic Director. "This LA production genuinely reflects the diversity of America in 2016. It is one of the enlightened ways that we are approaching this great work."

"I'm so happy to be working with this exceptional cast on my first production as The Wallis' Artist-in-Residence, sharing what many consider to be Sondheim's most beautiful show and score," said Director Michael Arden. "I'm looking forward to seeing Los Angeles audiences, both young and old, connect with these special characters on their journey backwards from adults to teenagers."

The ensemble includes Eric B. Anthony, Sandy Bainum, Melody Butiu, Doran Butler, Max Chucker, Sarah Daniels, Laura Dickinson, Kevin Patrick Doherty, Rachael Ferrera, Jennifer Foster, Travis Leland, Lyle Colby Mackston, Brent Schindele and Maximus Brandon Verso.

With music and lyrics by Sondheim and book by George Furth, *Merrily We Roll Along* tells the powerful and moving story of a composer's idealism and friendships, corrupted by success, in an emotionally charged journey through the lives of three friends. Told backwards, this rarely-staged musical begins with the disillusioned present, travelling in time throughout seven different periods, and ending with the friends' optimistic early years. Based on the Kaufman and Hart play, *Merrily We Roll Along* features some of Sondheim's most beautiful and at times haunting songs including, "Good Thing Going," "Our Time," "Old Friends" and "Not a Day Goes By." Initially presented on Broadway in 1981, it ran for 52 previews and only 16 performances before quickly closing. That production is now the subject of a new documentary film, *Best Worst Thing That Ever Could Have Happened* opening in theaters in November.

Single tickets for ***Merrily We Roll Along*** are now available for \$29 – \$110. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [TheWallis.org](http://TheWallis.org), call 310.746.4000, or stop by in person at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts Ticket Services located at 9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills, CA 90210. Ticket prices subject to change.

#### **About the *Merrily We Roll Along* Cast:**

**Whitney Bashor** (Beth Spencer) Broadway: *The Bridges of Madison County* (Clarence Derwent Award). National Tour: *Happy Days*, *Whistle Down the Wind*. Off Broadway: *The Fantasticks*, *Himself and Nora*. Regional: *The Bridges of Madison County* (Williamstown Theatre Festival), *Fly By Night* (Dallas Theater Center), *Light in the Piazza* (Philadelphia Theatre Company: Barrymore Award Winner for Best Musical), *Beaches* (Drury Lane Theatre), *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* (Denver Center Theatre Company), *Diner* (Signature Theatre), *To The Lighthouse* (Berkeley Repertory Theater), *Edges* (Original Company; Capital Repertory Theatre). Workshops: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Lincoln Center), *Unknown Soldier* (MTC), *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* (McCarter Theater Center). Concerts: *Adam Guettel* at 54 Below, *Jason Robert Brown* at 54 Below. Television: "Boardwalk Empire," "Love Monkey," "All My Children." Film: *Off The Black*. Whitney holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Michigan.

**Wayne Brady** (Charley Kringas) is one of the most talented and versatile men working in showbiz today. The five time Emmy Award-winner (four Daytime, one Primetime Emmy) and Grammy Award nominee has done it all. From theater (*Chicago*, *RENT*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Kinky Boots*), sitcoms ("How I Met Your Mother," "Real Husbands of Hollywood"), variety and talk shows ("The Wayne Brady Show," "The Chappelle Show"), hosting (Miss America, Daytime Emmys, The BET Honors), music (The Hollywood Bowl, Carnegie Hall, the CD "A Long Time Coming") and a sold out Las Vegas residency of his improv show *Makin' Sh\*t Up*. Currently he can be seen on his eighth season of CBS' "Let's Make A Deal" and The CW's "Whose Line Is It Anyway?"

**Aaron Lazar** (Franklin Shephard) Broadway: *The Light in the Piazza*, *The Last Ship*, *Les Misérables*, *Impressionism*, *A Little Night Music*, *Mamma Mia*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Oklahoma*. Film/TV: *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *J. Edgar*, *This is Where I Leave You*, "The Strain," "The Blacklist," "The Good Wife," "Blue Bloods," "The Following," as O'Brady Shaw on "The Onion News Network," "Girl Meets World," "A Gifted Man" and currently recurring on "Quantico." Aaron has performed as a guest artist with The New York Pops at Carnegie Hall, the National Symphony Orchestra at The Kennedy Center, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra at Masada, The Hollywood Bowl

Orchestra and The Boston Pops. His cabaret "Look for Me in the Songs" is critically acclaimed nationwide. Other fun credits include *Company* at Avery Fisher Hall with the New York Philharmonic, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *A New Brain* at City Center Encores. Having recently moved here from New York City, Aaron is thrilled to be making his Los Angeles theater debut.

**Saycon Sengbloh** (Gussie Carnegie) is an award-winning actress whose riveting performance as Wife Number One in *Eclipsed* at The Public earned her an Obie Award and Drama Desk Award, and a Tony nomination on Broadway. Sengbloh will be seen as Nora in the upcoming feature film *Double Play* by Ernest Dickerson. Sengbloh has also starred in the Broadway productions of *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, *Motown the Musical*, *Fela!*, *Wicked*, *Aida*, *The Color Purple*, *Hair* and the national tour of *RENT*. Regionally, she originated the roles of Rita Marley in *Marley* at Center Stage Theater (Baltimore), Frankie in the Dallas Theater Center's *Stagger Lee* and Toyia in Signature Theatre Company's *Hurt Village* (NYC). TV/film credits include "The Good Wife" (CBS), "The Night Of" (HBO), *American Gangster* (Universal Pictures) and *Funny Valentine* (BET Starz). Her original music can be found on iTunes. Education: Agnes Scott College.

**Amir Talai** (Joe Josephson) is a San Francisco native and a University of California, Berkeley graduate. He has been in numerous television shows and movies, most notably *What to Expect When You're Expecting* and *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo*. He will be seen next year in *The Circle*, opposite Emma Watson and Tom Hanks, and *Why We're Killing Gunther*, opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger. He was nominated for an Ovation Award for playing Boris in Pasadena Playhouse's *Can-Can*, and played Joey Biltmore in the Hollywood Bowl's *Guys and Dolls*. He serves on the board of The Story of Stuff and volunteers with Campaign Zero, which works to educate about and end police brutality in America. He is addicted to social media.

**Donna Vivino** (Mary Flynn), a New Jersey native, made her Broadway debut at the age of eight in the original company of *Les Misérables* as "Young Cosette" where she can be heard on the cast recording. Other Broadway/NYC credits include: *Wicked* (Elphaba), *Hairspray*, *Fame Becomes Me* (with Martin Short), *Saturday Night Fever*, *Stars of David* (World Premiere). TV/Film credits include Serena Maxwell on "Submissions Only," "Sopranos" (HBO), "A Gifted Man" (ABC), Young Erica Kane on "All My Children" (ABC), *Married to It*, *Good Friday* and *Everyday People*. Donna's debut solo jazz album "Beautiful Dreamer" is available on iTunes. Education: Barnard College, Columbia University.

For more casting information, please visit [TheWallis.org/Press](http://TheWallis.org/Press).

#### **About the Director:**

**Michael Arden** makes his debut as The Wallis' first Artist in Residence with *Merrily We Roll Along*. His credits include: Deaf West Theatre's *Spring Awakening* (Ovation, Outer Critics Circle Awards, Tony and Drama Desk Award Nominations), *My Fair Lady* at the Bay Street Theater, LA Ronde for The Forest Of Arden Theatre Collective, and *For The Record: John Hughes* at Rockwell Table and Stage. Michael is a Presidential Scholar in the Arts, a recipient of the 2015-2016 Standout Award for Diversity and Inclusion and winner of the 2004 Tony Honor. Upcoming projects include *Once on this Island* (NYC) and *The Pride* at The Wallis. He received his theater training at Interlochen Arts Academy and The Juilliard School.

Arden was recently named The Wallis' first ever Artist-in-Residence for the 2016/17 season. In addition to directing two new productions—Sondheim's *Merrily We Roll Along* and Alexi Kaye Campbell's *The Pride*—Arden will continue to develop new work and conduct a Master Class. *The*

*Pride*, a gorgeously drawn drama alternating between two very distinct time periods and sets of characters whose fate is written by their eras, is set to hit the stage of the Lovelace Studio Theater at The Wallis June 6 through 30, 2017.

**About the Production Team:**

The creative team includes: Eamon Foley (Choreographer), Matt Gould (Musical Supervisor), Adam Wachter (Musical Director), Dane Laffrey (Scenic and Costume Design), Travis Hagenbuch (Lighting Design), Dan Moses Schreier (Sound Design), Jeffrey Maloney (Prop Master), Beth Lipari (Casting), T.J. Kearney (Production Stage Manager), Anne L. Hitt (Assistant Stage Manager), Blake Silver (Associate Director) and Penny Wildman (Assistant Choreographer). Produced in association with Robert Laurita, Aaron Sanko, Invisible Wall Productions/Diego Kolankowsky and Kari Lynn Hearn.

**About Stephen Sondheim (Music/Lyrics):**

Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics for *Saturday Night, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Anyone Can Whistle, Company, Follies, The Frogs, Pacific Overtures, Sweeney Todd, Merrily We Roll Along, Sunday in the Park With George, Into the Woods, Assassins, Passion and Road Show* as well as lyrics for *West Side Story, Gypsy* and *Do I Hear a Waltz?* and additional lyrics for *Candide*. Anthologies of his work include *Side by Side by Sondheim, Marry Me A Little, You're Gonna Love Tomorrow* and *Putting It Together*. For films, he composed the scores for *Stravinsky*, co-composed *Reds* and wrote songs for *Dick Tracy* and the television production "Evening Primrose." He co-authored the film *The Last of Sheila* and the play *Getting Away With Murder*. Mr. Sondheim is on the Council of the Dramatists Guild, having served as its president from 1973 to 1981.

**About George Furth (1932-2008) (Book):**

George Furth graduated from Northwestern University's School of Speech and did graduate work at Columbia University. After appearing in dozens of films and countless television shows as an actor, he went on to write (the play or book for) *Company, Twigs, The Act, The Supporting Cast, Merrily We Roll Along, Precious Sons* and *Getting Away With Murder* (with Stephen Sondheim). He has won Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, London's Olivier and Evening Standard Award, Chicago's Jefferson, the Andy and Drama League awards. He was a member of the Actors Studio and the Dramatists Guild.

**About the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts**

Since opening its doors in October 2013, The Wallis has produced or presented over 100 dance, theatre, opera, classical music and children's programs to an ever expanding audience. Located in the heart of Beverly Hills, California, The Wallis brings audiences world-class theater, dance and music, performed by many of the world's most talented and sought-after artists. Featuring eclectic programming that mirrors the diverse landscape of Los Angeles and its notability as the entertainment capital of the world, The Wallis offers original and revered works from across the U.S. and around the globe. The mission of The Wallis is to be a vital cultural hub that uses unique arts events and education programming to entertain, enlighten and inspire children and adults in our community and across the nation.

Nominated for 26 Ovation Awards, including Best Season, four L.A. Drama Critic's Circle Awards and the recipient of five architectural awards since opening in 2013, The Wallis is a breathtaking 70,000-square-foot venue that celebrates the classic and the modern and was designed by Zoltan E. Pali, FAIA of Studio Pali Fekete architects. The building features the restored, original 1933 Beverly Hills Post Office (on the National Register of Historic Places) that serves as the theater's dramatic yet welcoming lobby, and houses the 150-seat Lovelace Studio Theater, GRoW at The Wallis: A Space for Arts

Education (a gift of Gregory Annenberg Weingarten and Family and the Annenberg Foundation) and the contemporary 500-seat, state-of-the-art Bram Goldsmith Theater. Together, these structures embrace the city's history and its future, creating a performing arts destination for L.A.-area visitors and residents alike.

For more information about **The Wallis' 2016/17 season**, please visit <http://bit.ly/2aEsZ6l>.

For more information about The Wallis, please visit: [TheWallis.org](http://TheWallis.org).

For downloadable photos, please visit [TheWallis.org/Press](http://TheWallis.org/Press)

Like The Wallis on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com), and follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com). #SondheimAtTheWallis

**TICKET INFORMATION:**

**What:** *Merrily We Roll Along*  
Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts  
Bram Goldsmith Theater  
9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA, 90210

**When:** November 23 – December 18, 2016  
November 23 – 29, 2016 (Previews)  
November 30 (Opening Night)  
Performance Schedule: Tues – Fri at 8pm; Sat 2pm & 8pm; Sun 2pm & 7pm

**Tickets:** Single tickets: \$29 – \$110 (prices subject to change)  
Online – [TheWallis.org](http://TheWallis.org)  
By Phone – 310.746.4000  
Box Office – Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts Ticket Service  
9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA, 90210

**Press Contacts:**

Sarah Jarvis, The Wallis Communications Manager  
310.246.3800 | [sjarvis@thewallis.org](mailto:sjarvis@thewallis.org)

Gary W. Murphy, The Wallis Public Relations Consultant  
310.914.0178 | [gmurphypr@gmail.com](mailto:gmurphypr@gmail.com)