FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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BIG RIVER CAST ANNOUNCED
Broadway Star Felicia Fields, Denver Favorite Harvy Blanks, and Rising Star Mack Shirilla Lead this Dazzling Cast

LONE TREE, CO – Tony-Nominated Director Randal Myler and multi-talented Music Director Dan Wheetman return to Lone Tree Arts Center (LTAC) to create a new vision for Big River: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn after setting the bar high with Hank Williams: Lost Highway last spring and John Denver Holiday Concert in 2012. Returning to the roots of Mark Twain’s classic American folktale, this production of Big River focuses on the talent and voices of the cast as they each become storytellers.

Mack Shirilla leads this star-studded cast as Huck; Mack recently played the same role in a production at Casa Mañana in Dallas TX for which he received wide acclaim for his "lovable, athletic Huck" (Dallas Morning News). Denver-favorite Harvy Blanks makes his LTAC debut as Jim. Tony-nominated for The Color Purple, Felicia Fields lends her incomparable voice to this cast as Alice. Other cast members include Matt LaFontaine, Lia Menaker, Kathy Brady, Mark Rubald, Randy Moore, Heather Lacy, Erik Sandvold, Rob Costigan, Zachary Alan, Burke Walton, and Sarah Grover.

About the Show

Chances are you've read “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” by Mark Twain; whether as a school project or an entertainment, this classic coming-of-age story has stood the test of time. In fact, this year marks the 130th anniversary of the novel. Big River takes Twain’s folktale and brings it to life with a book by William Hauptman and
music & lyrics by **Roger Miller**. The original Broadway production of *Big River* ran 1985-87 and won Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical, and Best Original score, among others. In 2003, a unique revival casting deaf and hard-of-hearing actors ran for 67 performances, gaining huge critical acclaim.

The story sweeps down the mighty Mississippi as rebellious teenager Huck takes off on a raft with runaway slave Jim. The pair discovers a friendship that defies convention and defines the American dream as their adventure introduces them to unforgettable characters and tricky situations. The pair are challenged by their beliefs, by society, by each other, and by their circumstances as they join together to pass through the “Muddy Water” in an attempt to reach a better life.

Randal Myler’s vision for this production lies in its roots in Twain’s novel. Imagine a storytelling troupe traveling down the very Mississippi River Huck and Jim did, stopping to share their tale. You are transported into a heartfelt account that questions friendships and bonds that transcend race. Actors portraying multiple roles shed new light on this script and its thought-provoking commentary on society. The minimalist set created by **Michael Duran** lends itself to the lighting design by **Jen Kiser** as the two components blend to create a backdrop that heightens Myler’s artistic choices. On the stage, we see a literal band of misfits, each musician donning multiple instruments throughout the show and revealing the talent in the small ensemble led by Wheetman. **Candy Brown** draws on her years of experience on Broadway as she choreographs the cast.

This is truly a show not to be missed as a unique trinity of artistic vision, talented cast, and beautiful script combine.
Cast Biographies

Zachary Alan, Ben Rogers, is making his professional Colorado debut. Zachary has been seen in High School Musical (Troy Bolton), The Music Man (Harold Hill), West Side Story, How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (J. Pierpont Finch), Cabaret (Ernst Ludwig), Legally Blonde the Musical, Ragtime, & Chicago. He has a degree in Musical Theatre from the University of Northern Colorado.

Harvy Blanks, Jim, is appearing for the first time at LTAC, but is no stranger to the Colorado area, having been a member of The Denver Center Theatre Company since 1985. There, he performed such diverse works as Banjo in The Man Who Came to Dinner and The Witty Gambler in Three Men and a Horse. At DCTC, he also performed 9 of August Wilson’s 10 play Century Cycle including Fences (Gabe), Joe Turner’s Come and Gone (Loomis), Jitney (Turnbo) and Two Trains Running (West). Harvy recently received accolades for his radio performances in Zora Neale Hurston’s “Their Eyes Were Watching God” and three character roles in August Wilson’s Century Cycle, both performed with the New York Public Radio. Harvy currently splits his time between New York and Colorado.

Kathleen Brady, Widow Douglas/Strange Woman/Duke/Aunt Sally, returns to LTAC after playing Mama Lily in Hank Williams: Lost Highway. Kathleen has been a part of the theatre community in Colorado since 1985. As a Resident Company Member of the Denver Center Theatre, she has performed in over 100 productions including musicals, comedies, dramas and the classics, and has garnered many awards over her 40 years as an actress both here and in the Bay Area of San Francisco. She is the voice of the National Woman’s Western Museum in DC. She has worked in commercials, film and television. Favorite roles include every Maggie she has ever played, her favorite being Maggie in The Beauty Queen of Leenann. She toured with Quilters under the direction of Randal Myler. Kathleen was a resident actress at PCPA (Pacific Conservatory for the Performing Arts) for 13 years prior to coming to Denver.

Rob Costigan, Lafe/Young Fool/Sheriff, was last seen as Stewpot in South Pacific in Concert at LTAC. He has performed in thirty productions at The Arvada Center, including The Man of La Mancha, Ragtime, Hairspray, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Big River, Victor Victoria, Broadway Bound, and The 1940’s Radio Hour. Other local credits include Xanadu and The Wedding Singer (The Aurora Fox), Singin’ in the Rain, Beauty and the Beast, State Fair, 42nd Street, Hello, Dolly!, and Gypsy (Country Dinner Playhouse). He has received a Denver Drama Critic’s Circle Award for Best Supporting Actor in a Musical and most recently a Henry Award nomination in the same category.
Felicia Fields, Alice, is best known for her portrayal of Sofia in the Broadway and first touring company of the musical *The Color Purple*, for which she received a Tony nomination, Clarence Derwitt Award, and several other honors. Chicago’s Leading Lady of Song, Felicia has performed many shows at the Court Theatre, Marriott, Goodman, Drury Lane, Broadway in Chicago, Northlight, Theatre at the Center, and more as well as with theaters throughout the United States and Canada. Felicia was a 2006 Drama League honoree as well as a recipient of a Black Theatre Alliance Award among others. Her television and film credits include Early Edition, Save the Last Dance, The Knights of Prosperity and many commercials and voice-overs.

Sarah Grover, Jo Harper/Susan Wilkes, returns to the LTAC stage after performing in *Home for the Holidays*. Sarah has been seen locally at Midtown Arts Center: *Next to Normal* (Natalie - Denver Post Ovation Award Winner for Best Supporting Actress in a Musical), Boulder Dinner Theatre: *The Wizard of Oz* (Dorothy), Starkey Theatrix (PACE Center): *Peter Pan* (Wendy), *Bingo – The Winning Musical* (Alison), Performance Now: *Once Upon a Mattress* (Princess Winnifred), and Platte Valley Players: *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Anne Frank). Sarah was also nominated by Culture West for Best Year by an Actress.

Heather Lacy, Miss Watson, was seen as Lady Sybil in the Arvada Center's production of *Camelot*. She also portrayed the troublemaking ghost, Elvira, in the Arvada Center's production of *Blithe Spirit*, for which she received a Marlowe Award. You might have seen Heather in *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*, or in *The Doyle and Debbie Show* (Denver Center Attractions, Garner Galleria Theater). Other favorite regional credits include Anna in *The King and I* and Charlotte in *A Little Night Music* (Opus Award). Heather holds a B.A. in Theater and Music.

Matt LaFontaine, Tom Sawyer, was last on the LTAC stage in the Arvada Center’s *Ragtime* (Houdini) and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. Matt has received Henry Award nominations for his work in *Hair* (Berger), *The Who’s Tommy* (Cousin Kevin), *Rent* (Benny) and *Guys & Dolls* (Nicely-Nicely). Matt was most recently in Town Hall Art Center’s *Swing* and PACE Center's *Peter Pan*. 
**Lia Menaker**, Mary Jane, has been seen in regional theaters performing in *Fiddler on the Roof* (Hodel) and *Country Roads: The Songs of John Denver* (Annie). New York credits include *Goldilocks & The Three Polar Bears* (Baby Bear) and National Tours are highlighted by *The Mystery of King Tut* (Anke) and *Wizard of Oz* (Dorothy). Lia is also a songwriter and lead female vocalist on Broken Darling’s new self-titled EP. Lia holds a BFA in Musical Theatre from Penn State University.

**Randy Moore**, Mark Twain /Uncle Silas/Robinson, returns to LTAC after playing Pap in *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* last spring. Randy was a member of the acting company of the Dallas Theater Center from 1961-1994; among his over 200 roles there, favorites include Cyrano de Bergerac, *Julius Caesar* (Mark Antony), *The Tempest* (Prospero), *Amadeus* (Salieri), *The Dresser* (Norman), *Equus* (Dysart), and *The Texas Trilogy* (Col Kincaid). A company member at the Denver Center Theater since 1995, his performances have included *You Can’t Take It With You* (Grandpa), *The Imaginary Invalid* (Argan), *The Miser* (Harpagon), *Christmas Carol* (Scrooge), and *Hamlet* (Polonius). Other regional theaters include ACT, The Alley, Old Globe, and Baltimore Center Stage.

**Mark Rubald**, Pap/King, was last seen at LTAC as Capt. Brackett in *South Pacific in Concert*; he was also seen in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* and *Ragtime*. Arvada Center: *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (Sheriff Ed Earl), *La Cage Aux Folles* (Dindon), *Of Mice And Men* (Slim), *Man Of La Mancha* (Governor), *Man For All Seasons* (Common Man), and *Dividing The Estate* (Lewis Gordon). Denver Center: *Dinner With Friends* (Gabe), *Servant of Two Masters* (Truffaldino), *Comedy Of Errors* (both Dromios), *John Brown’s Body* (Elyat/Wingate), and *Man Of The Moment* (Douglas Beechey). Old Globe: *Taming Of The Shrew* (Biondello). Central City Opera: *West Side Story* (Schrank).

**Erik Sandvold**, Judge Thatcher/Harry Wilkes/Doctor, is an alum of Northwestern University and has performed frequently with Colorado’s leading theater companies. Denver Center Theatre Company: *Death of a Salesman, When We Are Married, Well, Plainsong, Diary of Anne Frank, Pillowman, Flea in Her Ear, A Christmas Carol, The Skin of Our Teeth*; Arvada Center: *Moonlight and Magnolias, Arsenic and Old Lace, 1940’s Radio Hour, Colorado Shakespeare Festival: Romeo & Juliet, Twelfth Night, The Rivals; Curious Theatre: *God of Carnage, Rancho Mirage, Clybourne Park, Homebody/Kabul, Opus, Rabbit Hole, Fuddy Meers, Closer, Take Me Out* (Denver Post Ovation Award – Best Performance by an Actor in a Comedic Role), *I am My Own Wife* (Ovation Award – Best Solo Performance). Erik performed the new, one-actor musical *BUBS* (Ovation Award – Best Solo Performance) at FringeNYC and has won two national Alexander Scourby Narrator of the Year Awards.
Mack Shirilla, Huck, recently performed the role of Huck to much acclaim at Casa Manaña in Dallas, TX. Other recent performances include Spring Awakening (George), Dreamgirls (Dave), Myths and Hymns (Saturn), Follies (Kevin), Grease (Doody), Children of Eden (Cain), Titanic (Jim Ferrell), History Boys (Lockwood) and All Shook Up (Chad). Mack is a recent graduate of Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music with a degree in music theatre.

Burke Walton, Simon, is making his LTAC debut. Los Angeles Credits include: the World Premiere Musical Nightmare Alley (The Geffen Playhouse), David Fincher's The Social Network (Columbia Pictures), Anything Goes (The Freud Playhouse). Denver Credits include: Man of La Mancha (Anselmo/The Arvada Center), The Full Monty (Ethan Girard/Boulder's Dinner Theatre), A Christmas Carol (Ned Cratchit/DCTC), The Sound of Music (Rolf/Town Hall Arts Center) and Hair (Woof/Town Hall Arts Center) for which he won Best Supporting Actor in a Musical from Denver's broadwayworld.com. He is a graduate of UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television.

Dates & Tickets

Senior Matinee Performance: Wednesday, April 30 at 1:30pm; Tickets $25

Matinee Performances: April 26, 27, May 4 at 1:30pm; Tickets $36-$48

Evening Performances: April 24, 30, May 1 at 7:30pm, April 26, 27, May 2, 3 at 8:00pm; Tickets $29-$48

Tickets may be purchased by calling 720-509-1000 Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm or at www.LoneTreeArtsCenter.org. All tickets subject to a $3 ticket fee.

This performance is made possible in part thanks to the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District, Colorado Creative Industries and Professor Michael R. Harris & Charlotte Min-Harris.

About LTAC

The Lone Tree Arts Center is a professional, innovative and environmentally friendly, LEED Certified venue. LTAC operates a dynamic model for the performing arts by collaborating with some of the premier Colorado performing arts companies to present their productions in Lone Tree as well as presenting national and regional tours. LTAC has quickly discovered its place as a new provider of arts education programs for
children and an important meeting and event rental site for corporate, civic, private, and community arts groups.

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