Next to Normal Cast Announced

Baltimore, MD—Sept. 26, 2014. Center Stage announces casting for the rock musical Next to Normal, the second show of its music-filled 2014-15 Season. The winner of the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and three Tony Awards, Next to Normal is a groundbreaking, darkly funny musical that tells the story of a suburban mother struggling with bipolar disorder and the effect it has on her family. Baltimore native and 11-time director of Center Stage productions David Schweizer is helming the show, which runs Oct. 8 through Nov. 16 in Center Stage’s intimate Head Theater. Broadway-veteran Schweizer last directed 2012’s Bus Stop at Center Stage. “I was born and bred on Center Stage, and I am especially happy and gratified to be a part of Kwame’s theater, because the evolution is quite thrilling. This will be my third piece for Kwame,” Schweizer says.

“Having David here again is a treat. In his capable hands, I know Next to Normal will move audiences to the same rollercoaster of emotions that is in Brian Yorkey’s brilliant script,” Center Stage Artistic Director Kwame Kwei-Armah says. “I love this show because it dares to go where no other musical has gone before, and tackles mental illness with authenticity and a biting humor.”

Schweizer, who previously directed musicals The Boys from Syracuse and Caroline or Change at Center Stage, said he wanted to do Next to Normal because of how it connects to Baltimore.

“What draws me so much to this work is the feistiness of it in what might seem to others to be insurmountable odds. I kind of consider that a Baltimore thing, too. I think this community has its own feisty edge. There’s a nobleness to this city. It’s carved out its own identity. This theater has carved out its own identity. When I heard that this show was potentially on the docket for this season, I raised my hand way up, because I could feel the potential in the link between this show and the audiences.

Next to Normal features a cast lead by Ariela Morgenstern, who also played the powerhouse role of Diana at Penn State Centre Stage this summer and is making her Center Stage debut. Joining Morgenstern as Diana’s husband Dan is Michael Winther, who has performed on Broadway in musicals such as Mamma Mia!, 1776, and Damn Yankees and who was seen in Center Stage’s Schweizer-directed production of The Boys from Syracuse. Justin Scott Brown, who plays Gabe, comes to Baltimore after playing the role of Marius in the 20th anniversary national tour of Les Miserables. He was Jack in Center Stage’s production of Into the Woods.

Completing the cast are three actors making their Center Stage debuts. Matt Lutz (Dr. Madden) was a part of the original Broadway cast of Bonnie and Clyde and is featured in the films A Walk to Remember and Bringing Down the House as well as the TV shows Dawson’s Creek, Boston Public and 7th Heaven. Playing Diana and Dan’s daughter Natalie is Kally Duling, whose credits include The Fifth of July in Williamstown and Back in Pictures Off Broadway. Matthew Rodin (Henry) makes his professional debut in Next to Normal after graduating from The Boston Conservatory this year.

Next to Normal has music by Tom Kitt and a book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey. Kitt is responsible for the music behind other contemporary Broadway rock musicals, including Green Day’s American Idiot, High Fidelity and Bring It On: The Musical. Yorkey’s rock musical credits include Sting’s The Last Ship (on Broadway this fall).

Next to Normal is made possible by DLA Piper, with additional support from McCormick, Inc., and KPMG. Next to Normal’s media partners are WTMD and WYPR. Center Stage is supported by a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC), an agency dedicated to cultivating a vibrant cultural community where the arts thrive. An agency of the Department of Business and Economic Development, the MSAC provides financial support and technical assistance to nonprofit organizations, units of government, colleges, and universities for arts activities. Funding for the MSAC is also provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Center Stage’s 2014-15 Season is made possible by Season 52 presenting sponsor M&T Bank. Maryland Public Television is a Media Partner for Center Stage’s 2014-15 Season.
Previews for *Next to Normal* begin Oct. 8, and opening night is Oct. 15. For more information, visit centerstage.org or call 410.332.0033.

**CAST**

Diana  Ariela Morgenstern*
Natalie   Kally Duling*
Gabe   Justin Scott Brown*
Henry   Matthew Rodin*
Dan   Michael Winther*
Dr. Madden   Matt Lutz*

**ARTISTIC TEAM**

Director    David Schweizer
Musical Director                Darren Cohen
Set Design    Caleb Wertenbaker
Costume Design    David Burdick
Lighting Design    Aaron Black
Sound Design    Ryan Rumery
Choreographer    Dan Knechtges
Projection Designer  Driscoll Otto
Assistant Director   Ryan Haase
Associate Choreographer Jessica Hartman
Stage Manager   Captain Kate Murphy*
Dramaturg    Catherine Maria Rodriguez

* Member of Actors’ Equity Association

**About Center Stage**

Under the leadership of playwright, actor, and director Kwame Kwei-Armah OBE (Artistic Director) and national arts leader Stephen Richard (Managing Director), Center Stage is an artistically driven institution committed to engaging, entertaining, and enriching audiences through joyous and bold performances. Hailed by *The Wall Street Journal* as “a model of what regional theater can and should be,” Center Stage has, for more than 50 years, dedicated itself to exploring new works and bringing classics to life. This rich history is marked by critically acclaimed new works that have shaped the American theater— from the Tony Award-winning *The Triumph of Love* to world premieres such as *Miss Evers’ Boys* by David Feldshuh and *On the Verge* by Eric Overmyer. In 2013, Center Stage’s unprecedented presentation of the Tony Award-winning *Clybourne Park* in repertory with the world premiere of Kwei-Armah’s *Beneatha’s Place* sparked dialogue, drew international media attention, and became the subject of a nationally broadcast PBS documentary, “*A Raisin in the Sun Revisited: The Raisin Cycle at Center Stage*.” With its signature focus on civic and community engagement, Center Stage enters its 52nd season with a commitment to exploring how art and entertainment communicate in the 21st Century and to igniting conversation in Baltimore and beyond.