



**News Release
Virginia Repertory Theatre**

For Immediate Release

Date: November 3, 2015

Contact: Susan Davenport
Director of Communications
Virginia Repertory Theatre
sdavenport@virginiarep.org
804-513-8211
804-783-1688ext 1133

**Virginia Rep Announces the Opening of *Gypsy*
Friday, November 20**

**Starring
Robyn O'Neill as Mama Rose
Chris Hietikko as Herbie
and Christie Jackson as Louise**

Richmond, VA – Virginia Repertory Theatre announces the opening of the award-winning American musical, *Gypsy*, at the Sara Belle and Neil November Theatre, 114 West Broad Street on Friday, November 20 with a Preview on Thursday, November 19. The show runs through January 10, 2015. With a book by Arthur Laurents, music by Jule Styne, and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, *Gypsy* is a crowning achievement in American musical theatre.

Loosely based on the 1957 memoirs of Gypsy Lee Rose, *Gypsy* tells the story of Mama Rose, the ultimate stage mother, and her hopes and dreams for her daughters, June and Louise. As the lights of Vaudeville dim, Louise steps into the spotlight as Gypsy Rose Lee and rises to become one of the most famed burlesque performers of all time. The show opened on Broadway in 1959 and has had 5 revivals. The iconic role of Rose has been played by Broadway legends such as Ethel Merman, Angela Lansbury, Tyne Daly, Bernadette Peters, Patti LuPone, and Imelda Staunton. The last professional Richmond production of *Gypsy* was produced by TheatreVirginia in 1997.

Director Chase Kniffen has assembled an outstanding cast, design team, and musical ensemble and considers *Gypsy* to be a special project. “*Gypsy* has always been one of my dream shows to direct, and to work on it with Robyn is an incredible opportunity. She is perfect for the role.” Kniffen’s recent directing credits include last summer’s hit musical, *South Pacific*, *The Color Purple*, and *Caroline, or Change* (2015 RTCC for Best Musical) for Cadence Theatre Company in partnership with Virginia Rep. He won the 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2014 RTCC Award for Best Director of a Musical for his work on *The Sound of Music*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *Spring Awakening*, and *The Color Purple*.

Virginia Rep is delighted to welcome back **Music Director, Jose Simbulan**. Recent credits include *Man of La Mancha* at the Shakespeare Theatre Company and *West Side Story* at Merry-Go-Round Playhouse. Previous Richmond credits include *My Fair Lady* for Virginia Rep, as well as productions at Dogwood Dell, Barksdale Theatre, Richmond Triangle Players, and Theatre VCU. Currently based out of New York City, he has been in the Broadway pits of *Lestat* and the revival of *A Chorus Line*.

Choreographer, Leslie Owens-Harrington, is a seasoned choreographer with a diverse repertoire from theme park mainstage presentations to HBO’s featured movie *Iron Jawed Angels*. A few of her musical credits include *The Color Purple*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *My Fair Lady*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, and *Anything Goes*. Harrington’s Director/Choreographer credits include *Once on This Island*, *Smokey Joe’s Cafe*, and *Ragtime*.

Set Designer, Brian Prather, returns to Virginia Rep after his work on *South Pacific* this past summer and *Fiddler on the Roof* in 2013. Recent Off-Broadway designs include: *A Christmas Carol*, *Becoming Dr. Ruth*, *The Memory Show*, *Freud’s Last Session*, *Nymph Errant*, *The Burnt Part Boys*. International: *Chung-mu Hall* (South Korea). Joining Prather is **Lighting Designer, Lynn Hartman**. Recent Virginia Rep credits include: *Mame*, *Treasure Island*, *Other Desert Cities*, *Tartuffe*, *Shrek!*, *The Music Man*, *Red*, *The Producers*, *Spring Awakening*, *Seussical*, *Legacy of Light* (2011 RTCC Award) and *The Sound of Music* (2010 RTCC Award).

Costume Designer, Sue Griffin, recently won the 2015 RTCC award for her work on *South Pacific*. Other credits include *Mame*, *The Color Purple*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, and *White Christmas*. Under Griffin’s direction as head of the Virginia Rep costume shop, over 1000 costume pieces are produced annually.

Robyn O’Neill will play the iconic role of Mama Rose. O’Neill has appeared in more than 60 musicals since her arrival in Richmond in 1987 including leading roles in: *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Into the Woods*, *Seussical*, *Cinderella*, *Side Show*, and *Sunday in the*

Park with George. She has been a soloist with the Richmond Symphony and is the 2005 recipient of Richmond Magazine's Theresa Pollak Award.

Virginia Rep is thrilled to welcome to the stage New York actor, **Chris Hietikko**, in the role of Herbie. Hietikko's New York and Regional credits include: The Actor's Company Theatre: *The Runner Stumbles*; Rattlestick Playwright's Theatre: *A Trip to the Beach*; Goodspeed Opera House: *La Cage*; Shakespeare Theatre DC: *Wallenstein, Coriolanus*; Rep Theatre of St. Louis: *Sunday in the Park, Humble Boy, Betrayal*; Cincinnati Playhouse: *As You Like It*; Portland Center Stage: *Opus*; Denver Theatre Center: *Glengarry*; Humana Festival/ATL: *Wonderful World*; Old Globe: *Bedroom Farce*; Great Lakes Theatre Festival: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and the McCarter: *The Misanthrope*. Television credits include: *Law and Order: SVU*; *Crossing Jordan*; *Jimmy Kimmel*; and *Strong Medicine*.

Christie Jackson returns to the November stage as Louise. Recent Virginia Rep credits include: *Spring Awakening* (RTCC Winner for Best Actress in a Supporting Role in a Musical), *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Next to Normal* in partnership with Cadence Theatre Company.

Kevin DeJesus-Jones makes his Virginia Rep debut as Tulsa. He was most recently seen swinging over audiences in the Broadway production of *Spiderman: Turn Off the Dark*. Past regional credits include Robert Martin in *The Drowsy Chaperone* and Tommy Djilas in *The Music Man*. The full cast is listed below.

Ticket Information

Box Office 804-282-2620

www.virginiarep.org

Full Price Tickets: \$48 - \$60

Discounted Group Rates and Rush tickets available.

U-Tix for college and high school students \$15. Available by phone or in person day of show only. Student ID required.

The Sara Belle and Neil November Theatre is equipped with a new state-of-the-art induction loop hearing system that is compatible with all telecoil-equipped hearing aids and cochlear implants. A handheld receiver and headphone system is also available free of charge for anyone who is hearing impaired.

Valet is available at all performances except the Preview for \$8. Free self-park is available at all performances within two blocks of the theatre.

Press Kits Available at <http://va-rep.org/press.html>

Pass code accessible Hi Res photos available to media.

username = press password = HiRes121

Evening performances take place at 8:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, 7:00 p.m. on select Wednesdays and all Thursdays. Matinee performances take place at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday and select Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Student Matinees

Middle and high school matinees will take place on December 10 and 11 at 10:30 a.m. Tickets are \$14. Shows include talkback with cast members.

Direction & Design

Director	Chase Kniffen
Musical Director	Jose Simbulan
Choreographer	Leslie Owens-Harrington^
Assistant choreographer	Devonte Wells*
Scenic Designer	Brian Prather+
Lighting Designer	Lynn M. Hartman+
Costume Designer	Sue Griffin
Stage Manager	Rick Brandt*
Assistant Stage Manager	Luke Robinson*
Assistant Stage Manager	Luke Robinson

Cast List

Rose	Robyn O'Neill
Herbie	Chris Hietikko*
Louise	Christie Jackson
June	Catherine Walker
Tulsa	Kevin DeJesus-Jones*
Mazeppa	Debra Clinton
Electra/Miss Cratchitt	Susan Sandford*
Tessie Tura	Nicole Oberleitner
Yonkers	Dan Morton
L.A.	Devonte S. Wells*

^The director and choreographer are members of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

+Member of USA United Scenic Artists: local 829

* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the U.S.A.

Full bios can be found at www.virginiarep.org.

Corporate Sponsors

Virginia Rep is grateful for the support from our Signature Season Sponsors: Altria and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and our production sponsor, Townebank. Additional funding is provided by the Shubert Foundation, Windsor Foundation, Virginia Commission for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, The Richmond Times-Dispatch, Richmond.com and Community Idea Stations.

About Virginia Repertory Theatre

Virginia Repertory Theatre, located in Richmond, VA, combines the talents and strengths of two nonprofit companies that shared facilities, resources, and management teams for over a decade. Now the heritages of Barksdale Theatre (founded in 1953) and Theatre IV (founded in 1975) live on in their new form, as Central Virginia's leading professional theater company. Virginia Rep presents national caliber productions of the great dramas, comedies, and musicals as well as classics, contemporary works, and world premieres, always seeking to demonstrate the unique power of theater to engage, enthrall, educate, and inspire. Productions are staged at four distinct venues: the Sara Belle and Neil November Theatre and Theatre Gym at the downtown Virginia Rep Center, Virginia Rep's Children's Theatre located at Willow Lawn, and at Hanover Tavern, home to Virginia Rep's Barksdale Season.

