



THE LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS UNVEILS “HEADLINERS” SERIES WITH LEANN RIMES, BRIAN STOKES MITCHELL, DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM, AND MORE

January 7 – July 9, 2022
Hofmann Theatre, Leshler Center for the Arts

WALNUT CREEK, CA (3 November 2021) — The Leshler Center for the Arts announces the stellar lineup for its **Headliners** series, kicking off January 7 with Grammy and multi-award-winning singer **LeAnn Rimes**. Brought to audiences by the Diablo Regional Arts Association, the sensational series will also feature Tony Award-winning singer **Brian Stokes Mitchell** (February 25), trailblazing ballet from **Dance Theatre of Harlem** (April 29 & 30), soulful jazz from the **Joey Alexander Trio** featuring the Indonesian piano prodigy (May 6), Broadway veteran **Laura Benanti** (June 25), and comedian **Ryan Hamilton** (July 9). The **Headliners** series will be presented **January 7 – July 9, 2022** (*full schedule below, all performances 7:30pm*) at the Leshler Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek. For tickets (\$32-\$92, on sale November 3) and more information, the public may visit www.lesherartscenter.org or call the box office at (925) 943-7469 (*open Wed-Sun, 12-6pm*).

LeAnn Rimes (Friday, January 7)

LeAnn Rimes is an international multi-platinum selling acclaimed singer and ASCAP award-winning songwriter who has sold more than 44 million units globally. She has won two Grammy Awards, 12 Billboard Music Awards, two World Music Awards, three Academy of Country Music Awards, one Country Music Association Award, and one Dove Award. At just 13, she topped the charts with her rendition of Bill Mack’s “Blue”—her debut album of the same name brought her a number one hit and a pair of Grammy Awards the following year, including “Best New Artist,” making her the youngest Grammy winner at the time. The powerhouse vocalist lit

up television screens this past December when she won “The Masked Singer” on *FOX*, mesmerizing viewers as The Sun. Prior to this, she starred in and served as an Executive Producer for *Hallmark's* “It's Christmas, Eve,” which earned the highest TV original movie debut to date for the channel, premiering to over 4.3 million viewers.

Rimes has been honored with the Ally of Equality Award by the Human Rights Campaign for over 20 years of equal rights support, the 2019 HOPE Award for Depression Advocacy, and 2009 ACM Humanitarian Award, among other recognitions, solidifying her dedication to making the world a better place. Passionate about using her voice to help heal the world, Rimes released a record in November 2020 called “CHANT: The Human and The Holy (Soul of EverLe/Thirty Tigers).” Rimes continued her wellness journey with the launch of an iHeartRadio podcast, Wholly Human, which brings her lifestyle blog, Soul of EverLe, to life—introducing her fans to the teachers and wise souls that have made a positive impact on her. Rimes released her most recent studio album, “God's Work,” in July 2021, celebrating her monumental 25th anniversary as a recording artist and commemorating the release of her inaugural album “Blue.”

Brian Stokes Mitchell (Friday, February 25)

Dubbed “the last leading man” by *The New York Times*, **Brian Stokes Mitchell**’s career spans more than 40 years in Broadway, television, film, and music. He has received Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle awards for his turn in *Kiss Me, Kate*, and received Tony nominations for his performances in *Man of La Mancha*, August Wilson’s *King Hedley II*, and *Ragtime*. He has also performed on Broadway in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Jelly’s Last Jam*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, and most recently in *Shuffle Along*. Mitchell was four days away from opening *LOVE/LIFE* at City Center Encores when all of Broadway shut down due to the pandemic. While recovering from COVID-19 in March 2020, he began singing “The Impossible Dream” from his fifth-floor apartment window in Manhattan every night for a number of weeks. Crowds gathered to admire his impromptu performances, which he continued in honor of essential workers, applauding paramedics, firemen, policemen, and healthcare workers.

Mitchell's screen credits include a seven-year stint on "Trapper John, MD," as well as appearances on *PBS* "Great Performances," "Frasier," "The Prince of Egypt," "Glee," "Madam Secretary," "Elementary," and "Prodigal Son." He has had recurring roles on "Mr. Robot," "The Path," and "Evil." As a singer, Stokes has spanned the genres of jazz, opera, pops, country, and musical theater, performing all over the country with artists such as John Williams, Gustavo Dudamel, Marvin Hamlisch, Keith Lockhart, Michael Tilson Thomas, Leonard Slatkin, Bobby McFerrin, Dianne Reeves, and the Muppets. He has made multiple appearances at Carnegie Hall, beginning with his debut with the San Francisco Symphony to a sold-out solo concert. He has twice been invited to perform at the White House and has sung for Presidents Clinton and Obama.

Dance Theatre of Harlem (Friday, April 29 & Saturday, April 30)

The **Dance Theatre of Harlem** tours nationally and internationally, presenting a powerful vision for ballet in the 21st century. The 18-member, multi-ethnic company performs a forward-thinking repertoire that includes treasured classics, neoclassical works by George Balanchine and resident choreographer Robert Garland, as well as innovative contemporary works that use the language of ballet to celebrate Black culture. Led by Artistic Director Virginia Johnson, the **Dance Theatre of Harlem** aims to present a company of African-American and other racially diverse artists who perform the most demanding repertory at the highest level of quality, as well as a world-class school that trains young people in classical ballet and the allied arts. It also provides arts education, community outreach programs, and positive role models. Through performances, community engagement, and arts education, the company spreads the message of empowerment through the arts for all.

Joey Alexander Trio (Friday, May 6)

Born in Bali, Indonesia, **Joey Alexander** taught himself to play the piano at age six, learning jazz from his father and his classic jazz albums. When he was eight, he was invited by UNESCO to play solo piano for Herbie Hancock. The following year, he won the grand prize at the Master-Jam Fest in Ukraine and went on to perform at jazz festivals in Jakarta and Copenhagen. At 11, Wynton Marsalis invited Alexander to debut at Jazz at Lincoln Center's annual fundraising gala, and appearances at the Montreal and Newport Jazz Festivals, and a feature on "60 Minutes" soon

followed. In 2016, he performed at the 58th Grammy Awards as well as the White House with Wayne Shorter and Esperanza Spalding for the Obamas, as part of a nationally televised International Jazz Day special. In 2018, Alexander headlined Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Theater, and made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2019 to a sold-out Zankel Hall crowd. Both his debut album "My Favorite Things," and second CD "Countdown," received Grammy nominations, marking Alexander as the youngest musician ever nominated for a Grammy Award in a jazz category. His surprise third release "Joey. Monk. Live!" honoring Thelonious Monk's centennial, documents his trio's performance at Jazz at Lincoln Center in 2017. Building upon the swing and improvisational style that have made his performances a critical and popular success at well-known venues and major festivals around the world, the young pianist continues to astonish.

Laura Benanti (Saturday, June 25)

Tony Award-winning Broadway veteran **Laura Benanti** is a celebrated stage and screen actress who can currently be seen in *HBO Max*'s highly-anticipated "Gossip Girl" reboot. Her recent appearances also include her comedic portrayal of First Lady Melania Trump on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," and additional television credits include recurring roles on "Supergirl," "Nashville," "The Good Wife," "Elementary," "Nurse Jackie," and "Law and Order: SVU," among others. She also reprised her role on the final season of the hit TV series "Younger," starring opposite Sutton Foster and Hilary Duff, and starred in Sara Colangelo's "Worth" alongside Michael Keaton, Stanley Tucci, and Amy Ryan. Benanti will next be seen in Lin-Manuel Miranda's "Tick, Tick... Boom!" for Netflix. She also created and executive produced the *HBO Max* special, "Homeschool Musical: Class of 2020," an unscripted special featuring students across the U.S.

Benanti made her Broadway debut at the young age of 18 as Maria in *The Sound of Music* opposite Richard Chamberlain, and wowed audiences as Amalia Balash in *She Loves Me*, for which she was nominated for Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, and Drama League Awards. Benanti was also nominated for a Tony Award, and won both the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards, for her starring role in the Broadway production of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* for Lincoln Center Theatre. She earned the 2008 Tony Award for

“Outstanding Featured Actress in a Musical,” a Drama Desk Award, and an Outer Critics Circle Award for her revelatory portrayal of Louise in *Gypsy* opposite Patti LuPone. She was again nominated for Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards for her performance of Cinderella in Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* and nominated for a Tony in *Swing!* In 2019, Benanti made her triumphant return to Broadway as Eliza Doolittle in Lincoln Center's acclaimed production of *My Fair Lady*. Benanti's musical career includes a self-titled studio album comprised of contemporary covers, as well as jazzy love songs and comedic takes on beloved favorites. She also produced a children's album titled “Singing You Home - Children's Songs for Family Reunification,” in which all proceeds were donated to reuniting families separated at the border. The seven-song album featured stand-out artists such as Lin-Manuel Miranda, Ingrid Michaelson, Kristin Chenoweth, Cynthia Erivo, and Idina Menzel, among others.

Ryan Hamilton (Saturday, July 9)

Rising comedian **Ryan Hamilton** was named one of *Rolling Stone's* “Five Comics to Watch.” He released his first Netflix stand-up special, the one-hour original “Happy Face,” following a wealth of television appearances and a non-stop headlining tour. Armed with the unique perspective of growing up in rural Idaho, he has quickly become a favorite in the New York stand-up comedy scene. His recent appearances include “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert,” “Conan,” and opening spots for Jerry Seinfeld. *The New York Times* called him “one of the most reliably funny regulars at the Comedy Cellar, an observational comic who often riffs on the absurdity of his own wholesomeness.”

About the Diablo Regional Arts Association

The **Diablo Regional Arts Association** (DRAA) is the non-profit partner of the Leshner Center for the Arts, and acts as the designated curator for its programming and audience outreach. The organization aims to achieve artistic excellence by providing exceptional arts programming through quality live theatre, visual arts, and youth education at the Leshner Center for the Arts, while providing avenues of accessibility for everyone to enjoy the arts.

For Calendar Editors

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WHERE: Hofmann Theatre, Leshner Center for the Arts (1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek)

WHEN: **January 7 – July 9, 2022** (*all performances 7:30pm*)

LeAnn Rimes: Fri, January 7

Brian Stokes Mitchell: Fri, February 25

Dance Theatre of Harlem: Fri, April 29 & Sat, April 30

Joey Alexander Trio: Fri, May 6

Laura Benanti: Sat, June 25

Ryan Hamilton: Sat, July 9

INFO: **Tickets (\$32-\$92) go on sale Wednesday, November 3.** Discounts and ticket bundles available. For tickets or more information, the public may visit www.lesherartscenter.org or call the box office at (925) 943-7469 (*open Wed-Sun, 12-6pm*).

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