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Historical New Musical

Tells Unsung Story of World War I Heroines

(Dec. 17, 2021 – PHOENIX) The first show of 2022 at The Phoenix Theatre Company is sure to capture the hearts of the audience and inspire an appreciation for history told through musical theatre. *The Hello Girls*, making its west coast premiere, is a jazzy new musical that chronicles the story of the first women to join the U.S. Armed Forces during World War I as switchboard operators. It runs Jan. 5–30, 2022.

Based on a true story, *The Hello Girls* is a modern retelling of a critical part of history in the struggle for women’s rights. Serving as bilingual telephone operators helping turn the tide in World War I, these brave and inspiring women had to fight to make their way to the front lines and struggled to gain the respect of their peers and the nation. After the war, they fought a decades-long battle for equality and recognition, paving the way for future generations to fight for equal representation. While they were officially the Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Unit, they were typically known as “The Hello Girls.”

“This show is an opportunity to tell a slice of history that had a significant impact on women’s rights in our country, but isn’t very well known,” said Cara Reichel, director and co-creator. “The characters depict real life military heroines who disrupted the status quo during the early 20th-century and helped pivot the first world war’s outcome.”

The Hello Girls musical premiered at New York City’s Prospect Theater Company in 2018 in celebration of the centennial of these groundbreaking female members of a unit set up in 1917.

“Thousands of women applied to be part of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, but only 450 were officially trained to do the job, and just 233 actually served abroad,” added Reichel. “Sadly, the Hello Girls were refused veterans’ benefits granted to male soldiers, under the guise that the women were merely ‘contracted’ civilians rather than enlisted military personnel.”

While *The Hello Girls* musical is fictionalized, the show is based on historical information and drew inspiration from the 2017 book, *The Hello Girls*, by Elizabeth Cobbs. With music and lyrics by Peter Mills, book by Mills and Reichel and directed by Reichel, *The Hello Girls* received three Drama Desk Award nominations: Outstanding Musical, Outstanding Music and Outstanding Lyrics.

The Phoenix Theatre Company production features Rosemarie Chandler as Grace Banker; Gabrielle Smith as Suzanne Prevot; Michelle Chin as Helen Hill; Carmiña Garey as Louise LeBreton; Bonnie Beus Romney as Bertha Hunt; Kevin Robert White as Lt. Ernest Wessen; Scott Wakefield as General Pershing; Alex Crossland as Pvt. Eugene Matterson; Keiji Ishiguri as Pvt. Dempsey; and Teddy Ladley as Cpt. Joseph Riser. The 1900s era costumes for the show were painstakingly created by the theatre's costume designer, Cari Sue Smith, to pay homage to the era. Additionally, many of the performers play musical instruments on stage.

Tickets for *The Hello Girls* are on sale now. To purchase call (602) 254-2151 or visit www.phoenixtheatre.com.

At The Phoenix Theatre Company, masks are strongly encouraged and all patrons will undergo a mandatory temperature check upon arrival. Seating is not socially distanced. Safety protocols will continue to be updated to ensure patron and staff comfort and wellbeing throughout the ongoing global pandemic. To provide those who would feel more comfortable in a fully masked and vaccinated environment with an opportunity to attend productions, selected performances of *The Hello Girls* are designated as "Mask and Vaccination Required." They are Wednesday, Jan. 26 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, Jan. 30 at 3 p.m.

During these performances, masks and proof of vaccination will be required for all patrons and staff in the lobby and theatres unless actively eating or drinking. No food or beverages will be allowed in the theatres. Patrons will still undergo the standard temp check at the door but also must show proof of vaccination at their time of entry into the theatre with their valid ticket. "Fully vaccinated" means the performance date must be at least 14 days after the second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine, or at least 14 days after a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine.

Exceptions are being made for children under 12 and people with a medical condition or closely held religious belief that prevents vaccination. These guests must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours of the performance start time, or a negative COVID-19 antigen test taken within six hours of the performance start time.

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ABOUT THE PHOENIX THEATRE COMPANY

The Phoenix Theatre Company is the largest professional regional theatre company in the state. As the first arts organization in Arizona and a founding member of the Central Arts District, The Phoenix Theatre Company is committed to advancing performing arts in the Valley with nearly 500 performances each year on multiple stages. Located at 1825 N. Central Ave. in Phoenix, The Phoenix Theatre Company's mission is to create exceptional theatrical experiences by using the arts to articulate messages that inspire hope and understanding. For more information visit, www.phoenixtheatre.com.