

# Theatre CITY MIAMI

444 Brickell Ave Miami, FL 33131

305-755-9401

[www.citytheatre.com](http://www.citytheatre.com)

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CONTACT:

Susan Westfall Office: (305) 755-9401 Cell: (305) 607-4503

[Susan@citytheatre.com](mailto:Susan@citytheatre.com)

## **The Atlantic Council in Association with City Theatre and the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts Present WAR WORDS by Michelle Kholos Brooks**

**A Special One Night Only Veteran's Day Salute on Wednesday, November 10<sup>th</sup> 2021, at 8:00 PM  
The Knight Concert Hall, 1300 Biscayne Blvd., Miami, FL 33132**

*"Few movies or plays have ever captured for me as powerfully as WAR WORDS . . . the experiences of American veterans, especially those who have served in uniform since 9/11. Many of the reflections in it were not just familiar to me, they struck important chords with me as well."*

**General (Ret.) David Petraeus, Board Chair of the Atlantic Council**

(Miami) City Theatre and the Adrienne Arsht Center are honored to be selected by The Atlantic Council for Miami's presentation of WAR WORDS by Michelle Brooks, **a fully produced staged reading of the Pulitzer-Prize Nominated play**. Performing Wednesday, November 10 at 8:00 PM as a salute of Veterans and Veterans Day, it's an opportunity for veterans, active military, and the South Florida community to return together as an audience live and in-person to the beautiful Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts Knight Concert Hall for this remarkable and unique presentation.

WAR WORDS humanizes and personalizes the population of professional warriors among us including family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and strangers. The script, commissioned by The Atlantic Council, is based on numerous interviews between Ms. Brooks and active military and veterans responding to her question of "why they served". The funny, strange, heroic, and heartbreaking stories of the men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, told in their own words, gives voice to a powerful play about warriors deployed far away, those we brought home, and those we left behind. Now that the twenty-year "long war" in Afghanistan has ended, this timely, exciting, and enlightening work reveals to the public what "thank you for your service" really means. For audiences of active military and veterans, WAR WORDS is a work of art reflecting many of their own experiences.

The Miami reading is directed by City Theatre's Artistic Director Margaret M. Ledford, featuring a cast of South Florida artists onstage at the Knight Concert Hall, including some veterans themselves from the theatre group Combat Hippies. Performing the roles Brooks created for the play are Carlos Alayeto, Alex Alvarez\*, Hipolito Arriaga, Iain Batchelor\*, Javier Cabrera, Sofi Duemichen, Michael Ferreiro, Jovon Jacobs\*, Alexis Robinson, Angel R. Rodriguez, Fawad Siddiqui, Caleb Scott\*, Sandi Stock, Robert Strain\*,

Brendan Sokler\*, Crystal Millie Valdez\* (\* member of Actors Equity Association). WAR WORDS is performed at the Knight Concert Hall of the Adrienne Arsht Center of the Performing Arts names for Ms. Arsht who sits on the Board of the Atlantic Council.

The Atlantic Council is one of the nation's most prominent international affairs think tanks. It's launching of an annual nationwide celebration of Veteran's Day with WAR WORDS uses theatre to shorten the distance of understanding between ordinary Americans and veterans. Partnering in 2021 with professional theatre companies, veterans service organizations, and corporate sponsors makes possible play readings in Miami, Ft. Worth, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York City and Syracuse, returning audiences of veterans, active military, and the public to theatres in post-pandemic gatherings. The Atlantic Council's Steven Grundman serves as Executive Director and Coordinator for the national WAR WORDS Project.

Following the reading NBC 6's Willard Shepard will moderate a talk back with a panel of special guests on the topics raised by the play. Shepard, the five-time Emmy award winning journalist, attorney, and Gulf War fighter pilot has brought his unique insight to NBC 6 viewers as an anchor and investigative reporter for more than two decades. The panel will include WAR WORDS playwright Michelle Kholos Brooks, Army Chaplain Nate Graeser who inspired one of the play's characters, Anthony Torres a veteran actor and member of The Combat Hippies, and staff of the Bruce W. Carter VA staff who works with many Iraq and Afghanistan returned veterans.

Major funding support for this project comes from the Atlantic Council and The Boeing Company. Attending from the Atlantic Council will be Dr. Matthew Kroenig, Deputy Director of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security and Scowcroft Strategy Initiative. Attending from The Boeing Company will be Travis Sullivan, Vice President and General Manager of Boeing Distribution Services. Sponsors also include NBC6, the Bruce W. Carter VA Medical Hospital, the Miami HEAT Charitable Fund, the law firm of Stearns Weaver Miller, PA, Miami Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, City Theatre, and the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County.

Tickets for the general public are \$15 at [www.arshtcenter.org](http://www.arshtcenter.org) or 305.949.6722. Tickets for active military and veterans are free and available at [www.Vettix.org](http://www.Vettix.org) The Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts is located at 1300 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, FL 33132.

All programs, artists, ticket prices, availability, dates and times are subject to change without notice. Visit [arshtcenter.org](http://arshtcenter.org) for up-to-date information.

#### **[Arsht Center Commitment to Health and Safety](#)**

##### **[For Arsht Center Indoors and Safely Distanced Performances;](#)**

**[The Arsht Center remains deeply committed to the health and peace of mind of our guests, artists and staff. Based on guidance from national and local health officials, masks and proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test are required. Guests may volunteer proof of vaccination in lieu of a negative test. Learn more here. This event is indoors and will have safe distancing measures in place. We will also maintain enhanced cleaning, sanitation, and air filtration procedures. Any policy changes will be sent directly to ticketholders and updated regularly at \[arshtcenter.org/covid-19\]\(http://arshtcenter.org/covid-19\).](#)**

The Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County is made possible by the public support of the Miami-Dade County Mayor and the Board of County Commissioners, the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Tourist

Development Council and the City of Miami Omni Community Redevelopment Agency, as well as the Florida Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture. The Adrienne Arsht Center also receives generous support from individuals, corporations and local, state and national foundations.

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**Addendum:**

**More about WAR WORDS**

About the Atlantic Council's WAR WORDS 2021 National Project:

For media inquiries about the WAR WORDS National Project or any one of its performances, contact Executive Producer Steve Grundman at [sgrundman@acus.org](mailto:sgrundman@acus.org) or by calling +1 (857) 222-3347

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/programs/scowcroft-center-for-strategy-and-security/forward-defense/war-words-across-america/>

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**About Michelle Kholos Brooks** (WAR WORDS Playwright) is an award-winning dramatist with productions staged internationally. Awards and distinctions include the Susan Glaspell Award for *Hitler's Tasters*, the Reva Shiner Comedy Award for *Kalamazoo*, co-written by Kelly Younger. *Hitler's Tasters* was also named 'Best of Fringe' at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe by The Stage UK. The filmed stage version of *Hitler's Tasters* was listed as a Must-Watch by the LA Times and selected for The Kilroys: The List 2020. *Hostage* was a finalist for the Woodward/Newman Drama Award, The Fratti-Newman Political Play Contest and a Showcase finalist for the National New Play Network. *Chair* received second place in the Firehouse Theatre Festival of New American Plays. Plays have been produced and/or developed at Arena Stage, the Skylight Theatre (*World Premiere, Hostage*) Centenary Stage (*World Premiere, Hitler's Tasters*), Pacific Resident Theatre, Adirondack Theatre Festival, Bloomington Playwright's Project (*Rolling World Premiere, Kalamazoo*), The Colony Theatre (*World Premiere, Family Planning*) Florida Repertory Theatre, Boston Court Theatre, The Road Theatre Company, Wordsmyth Theatre, The Barrow Group, Bay Street Theatre, Venue 9 Theatre, Wings Theatre, Laurel Grove Theatre Company, Drama West, Vox Humana Theatre Ensemble, iTheatre Collaborative, New Light Theatre Project, 59E59th St. Theatre, Olive Theatre; Greenside at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, The Adobe Rose Theatre and The Electric Lodge. Publications include Dramatists Play Service, Room literary magazine and The Daily Beast. Brooks earned a B.A. from Emerson College and an M.F.A. in Fiction from Otis College of Art and Design. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America, The Playwright's Center and Pacific Resident Theatre. In addition, she is a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the [Atlantic Council, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/programs/scowcroft-center-for-strategy-and-security/).



**About Willard Shepard (WAR WORDS panel moderator)** Shepard's reporting includes his expertise in the military and aviation, where he uses his combat experience to guide viewers through the ongoing terrorist threats at home and abroad. He gives the public an inside look at the federal, state, and local efforts to keep America safe. His work detailing anti-terror efforts underwater to protect ports and cruise ships earned him an Emmy award. During the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, his military background brought a detailed perspective on the battlefield. He has also covered military conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo. He guided viewers through the return of Boeing's 737 Max to service after two fatal accidents. He served as a Lt. Colonel in the United States Air Force and Reserve. His A-10 squadron was the first Air Force Reserve Fighter unit ever to go into combat. During the Gulf War, Shepard flew 52 combat sorties over Iraq and Kuwait. He was awarded six Air Medals for his support of Coalition Army Ground Forces. Shepard has also flown missions over Bosnia for NATO. He was the first Air Force pilot to fly the Soviet Mig-29 fighter. As a staff officer, Lt. Colonel Shepard examined air operations programs at U.S. Southern Command. For the Air Force Reserve today, he assists high school students in obtaining ROTC scholarships and appointments to the USAF Academy. He now flies search and rescue missions for the USAF Civil Air Patrol and has flown countless sorties in the USAF CAP program showing middle and high school students aviation opportunities in the USAF and beyond.

He is a graduate of the Florida International University College of Law and specializes in media and aviation legal issues. Shepard graduated cum laude from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Air Force Officer Training School in San Antonio, Texas, and a finalist for the prestigious White House Fellowship program.



**About Nathan Graeser, Director of Veteran's Programs,** was interviewed by Michelle Kholos Brooks for WAR WORDS where he soon inspired the character of Chaplain Nate) is both a social worker and an Army Chaplain in the California National Guard. He is a national expert on policies and programs that support service-members transitioning out of the military. He has been featured on NPR, ABC, and numerous other media outlets. A tireless advocate for veteran and military families, he leads multiple Veteran initiatives in Los Angeles including the Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative and LA Veterans Orientation. As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, he has spent thousands of hours counseling veterans and their families deal with

the challenges of service and returning home. He earned a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary, a Masters in Social Work, and a Doctorate in Social Work from the University of Southern California. He serves on numerous local and national boards and just returned from a deployment with an Infantry Brigade in December 2018. He lives in Highland Park in a eco-friendly house with chickens, bees and three small humans ages five, three, and one. His rock star wife, Rachel, makes it all possible.

**About Margaret M. Ledford** **MARGARET M. LEDFORD (City Theatre Artistic Director)** is thrilled be embarking on her 5th year as Artistic Director of City Theatre and excited to FINALLY celebrate the 25th Summer Shorts Festival, a Silver Anniversary this summer. In addition to its signature Summer Shorts Festivals, Margaret oversees all of City Theatre’s artistic responsibilities related to the company’s year-round all-ages programming, including its productions, educational outreach initiatives, and community projects. She is a hands-on administrator and represents the company as part of its local, regional and national partnerships. Prior to becoming City Theatre’s Artistic Director, Margaret spent many seasons as a director for the company. Margaret hails from Chattanooga, Tennessee where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and Speech from the University of TN and studied Cubist-Expressionistic Scenography post WWI abroad at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. She is a member of Actors Equity Association and worked as an Equity Stage Manager in regional theatres: Barter Theatre in Abingdon, VA and Coconut Grove Playhouse. She served on the board of the South Florida Theatre League for 6 years, 4 of them as Board President. She is an 8 time Carbonell Award nominated director, a multiple Silver Palm winner for direction, and Carbonell winning Lighting Designer. She was the Associate Artistic Director and Resident Director for The Promethean Theatre for 8 years. Margaret has directed for many South Florida theaters including: Fantasy Theatre Factory, Thinking Cap Theatre, New Theatre, Naked Stage, Mosaic Theatre, Caldwell Theatre, Del Ray Beach Arts Garage, FAU's Theatre Lab, FIU, Florida Stage and Pam Beach Dramaworks. She also served on the theatre faculty for many years at Nova Southeastern University. Margaret is a founding member of Mangrove Creative Collective and a National Reviewer for the National YoungArts Foundation.

**About the Atlantic Council** The Atlantic Council is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization that galvanizes US leadership and engagement in the world, in partnership with allies and partners, to shape solutions to global challenges. The War Words Project is one expression of its aspiration not just to analyze challenges but to inspire, seek, and implement solutions to them. This project is a key pillar of the Atlantic Council’s [Forward Defense](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org) practice. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org>

**About The Miami VA Healthcare System** The VA provides primary care, mental health treatment and specialty medical services to Veterans in Miami-Dade, Broward and Monroe Counties at 9 convenient locations, including the Bruce W. Carter VA Medical Center in downtown Miami. All Veterans are invited to find out about the benefits they earned by visiting: [www.va.gov/miami-health-care](http://www.va.gov/miami-health-care)

**About City Theatre** City Theatre is an award-winning professional theater company founded in Miami, FL in 1996, that is now among the oldest cultural organizations in the region. It is dedicated to the development and production of new works and programming that entertains, informs, educates and resonates with its diverse audiences. It is the only theatre in the nation producing ten-minute plays and musicals year-round and for all ages, in robust and innovative programming including its signature SUMMER SHORTS FESTIVAL which will enjoy its Silver Anniversary Season in 2022 at its Main Stage Artistic Home, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts Carnival Studio Theater. City Theatre’s community of playwrights include award-winning and exciting new writers, hailing from Florida and

around the country, many selected through the City Theatre National Award for Short Playwriting Contests. City Theatre produces full-length plays as part of the Adrienne Arsht Theatre Up Close series for the Carnival Studio Theatre, and works the company finds specifically meaningful to South Florida audiences. City Theatre has been honored by the Carbonell Committee with the prestigious Bill Von Maurer Award, which recognizes significant contributions to South Florida theater development by an individual or group, for the company's dedication to the short form play and fostering new play development. For more information visit [www.citytheatre.com](http://www.citytheatre.com)

### **About the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts**

Set in the heart of downtown Miami, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County is committed to welcoming and connecting ALL people to the arts, to the Arsht Center and to each other. Our stages are alive year-round with artists from around the world, innovative programming from our resident companies and local arts partners, free community events that reflect Miami's unique identity and arts education experiences for thousands of Miami children each year.

Since opening in 2006, the Arsht Center, a 501C3 non-profit organization, has been recognized as a catalyst for billions of dollars in new development in the downtown area, a leader in programming that mirrors South Florida's diversity, a host venue for historic events and Miami's hub for arts education.

Each year, we serve more than 60,000 young learners and offer more than 100 culturally diverse and inclusive education programs — many enhanced by the Arsht Center's relationship with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, local teaching artists and Miami-based arts organizations.

The Arsht Center is also a home stage for three resident companies — Florida Grand Opera, Miami City Ballet and New World Symphony — and a launch pad for local artists to make their mark on the international stage. Our 300+ events each year include the Center's Signature Series of classical, jazz, Broadway, local theater and much more. We present a robust series of touring Broadway musicals direct from New York, the largest jazz series in South Florida, a major annual Flamenco Festival and an award-winning Miami-based theater program. In addition, our Family Fest, Free Gospel Sundays, CommuniTEA LGBTQ+ celebration and Heritage Fest are among dozens of free events that bring together people from all corners of our community. For more information, visit [arshtcenter.org](http://arshtcenter.org).

