



Alex Mustakas Awarded Meritorious Service Medal

Drayton Entertainment Artistic Director Honoured by Governor General of Canada

Thursday, May 26, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – **Alex Mustakas**, founding and current Artistic Director of award-winning Drayton Entertainment, was honoured by Her Excellency the Right Honourable **Mary Simon**, Governor General of Canada, with the prestigious *Meritorious Service Medal* (Civil Division).

He received his medal during a ceremony held earlier today at Rideau Hall in Ottawa, following a series of in-person delays and postponements caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The celebration fittingly complemented the launch of Drayton Entertainment's 2022 Season and the planned reopening of all seven of its stages throughout the province of Ontario.

Created by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the Meritorious Service Decorations recognize Canadians for exceptional deeds that bring honour to our country. Meritorious Service Decorations are an important part of the Canadian Honours System and highlight remarkable achievements that are accomplished over a limited time period.

Mustakas is being celebrated for his lifelong commitment to making the performing arts affordable and accessible. His distinctive business model has created one of the largest and most well-respected charitable arts organizations in Canada. At the height of its operations, Drayton Entertainment stages over 800 performances annually at its various venues, with attendance exceeding 250,000 each year. The Government of Ontario's Tourism Regional Economic Impact Model (TREIM) estimates the organization's economic impact on visitor spending at over \$80 million annually, positively affecting multiple communities throughout the province.

"I am beyond humbled to be singled out with this honour, and share this recognition with everyone involved in the success of Drayton Entertainment. It takes an entire creative community to produce such an ambitious lineup of shows each season, including our artists, musicians, technical crew, administrative staff, volunteer Board of Directors, sponsors, donors, and front-line volunteers. Each person involved with our organization plays an integral role and shares in this accomplishment," says Mustakas. "It's especially meaningful to receive this medal as we launch a new season after two years of closure. It's a reminder of the success we've had in the past and hopefully will continue to have in future."

Mustakas emigrated from Cyprus at the age of six. As a natural performer, he was drawn to the stage, but he honoured his father's wishes by earning a business degree in Economics from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. He found employment in the corporate sector, but seemed unable to shake his draw to the performing arts. In a bold move, he handed his degree to his father and said, 'This was for you. Now I want to do something for myself. I'd like to become a professional actor.'

Mustakas set off for uncharted territory, but after a few years on the stage, he pursued a Master's Degree in Arts Administration at City University in London. His dream of a small theatre of his own began to take shape during these years, providing the impetus to become an agent of change. He was acutely aware of the physical, social, economic, and cultural barriers that limited access to the arts, particularly in rural areas. He also recognized the stigma that surrounded the arts in terms of their perceived value and contribution to society.

Alex returned to Canada and began to build what would become a thriving theatre organization starting with an all-but-abandoned opera house in the small hamlet of Drayton, Ontario. Mustakas has repeatedly noted that he's grateful to his father for encouraging him to pursue economics training – his business acumen and artistic vision converged to create Drayton Entertainment's unique theatre model that amortizes production and administrative costs across numerous venues, and enables live theatre to flourish on seven unique stages across Ontario: the Drayton Festival Theatre in Drayton, Hamilton Family Theatre Cambridge in Cambridge, Huron Country Playhouse in Grand Bend, King's Wharf Theatre in Penetanguishene, and St. Jacobs Country Playhouse and the Schoolhouse Theatre in St. Jacobs. By merging his creative and commerce knowledge, Mustakas has set a path for long-term sustainability within the charitable arts sector.

"Alex's innovative approach to overcoming challenges and celebrating the arts is repeatedly validated – from the first-risky, but successful theatre start-up in Drayton, to the scaled-up network of seven stages across Ontario," says **Patricia Ziegler-Ignor**, President of Drayton Entertainment's Board of Directors. "We are incredibly proud of his accomplishments."

Over the course of his career, Mustakas has been recognized with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award (Media & Entertainment), Theatre Ontario's Maggie Bassett Award, and an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Wilfrid Laurier University, amongst others.

Meritorious Service Decorations are given to recognize outstanding contributions in any field, from advocacy initiatives and health care services to research and humanitarian efforts. Past recipients include **Colonel Chris Hadfield** (Ret'd), **Clara Hughes**, **Colette Roy Laroche**, **Sarah Burke**, and **Thérèse Tanguay Dion**.

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