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FORD'S THEATRE PRESENTS
ONE DESTINY ON DEMAND
BY RICHARD HELLESEN
DIRECTED BY MARK RAMONT

Forty-minute Video Production Available for Free via Registration at
www.fords.org

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Ford's Theatre Society announced release of its free, on-demand video version of the popular stage play ***One Destiny*** by Richard Helleesen, directed by Mark Ramont. ***One Destiny On Demand*** is now available for streaming Feb. 8-June 13, 2021, with event registration on <https://www.fords.org/visit/one-destiny>.

The 40-minute video production revisits the events of April 14, 1865, with a cast of historical characters who were present, including Ford's Theatre co-owner Harry Ford and stage actor Harry Hawk. As they reconstruct the sequence of events, they grapple with the question: Could John Wilkes Booth have been stopped from assassinating President Abraham Lincoln?

Initially created as a transportable production with two actors, costumes and a simple trunk of props, *One Destiny* boasts more than 1,400 on-stage performances with actors Michael Bunce and Stephen F. Schmidt since its 2006 debut, plus additional performances at D.C.-area schools and an event at the White House in April 2008. *One Destiny On Demand* was recorded on the Ford's Theatre stage with COVID-19 safety protocols in November 2020 by Chiet Productions.

Educators seeking related supplemental resources for teaching *One Destiny* and the Lincoln assassination will find content at <https://www.fords.org/visit/one-destiny>.

"*One Destiny* has captured the imaginations of tens of thousands who have experienced it at Ford's," said **Ford's Theatre Director Paul R. Tetreault**. "Not only does the story explore the key facts of the Lincoln assassination, but it captures the emotions of that fateful night. Through the eyes of the play's characters, audiences come to better understand the impact of John Wilkes Booth's hateful and treasonous act, while also realizing that he did not prevail. Democracy in America persevered, as does Lincoln's vision for union and equality and the status of Ford's Theatre as a haven for the performing arts."

“One Country, One Destiny” and Lincoln’s Great Coat

Playwright Richard Helleesen drew the play’s title from the hand-embroidered silk lining of President Abraham Lincoln’s woolen Brooks Brothers’s Great Coat (overcoat), which features an eagle carrying a banner that reads “One Country, One Destiny.” The phrase comes from an 1837 speech given by one of Lincoln’s role models, Senator Daniel Webster. Daniel Webster’s quotation can also be found within the elaborate murals on the first floor of the U.S. Capitol’s House chamber.

Lincoln’s Great Coat was made specially for his second inaugural on March 4, 1865, and its unified message spoke to the president’s hopes for union. Abraham Lincoln also wore the coat to Ford’s Theatre on the night of his assassination. After Lincoln’s assassination, Mary Lincoln bequeathed the coat to the Lincolns’ favorite doorman, Alphonse Donn. The Donn family held the coat for over a century, allowing curious visitors to cut swatches of the bloodstained lining. Eventually souvenir seekers did so much damage that the sleeve separated from the body of the coat.

The coat came into the collection of the National Park Service at Ford’s Theatre in 1967, as the site prepared to open as a museum in 1968. Because of the coat’s fragile condition today, the original is currently preserved in museum storage. High resolution images of the coat’s interior can be viewed on the Ford’s Theatre website: <https://www.fords.org/lincolns-assassination/lincolns-clothes/>.

THE CAST

Michael Bunce (Harry Hawk) is a Ford’s Theatre Associate Artist. He has appeared in Ford’s productions of *A Christmas Carol*, including the 2020 radio adaptation, *110 in the Shade*, *Our Town*, *1776*, *Liberty Smith and Meet John Doe*. Additional credits include the Kennedy Center’s *Regina* with Patti LuPone, *My Fair Lady* in Concert, Olney Theatre’s *South Pacific*, *1776* and *Anything Goes*, *The Fantasticks* at Rep Stage, and productions of *La Cage aux Folles*, *Beaches*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Urinetown* and *Pacific Overtures* for Signature Theatre. Bunce has also appeared in Barrington Stage’s *South Pacific*, Cumberland Theatre’s *Hay Fever*, *The Full Monty* and *Camping with Henry and Tom*, and national tours of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Victor/Victoria* with Toni Tennille and *42nd Street* Troika, Moscow.

Stephen F. Schmidt (Harry Ford) is a Ford’s Theatre Associate Artist and Ford’s Theatre Teaching Artist. He first performed *One Destiny* in 2006. Among his many Ford’s Theatre credits are Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol*, including for the 2020 radio adaptation, and the role of Lt. Brannigan in *Guys and Dolls* (postponed due to the pandemic). He also has appeared in Ford’s productions of *Ragtime* and *Hello, Dolly!*, which received the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Ensemble, Resident Musical. Other Helen Hayes honors include: Outstanding Supporting Actor, Resident Musical for Lockstock in *Urinetown* at Signature Theatre; Outstanding Lead Actor nominations, Resident Musical for: Willy Wonka in *Roald Dahl’s Willy Wonka* at The Kennedy Center, George Bailey in *It’s A Wonderful Life* at Toby’s, and Brad in *The Rocky Horror Show* at Woolly Mammoth. He has appeared in episodes of *House of Cards*, *The Wire* and *Homicide*. Film credits include: *J. Edgar*, *My One and Only* and *La Bamba* (added to Library of Congress’ National Film Registry 2017).

ARTISTIC TEAM

Playwright Richard Helleesen is the author of *One Destiny*, *Necessary Sacrifices*, *The Road From Appomattox* and the Ford’s Theatre walking tour *Investigation: Detective McDevitt*. He

also co-wrote the book for the Ford's 2015 production of Frank Wildhorn's *Freedom's Song: Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War*, and the script for the 2015 Ford's 150 commemoration, *Now He Belongs to the Ages*. Hellesen's other plays include *Kingdom*, *Once In Arden*, *Moonshadow*, a widely-produced musical adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* (with composer David DeBerry), and adaptations of *Johnny Tremain*, *The Emperor's New Clothes* and *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. His two-dozen short plays include five finalists in the Actors Theatre of Louisville 10-Minute Play Contest, including *Dos Corazones* which appears in *Best Ten-Minute Plays 2012*. With composer Michael Silversher he has written a musical version of *The Wind in the Willows*, 11 educational touring shows for South Coast Repertory, and an adaptation of the Lois Lowry novel *Gathering Blue*. A member of the Dramatists Guild, Hellesen is the recipient of writing awards from the National Theatre Conference, PEN USA West and the Beverly Hills Theatre Guild, and was Playwright in Residence at the William Inge Center for the Arts in 2009 and 2012. He makes his home in Sacramento, California.

Director Mark Ramont has worked professionally as a director, artistic administrator and educator at theatres such Ford's Theatre, Round House, Circle Repertory Theatre, Alley Theatre, Hangar Theatre, Capitol City Playhouse, and others. As the Director of Theatre Programming at Ford's Theatre, he was instrumental in shepherding world premiere productions of *Necessary Sacrifices*, *Liberty Smith*, *The Heavens Are Hung In Black* and *Meet John Doe* through the development and production process. Ramont has directed world premiere productions of *Dalton's Back*, *Walking the Dead*, *Mad River Rising* and *The Colorado Catechism*, among others. Currently, he is on faculty at California State University, Fullerton. Mark also has taught at Rice University, Sam Houston State University and American University. Ramont is recipient of the Princess Grace Foundation Statuette Award, as well as multiple Austin Theatre Critics' and Austin Circle of Theatres Awards.

The *One Destiny* On Demand production team also includes Stage Manager Taryn Friend, Costume Designer Janice Lopez, Lighting Designer Andrew R. Cissna, Sounds Designer Ryan Rumery. *One Destiny* On Demand was Filmed by Chiet Productions, with Director of Photography Justin Chiet, Edited by James Gardiner, First Assistnat Camera Jeremy Jacoby, Second Assistant Camera Eric Koraganie and Production Assistant Jason Obando.

Ford's Theatre Society

The Ford's Theatre Society was founded under the guidance of executive producer Frankie Hewitt, who, during her 35-year tenure, established Ford's as a living, working theatre producing performances that highlighted the diversity of the American experience. Since the arrival of Paul R. Tetreault as Director, critics and the theatregoing public have recognized Ford's for the superior quality of its artistic programming. With works from the Tony-nominated *Come From Away* and nationally acclaimed *Big River* to the world premieres of *Meet John Doe*, *The Heavens Are Hung In Black*, *Liberty Smith*, *Necessary Sacrifices*, *The Widow Lincoln* and *The Guard*, Ford's Theatre is making its mark on the American theatre landscape. For its accomplishments, the organization was honored in 2008 with the National Medal of Arts. For more information, visit www.fords.org. In the past decade, the mission of Ford's Theatre Society expanded to include education as a central pillar. This expansion led to the creation and construction of the Center for Education and Leadership, which opened in February 2012. Currently, under the leadership of Board Chair Phebe N. Novakovic, Ford's Theatre Society is

advancing the unfinished work of Abraham Lincoln by creating a vibrant, accessible Ford's Theatre campus that cultivates civic discourse, supports our nation's educators and engages the community with our history.

#FordsDestiny

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