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New York City Center Announces 2015 *Encores! Off-Center* Season

Featuring

A New Brain

**Music and Lyrics by William Finn
Book by William Finn and James Lapine
Starring Jonathan Groff
Directed by James Lapine**

Little Shop of Horrors

**Book and Lyrics by Howard Ashman; Music by Alan Menken
Starring Ellen Greene
Directed by Dick Scanlan; Choreographed by Patricia Wilcox**

and

The Wild Party

**Book, Music and Lyrics by Andrew Lippa
Starring Sutton Foster and Joshua Henry
Directed by Leigh Silverman; Choreographed by Sonya Tayeh**

June 24 – July 18, 2015

Jeanine Tesori, Artistic Director; Chris Fenwick, Music Director

New York, N.Y., December 14, 2014 – **New York City Center**’s acclaimed *Encores! Off-Center* series, under the artistic direction of **Jeanine Tesori**, returns for a third season of landmark Off-Broadway musicals, opening on June 24, 2015 with **William Finn** and **James Lapine**’s *A New Brain* starring **Jonathan Groff**, directed by **James Lapine**. The season continues with a one-night only performance of **Howard Ashman** and **Alan Menken**’s *Little Shop of Horrors*, starring original cast member **Ellen Greene**, directed by **Dick Scanlan**, on July 1. **Andrew Lippa**’s *The Wild Party* starring **Sutton Foster** and **Joshua Henry**, and directed by **Leigh Silverman**, wraps up the season, opening on July 15. **Chris Fenwick** is the *Encores! Off-Center* music director.

The 2015 *Encores! Off-Center* season will feature sets by **Donyale Werle**, costumes by **Clint Ramos**, lighting by **Mark Barton** and sound design by **Leon Rothenberg**.

New York City Center’s *Encores! Off-Center* series has been called “a summer theater highlight” by Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times* and “my favorite new arts institution” by Linda Winer of *Newsday*. The series presents Off-Broadway musicals that pushed creative boundaries when they were first produced. Filtered through the lens of today’s artists, these shows are presented not as historical documents but as

living, vital works that continue to resonate with audiences. The series also features **The Lobby Project**, a series of **free** performances, conversations and readings by groundbreaking artists, poets, authors, and performers. The Lobby Project events place each musical in the context of its legacy and provide insights into the work the audience is about to experience. (Schedule of Lobby Project events TBA)

The series reflects City Center's ongoing outreach to new and younger audiences. In keeping with this mission, \$25 tickets will be available to college students and young adults before tickets go on sale to the general public. [NOTE: It is necessary to sign up for City Center's free *Peer to Peer* program to be eligible for advance tickets. See details below. *Peer to Peer* tickets will go on sale on January 5, 2015; regular tickets are on sale now to City Center members only. General public tickets will go on sale on January 19, 2015.

A New Brain, inspired by William Finn's personal experiences, is a medical tragedy seen through the zany iris of a Looney Tunes short. After struggling composer Gordon Michael Schwinn (**Jonathan Groff**) collapses face-first into a plate of spaghetti, he is diagnosed with a brain tumor and is forced to come to terms with his creative ambitions and the lovable screw-ups in his life: an overbearing boyfriend, a power-belted homeless woman, and a nasty kiddie-show host named Mr. Bungee. The show began as a series of songs written by Finn shortly after his hospitalization for a brain tumor and was performed as a concert at The Public Theater. It premiered at Lincoln Center Theater on May 14, 1998 and ran for 78 performances, winning the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Off-Broadway Musical.

Little Shop of Horrors is a sci-fi musical about a hapless florist shop worker who acquires an R&B-singing plant that feeds on human blood. The production will star **Ellen Greene**, who created the role of Seymour's Skid Row co-worker Audrey in the original Off-Broadway production. An R&B girl's trio, The Urchins, provides commentary on the action and features **Tracy Nicole Chapman**, **Marva Hicks** and **Ramona Keller**, (The Radio from *Caroline, or Change*). *Little Shop* is based on Roger Corman's 1960 black comedy film by the same name, *Little Shop of Horrors* premiered Off-Off-Broadway in 1982 before moving Off-Broadway to the Orpheum Theatre, where it played 2,209 performances, winning the Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle and Drama Critics' Circle Awards for Best Musical. It was revived on Broadway in 2003, playing 372 performances at the Virginia Theatre.

Andrew Lipa's The Wild Party, adapted from the Jazz Age narrative poem by Joseph Moncure March, will star **Sutton Foster** and **Joshua Henry**, who costarred in the *Off-Center* production of *Violet*. *Violet* director **Leigh Silverman** will direct. *The Wild Party* is the story of one tragic, decadent night in a Manhattan apartment shared by Queenie (**Sutton Foster**) and her menacing lover, and the handsome stranger (**Joshua Henry**) who wants to lure her away. It opened at Manhattan Theatre Club on February 24, 2000 and played 54 performances.

New York City Center gratefully acknowledges the *Encores! Off-Center* Founding Sponsors, Stacey and Eric Mindich and Stacy Bash-Polley; Series Sponsor, American Express; Major Supporters, Nathalie and Pablo Salame; with additional support provided by The Frederick Loewe Foundation; Paula and Ira Resnick; Alec Stais and Elissa Burke; and the Stephanie and Fred Shuman Fund for *Encores!*

The Lobby Project is sponsored by The Frederick Loewe Foundation.

A NEW BRAIN – Artists

William Finn (Music, Lyrics, and Co-Librettist) is well known for his trilogy of short musical shows: *In Trousers*, *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*. The final two shows were combined into *Falsettos*, which ran for 486 performances on Broadway and won Tony Awards for Best Score and Best Book (the latter shared with James Lapine). Finn and Lapine's other collaborations include *Little Miss Sunshine* and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, which is currently one of the most performed musicals in the United States. Finn is also the composer of *Romance in Hard Times* and *Elegies, A SongCycle*. For television, he provided the music and lyrics for "Ira Sleeps Over," "Tom Thumb and Thumbelina" and "Pokey Little Puppy's First Christmas." Finn teaches a weekly master class at the NYU Tisch Graduate Program in Musical Theatre Writing and is the Artistic Producer of the Barrington Stage Company's Musical TheatreLab.

Jonathan Groff (Gordon Michael Schwinn) will soon be seen in the second season of the hit HBO television series "Looking," created by Michael Lannan and directed by Andrew Haigh. On Broadway, he starred as Melchior in *Spring Awakening*, for which he received a Theatre World Award and Tony, Drama Desk and Drama League award nominations. Jonathan's Off-Broadway credits include *The Submission* (MCC Theater); *The Bacchae* (The Public Theater); Craig Lucas' *The Singing Forest* and *Prayer for My Enemy* (Obie Award); and The Public Theater revival of *Hair*. He starred in *Deathtrap* on the West End and in *Red* in Los Angeles. His television work includes "Boss," "Glee," "The Good Wife" and HBO's "The Normal Heart." His films include *American Sniper*, *Frozen*, *C.O.G.*, *The Conspirator*, *Twelve-Thirty*, and *Taking Woodstock*.

James Lapine (Co-Librettist and Director) is a playwright, librettist and director. With William Finn he has also collaborated on *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*, later presented on Broadway as *Falsettos; Muscle; The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (director); and *Little Miss Sunshine*. Broadway credits include *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, *Dirty Blonde*, *Golden Child*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Amour*, *Sondheim on Sondheim*, *Annie* and his adaptation of Moss Hart's memoir *Act One*. He has also worked extensively Off-Broadway and is the author of six plays. He has received three Tony and five Drama Desk Awards as well as the Pulitzer Prize. In 2010 he was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame.

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS – Artists

Howard Ashman and **Alan Menken** (Music, Lyrics, and Book) first teamed up in 1978. Their first collaboration, *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater*, opened Off-Broadway in 1978 and was followed by the hugely successful *Little Shop of Horrors* in 1982. Ashman and Menken wrote the music and lyrics for the Disney films *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Howard Ashman became ill during the creation of the Disney film of *Aladdin*, and died in 1991, before the film was released. Three of his songs are in the film and the current Broadway show. Ashman and Menken's many hit songs include "Under the Sea," "Beauty and the Beast," "Be Our Guest," "Arabian Nights" and "Little Shop of Horrors."

Tracy Nicole Chapman (Chiffon) was in the original Broadway casts of *The Lion King*, the 2002 revival of *Into the Woods*, the 2000 revival of *The Music Man*, *The Who's Tommy*, *The Life and Caroline, or Change*. She also appeared on Broadway in *How to Succeed... Her first national tours include Jelly's Last Jam and Once on This Island*, and she has toured with Jessica Simpson, Vanessa Williams and Heather Headley. Regional credits include *Running Man*. Her film and television credits include *Across the Universe* and "The Wrong Coast."

Ellen Greene (Audrey) is perhaps best known for creating the lovable Audrey in the Off-Broadway, Los Angeles and London productions of *Little Shop of Horrors*; she reprised the role in the 1986 film made at Pinewood Studios in the UK. Ellen's Broadway credits include *Rachael Lily Rosenbloom and Don't You Ever Forget It*, *Threepenny Opera* (Tony Award nomination), *The Little Prince and the Aviator*, and *Three Men on a Horse*. Some of her Off-Broadway credits include *In the Boom Boom Room*, *The Sorrows of Stephen*, *The Nature and Purpose of the Universe* and *Teeth and Smiles*. Her many films include *Léon: The Professional*, *Talk Radio*, *One Fine Day*, *The Cooler* and *Next Stop, Greenwich Village*. Her TV credits include "Glory! Glory" for HBO, (Cable Ace Award nomination), "Dinner at Eight," "Pushing Daisies" and "Heroes." In 2009, she played Miss Adelaide in the all-star Hollywood Bowl staging of *Guys and Dolls*. Ellen's debut solo album *In His Eyes* was named the vocal recording of the year by *Playbill*, and this Thanksgiving she released a new Christmas album, *Songs for a Winter's Night*, to rave reviews.

Marva Hicks (Crystal)'s Broadway credits include *Motown the Musical*; *Caroline, or Change*; *The Lion King*; and *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music*. She has appeared Off-Broadway in *Thunder Knocking on the Door* and *The First Breeze of Summer*. Regional work includes *Thunder Knocking on the Door* (Helen Hayes Award), *Cuttin Up*, *The Women of Brewster Place* (Suzi Award), *Crowns* and *Sophisticated Ladies*. She played Bess in the Zach Theatre's Jazz/Blues production of *Porgy and Bess* (B. Iden Payne Award). Her films include *Labor Day*, *Virtuosity* and *Preaching to the Choir*. She has toured with Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson, and has recorded on Polygram Records.

Ramona Keller (Ronnette) made her Broadway debut in *Smokey Joe's Café* and later toured with the show in Germany. On Broadway, she originated roles of in *Caroline, or Change* (also in London) and *Brooklyn*. Some of her regional credits include the female lead in *Handel's Messiah Rocks!*, two productions of *Dreamgirls*, *Lonestar Love*, *Beehive*, *The Buddy Holly Story* and the musical revue *In Time* with Hugh Jackman in Las Vegas. Ramona has also performed with New York Pops, Sioux City Orchestra, Bay Atlantic Symphony and Grand Rapids Orchestra.

Dick Scanlan (Director) co-authored *Everyday Rapture* with and for Sherie Rene Scott. He received 2010 Tony and Drama Desk awards for his work on *Rapture*, which was produced Off-Broadway at Second Stage and by the Roundabout Theatre Company on Broadway. He wrote the book and lyrics for 2002's Tony Award-winning Best Musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, with music by Jeanine Tesori. His wholly rewritten version of *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* received rave reviews for its world premiere at the Denver Center Theatre Company in September 2014, directed by Kathleen Marshall. Last year, Mr. Scanlan served as Script Consultant to the legendary Berry Gordy in connection with *Motown The Musical*. Mr. Scanlan's novel, *Does Freddy Dance*, was published in 1995 by Alyson Publications. He has published numerous articles and essays in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and many other publications.

Patricia Wilcox (Choreographer) has choreographed the Broadway productions of *Motown the Musical* (Astaire Award for Best Choreography) and *A Night with Janis Joplin*. Her Off-Broadway and national tour work includes *Children's Letters to God*, *Bowfire* (also PBS television special), *Blues in the Night* (NAACP Image Award nomination) and *Seussical*. Selected regional work includes *A Swell Party* (The Kennedy Center), *Guys and Dolls* (Paper Mill Playhouse) and *A Marvelous Party*, which Ms. Wilcox co-conceived and choreographed, and which won the LA Drama Critics Circle, San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics, Elliott Norton and JEFF Awards. Patricia has created numbers for several ice skating gold medalists and for ice dancing teams in the last three Winter Olympics.

THE WILD PARTY - Artists

Sutton Foster (Queenie) will soon be seen starring in Darren Star's new TV Land series "Younger." On Broadway, Sutton most recently appeared as the title character in *Violet* (Tony, Drama Desk, Drama League and Outer Critic Circle award nominations), a role she originated in the *Encores! Off-Center* production. Other Broadway credits include *Anything Goes* (Tony Award), *Shrek*, *Young Frankenstein*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Little Women*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (Tony Award), *Les Misérables*, *Annie*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Grease*. Off-Broadway: *Trust* (Second Stage) and *Anyone Can Whistle* (City Center *Encores!*). She has traveled all over the United States and internationally with music director Michael Rafter, performing songs from her two albums: *Wish* and *An Evening with Sutton Foster: Live at the Café Carlyle*. On television she starred in Amy Sherman Palladino's "Bunheads" (Critics' Choice Television Award nomination), and made appearances on "Psych," "Royal Pains," "Law & Order: SVU," "Flight of the Conchords" and "Sesame Street." She holds an honorary doctorate from Ball State University, where she also teaches.

Joshua Henry (Black) was nominated for a Tony Award for his performance as Flick in the Broadway production of *Violet*, a role he originated in the *Encores! Off-Center* production. He was also nominated for a Tony Award for his performance in *The Scottsboro Boys*. Other Broadway shows include the Tony Award-winning revival of *The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess*, the Grammy Award-winning *American Idiot*, the Grammy and Tony Award-winning *In the Heights* and *Bring It On: The Musical*. His regional credits include *Godspell*, *The Wiz*, *Cotton Club Parade* and *Being Alive*. www.joshuahenry.net

Andrew Lippa (Music, Lyrics, and Book) wrote the theatrical oratorio *I Am Harvey Milk*, which received its New York premiere in October at Lincoln Center with Kristin Chenoweth and Mr. Lippa as Harvey Milk. *Life of the Party*, an evening celebrating 20 years of his work, premiered at London's award-winning Menier Chocolate Factory in June 2014. He also wrote the Drama Desk-nominated music and lyrics for the Broadway musical *Big Fish* as well as the music for Aaron Sorkin's Broadway play *The Farnsworth Invention*. Other musicals include *The Addams Family* (music and lyrics), *A Little Princess* (music), *John & Jen* (music/book), *Asphalt Beach* (music and lyrics) and *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown* (additional music/lyrics and

arrangements). He is currently working on a musical adaptation of Jules Feiffer's book *The Man in the Ceiling* with Mr. Feiffer. Accolades include a Tony and Grammy nomination, the Gilman/Gonzalez-Falla Theater Foundation Award, ASCAP's Richard Rodgers/New Horizons Award, The Drama Desk and The Outer Critics Circle Award.

Leigh Silverman (Director), a two-time Obie winner, directed the *Encores!* and Broadway productions of Jeanine Tesori's *Violet* (Tony Award nomination). Her Broadway credits also include *Chinglish* and *Well*. Recent Off-Broadway credits include *Kung Fu* and *Golden Child* (Signature Theater); *In The Wake, No Place To Go*; *Yellow Face* (Pulitzer finalist) and *Well* (The Public Theater); *the (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence* (Pulitzer finalist), *The Call, Go Back To Where You Are*; and *Blue Door* (Playwrights Horizons); *From Up Here* and *The Madrid* (MTC) and *Coraline* (MCC).

Sonya Tayeh (Choreographer)'s theater credits include *Head Over Heels* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Kung Fu* (Signature Theatre), *The Last Goodbye* (Old Globe, Williamstown), *Spring Awakening* (San Jose Repertory Theatre) and *Walk For Water* (Cirque du Soleil). An Emmy Award nominee for "So You Think You Can Dance," Sonya has also worked with Madonna, Florence and the Machine, Kylie Minogue and Miley Cyrus. Her concert dance credits include *Lamentation Variation* (Martha Graham Dance Company); *Wave, Next Wave* and *Quartet* (Los Angeles Ballet); and *The Root of Me, Endurance to Move*, and *Battles* (Tayeh Dance Company). She has won many accolades for her choreography, including the Lucille Lortel and Obie awards for her work on David Henry Hwang's *Kung Fu*.

Chris Fenwick (*Encores! Off-Center* Music Director) was music director of Jeanine Tesori's and Lisa Kron's *Fun Home* at The Public Theater and will continue with the production when it opens on Broadway this spring. He music directed the original productions of Michael John LaChiusa's *Giant, Los Otros, Queen of the Mist* and *See What I Wanna See*. Broadway credits include *Rocky, Grease, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, The Pajama Game, Wonderful Town* and *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*. Other credits include the Off-Broadway productions of *Hello Again, Here Lies Jenny, Road Show, Happiness* and *Mother Courage* and concerts with Patti LuPone at Carnegie Hall, Ravinia Festival, and many more. Chris was music director of the *Encores! Off-Center* productions of *The Cradle Will Rock, I'm Getting My Act Together, tick, tick...BOOM!, Faust* and *Pump Boys and Dinettes*.

Jeanine Tesori (*Encores! Off-Center* Artistic Director) composed the scores to the Broadway productions of *Violet; Caroline, or Change* (2004 Tony nomination for Best Original Score); *Shrek the Musical* (Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations for her music); and *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Her Off-Broadway musical *Violet* (Obie Award, New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical and Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Musical) was presented as a one-night only event during the *Encores! Off-Center* inaugural season, and moved to Broadway last season. Her recent Off-Broadway musical, *Fun Home*, a nominee for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, played a sold-out run at The Public Theater last season, and will open on Broadway in the spring. She has written music for several plays, including *Twelfth Night* at Lincoln Center (Tony nom. for best score), John Guare's *A Free Man of Color* and Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, which was part of the 2006 Shakespeare in the Park season and starred Meryl Streep. Her film scores include *Nights in Rodanthe, Every Day* and *You're Not You*. Her opera, *A Blizzard on Marblehead Neck* (libretto by Tony Kushner) premiered at Glimmerglass Festival in 2011 and her newest opera, *The Lion, the Unicorn and Me*, had its world premiere run at D.C.'s Washington National Opera in December 2013. She is a lecturer in music at Yale University.

New York City Center (Arlene Shuler, President & CEO) has played a defining role in the cultural life of the city since 1943. It was Manhattan's first performing arts center, dedicated by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia with a mission to make the best in music, theater, and dance accessible to all audiences. Today, City Center is home to many distinguished companies, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, City Center's Principal Dance Company, as well as Manhattan Theatre Club; a roster of renowned national and international visiting artists; and its own critically acclaimed and popular programs. The Tony-honored *Encores!* musical theater series has been hailed as "one of the very best reasons to be alive in New York." In summer 2013, City Center

launched *Encores! Off-Center*, a series that features landmark Off-Broadway musicals filtered through the lens of today's most innovative artists. Dance has been integral to the theater's mission from the start — and dance programs, including the annual *Fall for Dance* Festival, remain central to City Center's identity. Vital partnerships with arts organizations including Jazz at Lincoln Center and London's Sadler's Wells Theatre enhance City Center's programmatic offerings. City Center is dedicated to providing educational opportunities to New York City students and teachers through programs such as *Encores! In Schools* and the Young People's Dance Series. Special workshops cater to families, seniors, and other groups, while events such as the *Fall for Dance* DanceTalk series offer learning opportunities to the general public. In October 2011, City Center completed an extensive renovation project to revitalize and modernize its historic theater.

Peer to Peer, New York City Center's discount ticket program for students and young adults, provides special ticket offers on select City Center productions for full-time college students as well as to non-students under 25. Students must have valid college IDs or email addresses ending in .edu, and non-students must have valid government-issued IDs with proof of age. They can sign up for the free program at www.NYCityCenter.org to receive discount offers throughout the season.

Tickets to *Encores! Off-Center* are on sale now to City Center members. \$25 Tickets will go on sale to City Center's *Peer to Peer* members beginning on January 5, 2015. Tickets to the general public will go on sale beginning January 19, 2015. All tickets begin at \$25 and can be purchased at the New York City Center Box Office (West 55th Street between 6th and 7th Avenues), through CityTix® at 212-581-1212, or online at www.NYCityCenter.org. ***A New Brain*** will play five performances, from June 24-27, 2015. ***Little Shop of Horrors*** will play one performance only, on July 1, 2015. ***The Wild Party*** will play five performances only, from July 15-18, 2015. (See Schedule, below).

2015 *Encores! Off-Center* Performance Schedule

A New Brain will play five performances, June 24 - 27 as follows: Wednesday, June 24 and Thursday, June 25 at 7:30 pm; Friday, June 26 at 8 pm; Saturday, June 27 at 2 and 8 pm.

Little Shop of Horrors will play one performance only on July 1 at 7:30 pm.

The Wild Party will play five performances, July 15 – 18, as follows: Wednesday, July 15 and Thursday, July 16 at 7:30 pm; Friday, July 17 at 8 pm; Saturday, July 18 at 2 and 8 pm.

Program and Artists subject to change.