

**Hershey Felder Announces STAR CAST of
The Award Winning TAYLOR HACKFORD
production of
LOUIS & KEELY 'LIVE' AT THE SAHARA
*A Musical Play About
Las Vegas' Most Celebrated Onstage Lovers,
LOUIS PRIMA to be played by TONY AWARD WINNER
ANTHONY CRIVELLO
and KEELY SMITH to be played by actress and writer
VANESSA STEWART*
PERFORMANCES BEGIN FRIDAY MARCH 27 AT THE ROYAL GEORGE
THEATRE
TICKETS NOW ON SALE!**

Chicago – Continuing in a tradition of storytelling and music, Hershey Felder announces the star cast for the Chicago stage premiere of Academy Award winning director **Taylor Hackford's LOUIS AND KEELY, 'LIVE' AT THE SAHARA**. Playing the role of **LOUIS PRIMA** will be **TONY AWARD WINNER Anthony Crivello** (*Broadway's Kiss of the Spider Woman, Les Miserables, Evita, Marie Christine, Golden Boy*); and playing the role of **KEELY SMITH** will be the role's originator and bookwriter, **Vanessa Stewart**. Director Hackford, best known for his films *An Officer and a Gentleman, Against All Odds, The Devil's Advocate*, and cinematic musical events such as *La Bamba, Chuck Berry: Hail! Hail Rock n'Roll* and his epic musical film *RAY*, has decided to bring his latest award winning musical stage production to Chicago, where Louis Prima and Keely Smith created sold-out musical magic in the '50s & '60s. The production will begin previews on March 27th, 2015 at Chicago's Royal George Theatre, 1641 North Halsted Street. The play is co-written by Vanessa Stewart (who originated the role of Keely Smith,) along with Hackford, (co-writer, director & Producer) and Jake Broder (who originated the role of Louis Prima), and will feature some of the duo's greatest hits including "*That Ol' Black Magic,*" "*Hey Boy, Hey Girl,*" "*What Is This Thing Called Love,*" "*Night Train,*" "*Ai, Ai, Ai,*" "*I Can't Believe You're In Love With Me,*" and more. Frank Sinatra also appears in a pivotal role in this musical love story and will be cast in Chicago. **LOUIS AND KEELY, 'LIVE' AT THE SAHARA** features a hot seven-piece live band that is guaranteed to bring down the house.

LOUIS PRIMA was one of the great musical innovator/entrepreneurs of the 20th century – from his beginnings in New Orleans Jazz, to becoming the toast of New York's 52nd St in the '30s, to appearances in Hollywood feature films in the late '30s & his scandalous love affair with Jean Harlow, to leading one of the most popular Big

Bands of the '40s Swing Era, However, by the early '50s, his star seemed to be fading ... until he discovered teenager, KEELY SMITH, in a tiny Virginia Beach dive. In Pygmalion-like fashion Prima finessed Keely's stage fright and then molded her natural singing talent into a totally unique stage presence. Together they turned a two week gig on the floor of the Sahara Hotel's Casino in Las Vegas, into one of the most influential music acts of the '50s & 60s – 10 years later, Sonny & Cher basically copied their act. Prima & Smith's hot act on stage inevitably grew into a hot love story, and this musical play reveals their joy, thrills & chills, and ultimately their heartbreak. LOUIS AND KEELY 'LIVE' AT THE SAHARA is an American Love Story that not only packs an emotional wallop, but also features incredible music, staggeringly performed, that will have you dancing all the way home.

"Being Sicilian, and coming from a musical family, to be able to perform the role of Louis Prima, is somewhat being given the status of a God," says Crivello. "To be able to bring the story to life with all its layers – Sicilian, New Orleans Jazz, wrapped up in a complicated emotional love story is an actor's dream come true. Moreover, my Sicilian parents are smiling." Writer and creator Vanessa Stewart continues, "My grandfather saw Louis Prima's last performance at the Royal Sonesta in New Orleans – where I'm from, and it was always my dream to meet Keely Smith, an icon of female performance. When she attended the original performance and told me that I made a wonderful "her," it really was a dream come true."

Having enjoyed a 7 month sold-out engagement at Los Angeles' Geffen Playhouse, and multiple Ovation Award wins including BEST MUSICAL, LOUIS AND KEELY LIVE AT THE SAHARA is pleased to launch its national debut in the great musical city of Chicago. The Chicago cast and live orchestra will be announced in January of 2015.

Anthony Crivello (Louis Prima)

ANTHONY CRIVELLO received Broadway's Tony Award, Chicago's Jefferson Award, a Carbonelle Award and nominations for two Jefferson Awards, two Canadian Dora Mavor Moore Awards, LA's Ovation, Drama Critics, Robbie, Garland Awards, and Friends of New York Theater Award. Broadway: *Golden Boy*, *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* (Toronto, London), *Marie Christine*, *Evita*, *Les Miserables*, *The News*, *Measure For Measure*, *Heathers: The Musical*. Toronto: *Jane Eyre*. LA: Steve Martin's *The Underpants*, *Expecting Isabel*, *Do I Hear a Waltz*. Chicago: *The House of Martin Guerre*, *A Flea in Her Ear*. Las Vegas: *Phanto-The Las Vegas Spectacular*. Films: Roland Emmerich's *TRADE* (Kevin Kline/ premiers 2007 Sundance Film Festival), *Material Girls* (Hilary & Hailey Duff and Angelica Houston), *Texas Rangers* (Ashton Kutcher & Usher), *Independence Day*, *Henry Toy*, *The Mark*, *The Glass Jar*, Jane Austen's *Mafia!*, *Slaves of New York*, *Spellbinder*, *Shakedown*, *Crocodile Dundee II*. Television: "Behind The Candelabra," "Seinfeld," "CSI: NY," "Frasier," "In-Laws," "Crossing Jordan," "Law and Order," "Normal," "Ohio," "Dillinger and Capone," "The Lost Capone," "Miami Vice," "Star Trek-Voyager," "Babylon 5," "Alien Hunter," "Les Miserables in Concert," "One Life to Live."

Vanessa Claire Stewart (Keely Smith, Co-Writer)

As an actor, Vanessa wrote and originated the role of Keely Smith for "Louis and Keely: Live at the Sahara" - and swept the LA theater awards scene for her portrayal including an

Ovation, LA Weekly, Garland and LADCC award. Other notable theater roles include originating the stage portrayal of Alex in the World Premiere of *A Clockwork Orange* (LA Weekly award for best actress); Olivia, *Twelfth Night* (Kingsmen Shakespeare Festival); Louise, *Gypsy* (Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre); Laura, *A Glass Menagerie*, (Peter Bennett, director) TV/FILM: *Rules of Engagement*, *Wanda Sykes Show*, *Joan of Arcadia*, *Chase the Slut* (Edinburgh Film Festival), and upcoming film *The List* with Jennifer Morrison and Patrick Fugit. As a writer, Stewart penned the smash hit *Stoneface* (a bioplay about Buster Keaton starring French Stewart) for the Pasadena Playhouse. The Hollywood Reporter said of her: "One cannot compliment playwright Stewart enough for displaying such an empathetic understanding of the basis of Keaton's comedy". In addition, she wrote and starred in the feature film *Chase the Slut* (Edinburgh Film Festival) and was a contributor to the film anthology "Girls Girls Girls" with Oscar winning actress Octavia Spencer. (San Diego Film Festival, LA Femme Film Fest). Most recently, Vanessa has been hired to write the remake for Mario Bava's cult hit *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*. She's currently working on an original series about the birth of jazz called "Storyville," as well as a new musical about America's first serial killer HH Holmes called "Deadly". As a singer, Vanessa opened the Newport Beach Jazz Festival, headlined a benefit for the Society of Singers, hosted the LA Weekly Awards and has sung everywhere from Birdland in New York City to Preservation Hall in New Orleans.

Taylor Hackford (Director; Co-Writer, Producer)

Taylor Hackford began his entertainment career at KCET, the Los Angeles public television affiliate, where he produced, wrote or directed documentaries, investigative reports and music performance programs. In 1979, Taylor won an Academy Award in the category of Best Live-Action Short for his first dramatic film, *Teenage Father*. He then made his feature directorial debut in 1980 with *The Idolmaker*, starring Ray Sharkey and Peter Gallagher. *An Officer and a Gentleman*, starring Richard Gere and Debra Winger, was Taylor's second film, which became a commercial and critical hit in 1982. It received 5 Academy Award nominations and brought home Oscars for Louis Gossett, Jr. as Best Supporting Actor, and Best Original Song (Up Where We Belong). Taylor subsequently Produced and Directed *Against All Odds*, starring Jeff Bridges, Rachel Ward & James Woods, *White Nights*, starring Mikhail Baryshnikov & Gregory Hines, *Everybody's All-American*, starring Dennis Quaid & Jessica Lange, and the acclaimed documentary *Chuck Berry: Hail! Hail! Rock n Roll*, featuring Chuck Berry and Keith Richards. Taylor, who has been fascinated by all things Latino since his stint as a Peace Corp volunteer in South America (1968-69), developed and produced *La Bamba*, the Richie Valens biography, which is still the most successful Latin themed feature film in history. Taylor received the Best Director Award at the 1993 Tokyo Film Festival for his next film, *Blood In, Blood Out (Bound by Honor.) Dolores Claiborne*, starring Kathy Bates and Jennifer Jason Leigh was selected for screening at the 1995 Venice, Deauville and Tokyo Film Festivals. In 1996 Taylor discovered thousands of feet of unreleased documentary footage of the legendary Muhammed Ali/George Foreman title fight in Zaire, Africa. Shooting new interviews with Norman Mailer, George Plimpton and Spike Lee, Hackford put together the documentary *When We Were Kings*, which won the 1997 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. In 1998 Hackford directed the critically acclaimed, world-wide hit *The Devil's Advocate* (1999), starring Al Pacino and Keanu Reeves. Then in 2001 he delivered the riveting *Proof of Life*, with Meg Ryan, Russell Crowe. Hackford had struggled for nearly 15 years to make *RAY*, a dramatic film portrait of American musical icon, Ray Charles, and finally succeeded in 2005 when *RAY* starring Jamie Foxx received critical raves and was nominated for 6 Academy Awards in 2005, winning 2 Oscars, including Best Actor for Jamie

Foxx. Hackford's most recent films are: **LOVE RANCH**, starring Academy Award Winners Joe Pesci & Helen Mirren (Mr. Hackford's wife) and **PARKER** starring Jason Statham & Jennifer Lopez.

Hershey Felder (Producer)

Broadway, London's West End: *George Gershwin Alone* (Helen Hayes Theatre, Duchess Theatre). Regional and international appearances of "Composers Sonata" (1999-2014) – *George Gershwin Alone, Monsieur Chopin, Beethoven, As I Knew Him, and Maestro: Leonard Bernstein* and *Hershey Felder as IRVING BERLIN* (Geffen Theatre LA World Premiere). Winner of 2007 Los Angeles Ovation Awards, Best Musical and Best Actor for *George Gershwin Alone*. Worldwide live broadcasts, *George Gershwin Alone*, 2005 and 2011 for the WFMT Network. Direction includes *Mona Golabek in The Pianist of Willesden Lane* (National Tour), Current projects include *Abe Lincoln's Piano, Hershey Felder as IRVING BERLIN* and several other titles in development for various artists. Mr. Felder is a Steinway Concert Artist, and has been a Scholar in Residence at Harvard University's Department of Music. He is the President of Eighty-Eight Entertainment and is married to Kim Campbell, former Prime Minister of Canada.

The artistic team for **LOUIS AND KEELY LIVE AT THE SAHARA** is led by Director Taylor Hackford. Scenic Design is by Hershey Felder and Trevor Hay, Sound Design is by Erik Carstensen, Lighting Design is by Chris Rynne, Projection Design is by Andrew Wilder, and Scenic Decoration is by Meghan Maiya. Matt Marsden serves as Production Manager and the Production Stage Manager is Rebecca Peters.

Performances of **LOUIS AND KEELY LIVE AT THE SAHARA** begin Friday, March 27 at 8 p.m. and continue as follows: Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m, Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m., Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m., and Sundays at 2 p.m. and 7 pm All tickets are \$65. Tickets will be on sale at The Royal George Theatre and may be purchased by calling **312.988.9000**. Box office hours are 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Tickets may also be purchased online at www.theroyalgeorgetheatre.com. **TICKETS NOW ON SALE!**

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Noreen

Noreen Heron

Noreen Heron & Associates

1528 W. Fullerton Avenue

Chicago, IL 60614

773.969.5201 (P)

773.477.7388 (F)

www.heronpr.com

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