

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES COMPLETE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR *REDWOOD*

Broadway Legend Idina Menzel to Lead Cast of World-Premiere Musical

La Jolla, CA – La Jolla Playhouse announces the cast and creative team for its world-premiere production of *Redwood*, with book and direction by Tony Award nominee **Tina Landau** (Playhouse's *Beauty*), music by **Kate Diaz**, lyrics by **Diaz** and **Landau**. Conceived by **Landau** and Tony Award winner **Idina Menzel** (Broadway's *Rent*, *Wicked*), with additional contributions by **Menzel**, *Redwood* will run **February 13 – March 31, 2024** in the Playhouse's Sheila and Hughes Potiker Theatre. For more information, please visit lajollaplayhouse.org.

In addition to **Idina Menzel** in the role of "Jesse," the cast features **De'Adre Aziza** as "Mel," **Nkeki Obi-Melekwe** as "Becca," **Michael Park** as "Finn," and **Zachary Noah Piser** as "Spencer," along with understudies **Aja Simone Baitey**, **Giovanny Diaz de Leon** and **Lance Arthur Smith**.

The *Redwood* creative team includes **Kimberly Grigsby**, Music Supervisor; **Haley Bennett**, Music Director; **Kate Diaz**, Orchestrations and Arrangements; **Jason Ardizzone-West**, Scenic Designer; **Toni-Leslie James**, Costume Designer; **Scott Zielinski**, Lighting Designer; **Jonathan Deans**, Sound Designer; **Hana S. Kim**, Media Designer; **Melecio Estrella**, **BANDALOO**: Vertical Movement and Staging; **The Telsey Office**, **Patrick Goodwin**, **CSA/Jacole Kitchen**, Casting; **Lora K. Powell**, Stage Manager; **Topaz Cooks**, Assistant Stage Manager.

"What an absolute thrill to cap off our 2023/2024 season with this riveting new musical. The Playhouse has been developing *Redwood* for several years, working with the dynamo team of Tina Landau, Kate Diaz and Idina Menzel – each a visionary artist in her own right – to create an extraordinary work that overflows with invention, inspiration and empathy," said **Christopher Ashley**, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse.

Broadway legend Idina Menzel makes her La Jolla Playhouse debut in the world premiere of *Redwood*, a transportive new musical experience about one woman's journey into the precious and precarious world of the redwood forest. Idina plays Jesse, a successful businesswoman, mother and wife. She seems to have it all, but inside, her heart is broken. Finding herself at a turning point, Jesse leaves everyone and everything behind, gets in her car and drives.... Thousands of miles later, she hits the ancient forests of Northern California, where a chance meeting and a leap of faith change her life forever. With its deeply personal story, refreshingly contemporary sound, and awe-inspiring design, *Redwood* explores the lengths – and heights – one travels to find strength, resilience and healing.

La Jolla Playhouse is a place where artists and audiences come together to create what's new and next in the American theatre, from Tony Award-winning productions, to imaginative programs for young audiences, to interactive experiences outside our theatre walls. Founded in 1947 by Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire and Mel Ferrer, the Playhouse is currently led by Tony Award winner Christopher Ashley, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse, and Managing Director Debby Buchholz. The Playhouse is internationally renowned for the development of new works, including mounting 110 world premieres, commissioning 70 new works, and sending 35 productions to Broadway, garnering a total of 38 Tony Awards, as well as the 1993 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

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Idina Menzel is a powerhouse multi-hyphenate: a singer, an actress in film and TV, a songwriter, a Broadway star, and a philanthropist. She rose to fame for her role as Maureen in the popular Broadway musical *Rent*, and her career took off when she won a Tony Award for her role as Elphaba in the smash musical *Wicked*. Her voice can be heard as Elsa in Disney's Oscar®-winning *Frozen*, the second highest grossing animated film of all time. The film's song "Let It Go", voiced by Menzel, became an instant international phenomenon, winning the Oscar® for Best Original Song – where Menzel performed it at the ceremony – and the Grammy® Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media. She reprised her role as Elsa in Disney's *Frozen 2*, which broke records to become the highest grossing animated movie of all time. She joined Adam Sandler in the Safdie Brothers' Film Independent Spirit Award-winning A24 film *Uncut Gems*. Menzel can currently be seen in the Disney+ documentary *Idina Menzel, Which Way to the Stage?*, Disney's *Enchanted* sequel, *Enchanted 2: Disenchanted*, alongside Amy Adams, Patrick Dempsey, and Susan Sarandon; as well as Amazon Studios' *Cinderella*, for which she wrote and sang the song "Dream Girl." Menzel's prolific recording career includes multiple cast albums and the solo albums: *Still I Can't Be Still*, *Here, I Stand*, *idina*, and her latest album, *Christmas: A Season of Love*. Her first Christmas album, *Holiday Wishes*, debuted at #1 on Billboard's Holiday Albums chart. Menzel received the Breakthrough Artist of the Year Award at Billboard's annual Women in Music event in 2014 and performed the National Anthem at Super Bowl XLIX. Additional screen credits include Lifetime's remake of *Beaches*, Disney's *Enchanted*, Maureen in Chris Columbus' film version of *Rent*, as well as the recurring role of Shelby Corcoran on Fox's *Glee*. Menzel was previously seen on stage in *If/Then*, for which she earned her third Tony Award nomination, Broadway's *Aida* and the Encores! production of *Hair*. Menzel also premiered *Wicked* in the West End, receiving the Theatregoers Choice Award. She and her sister Cara Mentzel recently released a children's picture book, "Loud Mouse," which centers on self-acceptance and being true to yourself. Menzel co-founded the A BroaderWay Foundation in 2010, dedicated to offering girls from underserved communities an outlet for self-expression and creativity through arts-centered programs.

Tina Landau is a writer and director whose Broadway credits include *The Spongebob Musical* (also conceiver; Drama Desk & Outer Critics Circle winner Best Direction and Best Musical, 12 Tony Award noms), Tracy Letts' *Superior Donuts*, and the revival of *Bells Are Ringing* (Tony noms). Tina has written and directed productions including the musicals *Floyd Collins* (with composer Adam Guettel, Playwrights Horizons) and *Dream True* (with composer Ricky Ian Gordon, The Vineyard), as well as *Ms. Blakk for President* (with Tarell McCraney, Steppenwolf Theatre), *Space* (Steppenwolf, The Taper, The Public), *Beauty* (La Jolla Playhouse), and *Stonewall: Night Variations* (En Garde Arts). Her Off-Broadway productions include Bill Irwin and David Shiner's *Old Hats*, Chuck Mee's *Big Love* and *Iphigenia 2.0* (all Signature), Paula Vogel's *A Civil War Christmas* (NYTW), and many works by Tarell McCraney including *Head of Passes*, *In the Red and Brown Water* (both at the Public) and *Wig Out!* (Vineyard). Tina is an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, where her over 20 productions also include McCraney's *The Brother/Sister Plays*, *The Wheel* (with Joan Allen), *The Doppelganger* (with Rainn Wilson) and *The Time of Your Life* (also Seattle Rep, ACT). Tina's work has been recognized by the Tonys, Drama Desks, Drama League, Outer Critics, Lucille Lortel, Obies, and many more, and she's a recipient of a United States Artist Fellowship, Princess Grace Statuette, NEA/TCG Directing Fellowship, and Rockefeller and Pew grants. She's the author, with Anne Bogart, of *The Viewpoints Book*, and is currently an Artist-in-Residence at Little Island in NYC.

Kate Diaz is an LA-based composer-songwriter-producer. Kate has scored animated series, feature documentaries and docu-series, and she also composes music for trailers and commercials. Her pop/rock songs have been placed in multiple TV shows, and she recently cowrote and produced an end credits song for an upcoming documentary. A multi-instrumentalist, she self-produces her scores and songs.

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FACT SHEET

WHAT: *Redwood*
Book by Tina Landau
Music by Kate Diaz
Lyrics by Kate Diaz and Tina Landau
Conceived by Tina Landau and Idina Menzel
Additional Contributions by Idina Menzel
Directed by Tina Landau

WHEN: **February 13 – March 31, 2024** (Press Nights: February 24, 28, 29)
Tue/Wed at 7:30pm; Thu/Fri/Sat at 8pm; Sun at 7pm; Sat/Sun at 2pm

WHERE: **La Jolla Playhouse: Sheila and Hughes Potiker Theatre**
2910 La Jolla Village Drive, La Jolla, CA 92039

WHO: Creative Team
Music Supervisor: Kimberly Grigsby
Music Director: Haley Bennett
Orchestrations and Arrangements: Kate Diaz
Scenic Designer: Jason Ardizzone-West
Costume Designer: Toni-Leslie James
Lighting Designer: Scott Zielinski
Sound Designer: Jonathan Deans
Media Designer: Hana S. Kim
Vertical Movement and Staging: Melecio Estrella, Bandaloop
Casting: The Telsey Office, Patrick Goodwin, CSA/Jacole Kitchen
Stage Manager: Lora K. Powell
Assistant Stage Manager: Topaz Cooks

Cast

De'Adre Aziza	<i>Mel</i>
Idina Menzel	<i>Jesse</i>
Nkeki Obi-Melekwe	<i>Becca</i>
Michael Park	<i>Finn</i>
Zachary Noah Piser	<i>Spencer</i>

Understudies: Aja Simone Baitey, Giovanni Diaz de Leon, Lance Arthur Smith

BACKGROUND:

Broadway icon Idina Menzel makes her La Jolla Playhouse debut in the world premiere of *Redwood*, a transportive new musical experience about one woman's journey into the precious and precarious world of the redwood forest. Idina plays Jesse, a successful businesswoman, mother and wife. She seems to have it all, but inside, her heart is broken. Finding herself at a turning point, Jesse leaves everyone and everything behind, gets in her car and drives.... Thousands of miles later, she hits the ancient forests of Northern California, where a chance meeting and a leap of faith change her life forever. With its deeply personal story, refreshingly contemporary sound, and awe-inspiring design, *Redwood* explores the lengths – and heights – one travels to find strength, resilience and healing.

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TICKETS: lajollaplayhouse.org; (858) 550-1010

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