



**10/17/18**

*By Diane Hampton*

## **Notable Broadway Talent to Perform at ASU Mid-South Anniversary Celebration**

*25 Years on Broadway to feature six Broadway Stars*

To celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Arkansas State University Mid-South is bringing Broadway talent from around the country to perform for its Gala and Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. Titled *25 Years on Broadway*, the November 3rd awards show will parallel twenty-five years of history of the College, with twenty-five years of celebrated Broadway musicals. The performance will be built around the inductees and chronicle key years in the history of the College.

Being inducted into the first class of the Mid-South Hall of Fame are: Mr. Solon Anthony, Mr. William Barbour, Jr., Dr. Barbara Baxter, Mr. Alex Coulter, Dr. Glen Fenter, Mr. Thomas Goldsby, Jr., Mr. William Ingram, Sr., Mr. Lloyd McCuiston, Jr., Mr. A.B. Smith, Jr., and Rev. Mary Toney.

The show headlines two acclaimed musicians, both originally from Mississippi and now residing in Las Vegas, Nevada. Philip Fortenberry, an acclaimed piano virtuoso, and Keith Thompson, an award winning composer and musical director are producing the event along with the Foundation at ASU Mid-South.

Made possible by the Rockie Smith Endowment for the Arts at ASU Mid-South, the volunteer chair of the event is Llana Smith Rada, daughter of the late Rockie and A.B. Smith and longtime friend of Fortenberry and Thompson.

“I am so excited about this event and deeply touched that Philip and Keith have agreed to bring their awesome talents to ASU Mid-South,” offered Llana Smith Rada. “Education in the arts, particularly the performing arts, was so important to my mother and father. The show will serve to honor the ten inaugural inductees into the Mid-South Hall of Fame, will celebrate the twenty-five year success of ASU Mid-South, and will bring hugely successful performers to Crittenden County for a very unique and entertaining show.”

Philip Fortenberry, pianist, has played for ten Broadway shows including *Cats*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and *The Lion King*. He toured the U.S. and Canada in concert performances of *The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber*, and has performed in concerts from Lincoln Center to Carnegie Hall, from the Kennedy Center to the White House. His one-man show, *The Man at the Piano*, continues to play to sold-out houses around the country and he toured through China his solo concert, *Salute to Broadway*, in August of 2018. Philip was the piano double for Michael Douglas’ award-winning performance as Liberace in the HBO biopic, *Behind the Candelabra*.

A native of Columbia, Mississippi, Philip began playing the piano at the age of four and by seven was the accompanist for his church until he left the south and moved to New York City where he continued private piano studies at The Juilliard School.

Broadway and Las Vegas musical director and conductor Keith Thompson's professional credits include vocal director for the Nickelodeon Comedy Series, *Roundhouse*, musical director and conductor for the Las Vegas companies of *Jersey*

*Boys, The Producers, Hairspray, We Will Rock You*, and Musical Coordinator for the most recent Las Vegas production of *Mamma Mia!*.

Thompson's New York credits include *Les Misérables, When Pigs Fly, Sideshow Three Men and a Horse, Forbidden Broadway* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. He won the 2000 Dora Award as musical director for *Cabaret* in Toronto. He also conducted the first National tour of *Mamma Mia!* as well as *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* starring Donny Osmond. Other U.S. tours include the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary tour of *HAIR*, *Peter Pan* with Cathy Rigby, *Jesus Christ Superstar* with Ted Neeley and Carl Anderson, and *The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber*, an orchestra concert tour that featured Sarah Brightman.

Joining Fortenberry and Thompson are acclaimed vocalists Jennifer Goode Cooper, a native of Memphis, and her husband Sean Cooper, Randal Keith and Niki Scalera.

The Wall Street Journal called Jennifer Goode Cooper a "lustrous soprano", while The New York described her vocals as "soprano with steely-eyed ferocity." Her musical theater roles include Kate in *Kiss Me Kate*, Anna in *The King and I*, Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Fiona in *Brigadoon*, and Eliza in *My Fair Lady*. Her roles in opera performances include the premiere of Nathaniel Stookey's *Ivonne* at Opera Memphis. She also starred in Broadway and Los Angeles productions of *La Bohème*.

On Broadway, Sean Cooper appeared in the original cast of Baz Luhrmann's production of Puccini's *La Bohème* and *Riverdance*. Roles of note include Emile deBecque in *South Pacific*, Pirate King in *The Pirates of Penzance*, Captain Lombard in *The Mousetrap*, Daddy Warbucks in *Annie*, and Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Randal Keith is best known for his role as Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* appearing in nearly 3000 performances on Broadway, throughout the U.S., and in Canada, China and South Korea. Keith starred as The Phantom in the first National tour of *The Phantom of the Opera* and later moved to Las Vegas to open the Vegas production of *Spamalot* as Sir Bedevere and eventually taking over the role of King Arthur. Keith recently launched his first solo concert, *The Music of Robert Goulet: Broadway and Beyond*.

Niki Scalera has performed on Broadway as Penny in *Hairspray*, as Jane in Disney's *Tarzan* & in Neil Simon's *Jake's Women* and has appeared on daytime dramas *Loving*, *All My Children* & *Another World* and in the Emmy nominated ABC After School Special *Don't Touch*. The Queen musical *We Will Rock You* brought Niki to Las Vegas where she has been a soloist with the Philharmonic.

25 Years on Broadway will be held November 3, 2018 starting at 6:00 p.m. in the Donald W. Reynolds Center on the campus of ASU Mid-South. Tickets for the event are \$150 per person and include the evening's entertainment, a gourmet dinner and cocktails. Reserved tables of eight are also available for \$1000. For more information, contact Diane Hampton at the ASU Mid-South Foundation (870)733-6880 or [dhampton@asumidsouth.edu](mailto:dhampton@asumidsouth.edu). Tickets may also be purchased online at [www.asumidsouth.edu/25-year-gala/](http://www.asumidsouth.edu/25-year-gala/)

### **About Arkansas State University Mid-South**

Arkansas State University Mid-South is a public two-year institution of higher education with an open-door admission policy, serving Crittenden County, Arkansas and the surrounding areas. The College is committed to enriching lives through high quality educational programming that fosters student success, workforce development, and lifelong learning.

For more information about ASU Mid-South, visit <https://www.asumidsouth.edu/>

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Phillip Fortenberry



Keith Thompson



Jennifer Goode Cooper



Sean Cooper



Randall Keith



Niki Scalera