

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 23, 2019

Contact:

Ann Reynolds, *Communications Manager*
(425) 392-1942 x129; areynolds@villagetheatre.org

Website: <https://www.villagetheatre.org/issaquah/beta-series-hart-island.php>

Press Photos <http://www.villagetheatre.org/pressroom> Username: press / Password: village

Facebook: [VillageTheatre](#) Instagram: [@Village_Theatre](#) Hashtag: #BetaSeries

Tickets: \$25 - \$30

Additional discounts available to Village Originals Members.

Box Office: ISS (425) 392-2202 | Tues. – Sat. 11:00AM – 7:00PM

Immigration, Incarceration, and Social Justice are Front and Center in Developmental Musical *Hart Island* at Village Theatre

Single tickets are on sale now.

Issaquah Run: June 7-16, 2019

ISSAQUAH, WASH. – Village Theatre will close out the 2019 Season of the **Beta Series** with *Hart Island*, an emotional tale of an immigrant woman fighting for her child, and the unexpected compassion of a disillusioned Rikers Island inmate who is the only person who can help her. This hauntingly beautiful new musical observes two people on the fringe of society as they change each other's lives forever. Written by **Danny Haengil Larsen** (composer & co-lyricist) and **Michelle Elliott** (bookwriter & co-lyricist), the show will run at Village Theatre's **First Stage Theatre** in Issaquah June 7-16, 2019.

Until a *New York Times* feature in 2016, Hart Island was one of America's best kept secrets. The largest potter's field in the United States, Hart Island is a public burial ground for New York City's unclaimed – people who experienced homelessness, immigrants, and stillborn babies, with burials performed by the incarcerated men of Rikers Island. In a system trying to literally bury the unwanted away from society, *Hart Island* is about two outsiders brought together by their shared grief and experience of the island which allows them to affect each other in a positive, redemptive, and healing way.

After receiving Village Theatre's first **Writer's Residency** in 2016, a reading during **The 2017 Festival of New Musicals**, and a two-week workshop in New York City through the **At The Table** program, the Beta Series production will allow the show to continue its developmental process by providing the writers with actors, basic sets and costumes, and an audience of smart and

savvy theatre-goers. After each performance, attendees are invited to ask questions and share their feedback with the writers. As the writers often make continuous changes during the Beta Series process, patrons are encouraged to witness the evolution by seeing the performance multiple times. “This will be the first opportunity for us to see *Hart Island* up on its feet,” said Larsen and Elliott. “A show can only be developed so far in staged readings. At some point you have to see how it lives and breathes on stage. We are incredibly excited about this production.”

The cast features an exciting mix of Village Theatre favorites and new performers from around the country. **Rodney Hicks** and **Rocky Vega** will play Charles and Marielena respectively, the two figures at the center of this beautiful story. A Broadway regular, Hicks was part of the original casts of *Come From Away*, *RENT*, and *The Scottsboro Boys*, and was last seen on Village Theatre’s Mainstage in the 2012 production of *Big River*. Vega starred in the Off-Broadway production of *Anne of Green Gables* in 2017, and more recently in *Hair* at Geva Theatre Center. The ensemble will include the talents of **Antonia Darlene** (*Show Boat*), **Alexandria J. Henderson** (Gregory Award recipient for *Dreamgirls*), **Rafael Molina** (*Into the Woods*), **Jesse Smith** (*Dreamgirls*), **Fune Tautala** (*The Spitfire Grill* at Showtunes Theatre Company), and **Saxton Jay Walker** (*Afterwords*).

Village Theatre artistic director **Jerry Dixon** (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*) will direct the developmental production. Joining Dixon on the creative team is choreographer **Amber Willett**, music director **Tim Symons** (*Into the Woods*), scenic designer **Christopher Mumaw** (*The Noteworthy Life of Howard Barnes*, *Newsies*), costume designer **Bryne McKeen**, lighting designer **Amber Lynne Parker**, and sound designer **Natalie Kinsaul**.

Hart Island is onstage at Village Theatre’s First Stage Theatre in Issaquah June 7-16, 2019. For tickets, please visit www.VillageTheatre.org or call the Box Office at (425) 392-2202.

About the writers

Danny Haengil Larsen (composer & co-lyricist) and **Michelle Elliott** (bookwriter & co-lyricist) graduated from New York University’s Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program. Their first musical, *The Yellow Wood*, was awarded a Richard Rodgers Development Award and the Daryl Roth Award. In 2007, *The Yellow Wood* was presented in the New York Musical Theatre Festival, where Danny received the award for Best Music. The show was also part of the Village Originals and the National Alliance of Musical Theatre Festival. *Cloaked*, their second show, received workshop productions at CAP 21 and Village Theatre. *Cloaked* received a Jonathan Larson Grant and Michelle was the recipient of the Kleban Prize for Most Promising Librettist for the show.

Danny and Michelle wrote, filmed, and produced a seven-part musical for teens entitled *The Hinterlands* in a response to the spate of suicides by gay youth. The show can be viewed at HinterlandsTheMusical.com and via YouTube.

Michelle and Danny’s musical for young people, *Zombie in Love*, premiere at the Oregon Children’s Theatre, where it received multiple Drammy Awards, including Best Original Score and Best Original Script, as well as the Portland Area Musical Theatre Award for Outstanding Original Musical. Their musical, *Catch the Wind* (formerly *Maiden Voyage*), is a passionate exploration of the lives of women aboard a notorious pirate ship and was presented at the Village Theatre Festival of New Musicals in 2013, and the Buck Hill Skytop Music Festival in 2016.

Their new show, *Hart Island*, is about New York City's public burial ground and was shortlisted for the Kevin Spacey Foundation Artists of Choice Award. It has received extensive development at Village Theatre through a Writer's Residency and The Festival of New Musicals, as well as a co-produced workshop with Village Theatre and Musical Theatre Factory.

Danny holds Bachelor of Arts degrees in Music and Theatre Education from Brigham Young University, and has orchestrated several musicals, including *Wind in the Willows* and *The Ballad of Little Jo*.

Michelle's first play, *Promising*, was produced off-off Broadway in 2015.

About Village Theatre's Village Originals Program

The Village Originals program of readings, workshops, and developmental productions represents one of the strongest commitments to new musicals in the nation, developing such musicals as Pulitzer Prize winner *Next to Normal*, Tony Award winner *Million Dollar Quartet*, Drama Desk Award-winner *Cupid & Psyche*, Stephen Schwartz's *Snapshots*, and the Drama Desk Award-nominated *It Shoulda Been You*, *After the Fair*, and *Making Tracks*. Village Theatre is one of the few resident theatres to provide regular opportunities at every step of musical development, from first table reading to full-scale premiere production. Each season, new works are included as part of Village Theatre's five-show Mainstage lineup alongside the classics. Anchored by The Annual Festival of New Musicals and the Beta Series, the Village Originals program is dedicated to the continued growth and evolution of musical theatre, and a determination that the form will remain vibrant and relevant for generations to come.

About Village Theatre

Based in Issaquah, WA, with operations in Everett, WA, Village Theatre is a leading producer of musical theatre in the Pacific Northwest. Producing entertaining, quality productions since 1979, Village Theatre has grown into one of the region's best-attended theatres, with approximately 20,000 Subscribers and 220,000 projected total attendance each season. Through its Village Originals program, Village Theatre is nationally recognized for its contribution to the development of new musicals, having supported the creation of over 160 new works to date. Village Theatre also takes pride in nurturing tomorrow's audiences through its Youth Education and Outreach programs, KIDSTAGE and Pied Piper, serving over 58,000 young people and their families annually.

###