November 8, 2021

Broadway’s Kelli O’ Hara Comes to McCarter!

It’s not often that our McCarter world and that of Broadway meet, but it’s inevitable when we get to welcome one of the luminaries of the New York musical stage to our Matthews Theatre stage. The opera world calls these artists “divas,” but I prefer to call them “First Ladies.” In a sense, they are indeed royalty, and at the moment there are three who occupy their own pantheon. Two are already part of our McCarter history – Sutton Foster and Audra McDonald (who returns to our stage on April 2); but we have waited far too long to welcome the third, Kelli O’Hara, who joins us for the first time this coming Saturday, November 13th.

Referring to Kelli as a “triple threat” scarcely does justice to her career as a star of the Broadway stage, television and recordings – she’s done it all and run out of shelf-space for her Tony nominations (six) including a statue for her Anna Leonowens in The King and I (2015); an Emmy nomination for her portrayal of Katie Bonner in The Accidental Wolf; and a pair of Grammy nominations for her two solo CDs, just to complete the awards circuit. Broadway? If you’ve been going to musicals (whether new or revivals) for the past decade, it would have been difficult not to have seen her in everything from Kiss Me Kate to The Pajama Game, The Bridges of Madison County, South Pacific, Follies and many more; no surprise that the Drama League honored her in 2019 with its Distinguished Achievement in Musical Theatre.

But here’s something that I bet you didn’t know that adds yet another dimension to her portfolio: she is an opera star at the Met, starting with Lehar’s The Merry Widow in 2015, and continuing with Despina in Mozart’s Cosi fan tutte. As an opera nut, I have seen many a Despina in my day, and Kelli owns the role! If I were running the Met, I would make it a priority to find other opportunities to showcase her, both as singer and comedienne. You will get your own chance to experience the many facets of her talent when you join us in saluting her this weekend; as the saying goes, all good things come to those who wait!

—William L. Lockwood, Jr.
Director of Special Programming