

For immediate release

CENTER THEATRE GROUP ANNOUNCES
STEPHEN SONDHEIM'S
OLD FRIENDS

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE
STARRING
BERNADETTE PETERS & LEA SALONGA

MUSIC & LYRICS BY STEPHEN SONDHEIM
DEvised BY CAMERON MACKINTOSH
MUSICALLY STAGED AND DIRECTED BY
MATTHEW BOURNE

AS PART OF THE 2024/25 CTG SEASON
AT THE AHMANSON THEATRE
FEBRUARY 8 — MARCH 9, 2025

LOS ANGELES (April 8, 2024) — **Center Theatre Group** (CTG) is pleased to announce the North American premiere of ***Stephen Sondheim's Old Friends***, starring **Bernadette Peters** (*Gypsy, Annie Get Your Gun*) and **Lea Salonga** (*Miss Saigon, Here Lies Love*), and directed by **Sir Matthew Bourne** (*Swan Lake, My Fair Lady*), playing at the **Ahmanson Theatre** from **February 8—March 9, 2025**. The production is the first to be announced from Center Theatre Group's upcoming 2024/25 season. Additional season programming will be revealed in the coming weeks.

Featuring music and lyrics by **Stephen Sondheim** (*Merrily We Roll Along, Into the Woods*), and

devised by **Cameron Mackintosh** (*Cats*, *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*), *Old Friends* opened in London's West End to an array of 5-star reviews, playing its final performance at the Gielgud Theatre on January 6, 2024. Celebrating the life and work of the great Stephen Sondheim, the show has been called "a five-star celebration, gloriously performed by a stellar cast" by the *Financial Times*. The *Daily Telegraph* proclaimed the show as "the musical theatre equivalent of the superhero team-up."

"The North American premiere of *Stephen Sondheim's Old Friends* at the Ahmanson promises to be one of the theatrical events of the year and I am beyond thrilled to welcome three theatrical legends to Center Theatre Group as part of this production. Bernadette Peters, who will be making her CTG debut, along with two artists who we have a long history with; Lea Salonga, who appeared with us in *Flower Drum Song*, and Matthew Bourne, who was just here with his production of *Romeo and Juliet*," said **Snehal Desai, Center Theatre Group Artistic Director**. "This celebration of the music and legacy of Stephen Sondheim will undoubtedly be one of the highlights of our upcoming 2024/25 season."

After making its North American premiere with Center Theatre Group, *Stephen Sondheim's Old Friends* will make its Broadway premiere with Manhattan Theatre Club at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre beginning March 25, 2025.

Tickets to Center Theatre Group's 2024/25 season will be available for subscription purchase soon. To make a donation and learn about ways you can support live theatre in Los Angeles, please visit CenterTheatreGroup.org/Give.

Center Theatre Group
In Association with CMI and Daryl Roth
Presents

Cameron Mackintosh's Production of
***Stephen Sondheim's
Old Friends***
North American Premiere
Starring Bernadette Peters & Lea Salonga
Music & Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim
Devised by Cameron Mackintosh
Musically Staged and Direction by Matthew Bourne
Side by Side with Julia McKenzie
Choreography by Stephen Mear
Originally Produced in London by Cameron Mackintosh
Produced in Association with Cameron Mackintosh and Daryl Roth

At the Ahmanson Theatre
February 8—March 9, 2025
Opens February 13

At the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre
Previews Begin March 25, 2025

Center Theatre Group will present the North American premiere of *Old Friends* at the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles in advance of the Broadway premiere.

Cameron Mackintosh said, “*Old Friends* was Steve's idea, born during lockdown, when he suggested it was time (and we had plenty of it!) we put together a third review of his work, to follow from the worldwide hit *Side by Side By Sondheim* in 1976 (my first!) and *Putting It Together* (which Julia McKenzie directed at the Manhattan Theatre Club starring Julie Andrews in 1993). Though we had started work, very sadly, on Thanksgiving 2021, Steve moved on. So, a few weeks later over the Christmas holidays I collated all our notes and, drawing on material from all the other shows Steve, Julia and I had worked on over the years, completed ‘our farewell show’. In May 2022, we staged a star-studded Gala in London’s West End at the Sondheim Theatre (which I had rebuilt and renamed after him) to celebrate Steve’s work and raise funds for his new Foundation. It was a sensational success that sold out within hours, screened simultaneously at the nearby Prince Edward Theatre, and was subsequently broadcast on TV on the BBC. The material held together so brilliantly that I decided to press ahead and give *Old Friends* the full stage life Steve and I had always planned. The show opened in September 2023 at London’s Gielgud Theatre, directed by Matthew Bourne, side by side with Julia McKenzie, and choreographed by Stephen Mear. Starring Bernadette Peters (making her West End debut at long last!) and Lea Salonga, it received rave reviews and nightly standing ovations during its 16-week run. It is a tremendous joy to now be bringing *Old Friends* to the Ahmanson in Los Angeles and to be back side by side with Lynne Meadow at the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York thanks to Daryl Roth’s support, with a terrific company headed again by my old friends Bernadette and Lea with many other stars to be announced shortly. Audiences are in for a joyous and unforgettable evening featuring some of the greatest songs ever written for the musical theatre in ‘a great big Broadway show’ – just as Steve wanted.”

Celebrate one of Broadway’s true icons with this legendary theatrical event! **Stephen Sondheim’s *Old Friends*** is an irresistible tribute to the master himself, with a company headlined by none other than Tony Award® winners Bernadette Peters and Lea Salonga. **Stephen Sondheim’s *Old Friends*** comes to Broadway from London’s West End, where it sold out in a matter of hours, earned a bevy of 5-star raves and was hailed by *The New York Times* as “unmissable musical theatre.”

Additional casting, creative team, and other listings information for **Stephen Sondheim’s *Old Friends*** will be announced at a later date.

Center Theatre Group, one of the nation’s preeminent arts and cultural organizations, is Los Angeles’ leading not-for-profit theatre company, which, under the leadership of Artistic Director Snehal Desai, Managing Director / CEO Meghan Pressman, and Producing Director Douglas C. Baker, programs the Mark Taper Forum and the Ahmanson Theatre at the Music Center in Downtown Los Angeles, and the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City. Center Theatre Group is one of the country’s leading producers of ambitious new works through commissions and world

premiere productions and a leader in interactive community engagement and education programs that reach across generations, demographics, and circumstances to serve Los Angeles. Founded in 1967, Center Theatre Group has produced more than 700 productions across its three stages, including such iconic shows as *Zoot Suit*; *Angels in America*; *The Kentucky Cycle*; *Biloxi Blues*; *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*; *Children of a Lesser God*; *Curtains*; *The Drowsy Chaperone*; *9 to 5: The Musical*; and *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*.
CenterTheatreGroup.org

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BIOGRAPHIES FOR STEPHEN SONDHEIM'S OLD FRIENDS

BERNADETTE PETERS. In addition to starring in the Lifetime TV movie *Living Proof*, Peters has lit up the silver screen in over 30 films throughout her distinguished career. She received a Golden Globe Award for her memorable performance in *Pennies From Heaven*. Other film credits include *The Jerk*, *The Longest Yard*, *Silent Movie*, *Annie*, *Pink Cadillac*, *Slaves of New York*, Woody Allen's *Alice*, *Impromptu*, *It Runs in the Family*, *Coming Up Roses*, *The Broken Hearts Gallery* and most recently, a surprise appearance in the popular Jonathan Larson biopic, *tick, tick...BOOM!* Bernadette has recorded six solo albums, including the Grammy-nominated *I'll Be Your Baby Tonight*, *Sondheim, Etc.: Bernadette Peters Live at Carnegie Hall*, and *Bernadette Peters Loves Rodgers & Hammerstein*, in addition to numerous original Broadway cast recordings. Peters devotes her time and talents to numerous events that benefit Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. Her "pet project" Broadway Barks, co-founded with Mary Tyler Moore, is an annual, star-studded dog and cat adoption event that benefits shelter animals in the New York City and tri-state area. The American Theater Wing honored her efforts and awarded her with the Isabelle Stevenson Tony Award which recognizes an individual from the theatre community who has made a substantial contribution of volunteered time and effort on behalf of one or more humanitarian, social service or charitable organizations, regardless of whether such organizations relate to the theatre. This past November, while in London Bernadette presented West End Woofs, a sister organization to Broadway Barks that she co-hosted with her good friend, Elaine Paige. The event is the first of its kind in the UK that fostered a spirit of community among animal shelters and rescue groups. She is a New York Times best-selling author who has penned three children's books: *Broadway Barks*, *Stella is a Star*, and *Stella and Charlie: Friends Forever*. All of her proceeds from the sale of these books benefit Broadway Barks. Peters resides in New York and Los Angeles with her rescue dogs, Charlie and Rosalia.

LEA SALONGA is best known for her Tony Award Winning role in *Miss Saigon*. In addition to Tony, she has won the Olivier, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, Theater World Awards, Time100 Impact Award from Time Magazine, and the Gold Legend Award from Gold House. Most recently, Lea starred in the West End production of Stephen Sondheim's musical revue, *Old Friends*, and as Aurora in *Here Lies Love* on Broadway, which she also produced. Lea was also the first Asian to play Eponine in the musical *Les Misérables* on Broadway and returned to the show as Fantine in the 2006 revival. Fans of all ages recognize Lea as the singing voice of

Princess Jasmine from *Aladdin* and Fa Mulan for *Mulan* and *Mulan II*. For her portrayal of the beloved princesses, the Walt Disney Company bestowed her with the honor of “Disney Legend.” She has released 14 albums and toured all over the globe, performing sold-out concerts in landmark venues. Salonga’s talents extend to the screen, where she can be seen on MAX’s *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* and Sony’s *Yellow Rose* and heard on Netflix’s *Centaurworld* and FX’s *Little Demon*.

STEPHEN SONDHEIM (Music & Lyrics) wrote the music and lyrics for *Saturday Night* (1954), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *The Frogs* (1974), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987), *Assassins* (1991), *Passion* (1994), and *Road Show* (2008), as well as the lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959), *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (1965), and additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973). *Side by Side by Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me a Little* (1981), *You’re Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983), *Putting It Together* (1993/99), *Moving On* (2001), and *Sondheim on Sondheim* (2010) are anthologies of his work as a composer and lyricist. For films, he composed the scores of *Stavisky* (1974), co-composed the score for *Reds* (1981), and wrote songs for *Dick Tracy* (1990). He wrote songs for the television production *Evening Primrose* (1966), co-authored the film *The Last of Sheila* (1973), and the play *Getting Away with Murder* (1996) and provided incidental music for the plays *The Girls of Summer* (1956), *Invitation to a March* (1961), *Twigs* (1971), and *The Enclave* (1973). He won the Tony Award for Best Score for *Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods*, and *Passion*, all of which won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award, as did *Pacific Overtures* and *Sunday in the Park with George*, the latter also receiving the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (1985). Stephen Sondheim was born in 1930 and raised in New York City. He graduated from Williams College, winning the Hutchinson Prize for Music Composition, after which he studied theory and composition with Milton Babbitt. He served on the Council of the Dramatists Guild, the national association of playwrights, composers, and lyricists, and served as its president from 1973 to 1981. In 1983, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and in 1990, he was appointed the first Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University. He was awarded the Kennedy Center Honors in 1993, the National Medal of Arts in 1996, the MacDowell Medal in 2013, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015. His collected lyrics with attendant essays have been published in two volumes: *Finishing the Hat* (2010) and *Look, I Made a Hat* (2011). In 2010, the Broadway theater formerly known as Henry Miller’s Theatre was renamed in his honor, and in 2019, he became the first living artist to have a theater named in his honor on Shaftesbury Avenue when the refurbished Queen’s Theatre in London’s West End was renamed the Sondheim Theatre to commemorate his 90th birthday, by Sir Cameron Mackintosh.

CAMERON MACKINTOSH (Devisor/Producing Partner) has been producing shows since 1967 and remains the world’s most prolific producer of musicals in theatre history. As well as producing three of the world’s longest running musicals – *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the*

Opera and *Cats* – his legendary productions also include *Miss Saigon*, *Oliver!*, *Mary Poppins* (co-produced with Disney), *Side By Side By Sondheim*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Witches of Eastwick* and *Five Guys Named Moe*. He has produced several hugely acclaimed revivals of *My Fair Lady*, *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* as well as reinventing long running new productions of *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Oliver!* Cameron is also co-producer with Jeffrey Seller of *Hamilton* in London and on Tour in the UK. In 2012, alongside Working Title Films and Universal, Cameron produced the hugely successful Oscar®, Golden Globe and BAFTA award-winning film adaptation of *Les Misérables*, which is one of the most successful movies ever of an original stage musical. To celebrate over 10 years since its release, the movie has been remixed and recently re-released in full Dolby Atmos and Dolby Vision in selected cinemas around the world, as well as a new home vision 4K Blu-ray disc and iTunes download version of the film. The staged concert version of *Les Misérables* has proved to be just as successful as the original musical and is returning this autumn to stadiums and stages around the world in a much-anticipated spectacular Arena Tour – which is already mostly sold out in the UK. The concert version of *Les Misérables* has been filmed three times – at the Royal Albert Hall, the O2 Arena and the Gielgud Theatre – and is continually rescreened on TV and in cinemas throughout the world and, alongside his spectacular Royal Albert Hall production of *The Phantom of the Opera*, regularly breaks attendance records for live recording performances of musical theatre. Cameron owns and operates eight historic London theatres, which have all been spectacularly rebuilt and refurbished for the 21st century. They house many of London's most successful hits. The Sondheim, formerly known as the Queen's, now has a glorious auditorium and backstage and has been renamed in honour of Cameron's great friend, theatrical legend Stephen Sondheim, who passed away in 2021. The last show he and Cameron were working on, *Old Friends*, had an all-star gala premiere at the Sondheim Theatre in 2022 and was later screened on BBC TV. In 1990, Cameron inaugurated the Chair of Contemporary Theatre at St Catherine's College in Oxford University, with Stephen Sondheim as his visiting professor. The current Professor is world-renowned director, Gregory Doran. Music Theatre International, one of the world's oldest and largest libraries of secondary rights of the greatest musicals ever written, is now one of Cameron's companies. Cameron was knighted in the 1996 New Year's Honours for his services to British theatre and in June 2023, was awarded the Freedom of the City of London. He is the first British producer ever to be elected to Broadway's Theater Hall of Fame.

MATTHEW BOURNE (Musical Staging & Direction) is firmly established as the UK's most popular and successful choreographer and director. He is the creator of the world's longest-running ballet production, a record-breaking nine-time Olivier Award winner, and the only British director to have won the Tony Award for both Best Choreographer and Best Director of a Musical. He is the Artistic Director of New Adventures, the UK's busiest and most popular dance company and the major exporter of British dance internationally. As Artistic Director of his first company, Adventures in Motion Pictures, from 1987 until 2001, Matthew created many award-winning works (including *Nutcracker!*, *Highland Fling*, *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella* and *The Car Man*) Further hit productions were created when New Adventures was launched in 2002 (including *Play Without Words*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Dorian Gray*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Red Shoes* and *Romeo and Juliet*). Matthew is also a West End and Broadway choreographer; a 30-year relationship with producer Cameron Mackintosh has resulted in the globally successful musicals *Mary Poppins*, *My Fair Lady* and *Oliver!* In 2015, he became the first dance figure to be given the

Stage Award for Outstanding Contribution to British Theatre. He received the OBE in 2001 and was knighted in the Queen's New Year Honours in 2016; in the same year he was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Award in recognition of his outstanding services to dance. His latest work for New Adventures, *The Midnight Bell*, which premiered in 2021, went on to win the National Dance Award for Best Modern Choreography. His productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Edward Scissorhands* are currently on tour.

DARYL ROTH (Producing Partner) is honored to hold the singular distinction of producing 7 Pulitzer Prize-winning plays: *Anna in the Tropics*; *August: Osage County* (2008 Tony Award); *Clybourne Park* (2012 Tony Award); *How I Learned to Drive*; *Proof* (2001 Tony Award); Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women*; and *Wit*. The proud recipient of 13 Tony Awards and London's Olivier Award, her over 130 productions include *Kinky Boots*; *Angels in America*; *Between the Lines*; *Company*; *Funny Girl*; *Gloria: A Life*; Edward Albee's *The Goat or Who is Sylvia*; *Indecent*; *Into the Woods*; *It Shoulda Been You*; *Life of Pi*; *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*; *The Normal Heart*; *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*; *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*; and *War Horse*. Currently: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (West End) and *Appropriate*. Upcoming: *Left on Tenth*. Trustee, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Lincoln Center Theater. She is proud to have been inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.

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April 8, 2024

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