



NEWS RELEASE

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The Belle is Back! Emily Dickinson Museum Sponsors Benefit Performance Of The Belle of Amherst featuring Barbara Dana

AMHERST, Mass.—The Emily Dickinson Museum presents a benefit performance of William Luce’s critically praised play, *The Belle of Amherst*, with acclaimed actress Barbara Dana at 7:00 pm, Thursday, March 11, at the Kirby Memorial Theater at Amherst College. Based on the life of Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), the one-woman play dramatically portrays the poet’s private thoughts, desires, and fears through extensive reference to her poetry, letters, and reminiscences of encounters with the significant people in her life. Immediately following the performance Ms. Dana will hold a talkback with the audience to describe how she created a portrayal of Emily Dickinson’s complex character for the stage.

Reserved seating is available for \$50 per ticket; general admission tickets are available for \$25 for adults and \$15 for students. For tickets and information, contact info@emilydickinsonmuseum.org or call 413-542-5311. Tickets are also available for purchase at A.J. Hastings on South Pleasant Street in Amherst.

Sponsors of the March 11 performance include PeoplesBank; Blair, Cutting and Smith Insurance Agency; The Center for Cross-Cultural Study; Elite Home Health Agency, Inc.; Jones Properties; Jones Group Realtors; and Northampton Cooperative Bank. “Thanks to the generous support of our business friends,” said executive director Jane Wald, “all proceeds from the production will directly benefit the Emily Dickinson Museum’s programs and operations.”

Ms. Dana is dedicating the March 11 performance to actress Julie Harris who, in Dana’s words, “is my acting idol and has been since I was a girl and aspiring actress.” Ms. Harris played the title role in *The Belle of Amherst* when it opened on Broadway at the Longacre Theatre on April 28, 1976. She and director Charles Nelson Reilly brought the play to the Kirby Theater in Amherst the same year.

Since the play’s earliest performances, it has been popular with audiences and critics alike. Critic Elliott Norton of the *Boston Herald American* has written: “Wonderfully entertaining, insightful, stirring, an endearing chronicle of a woman who lived a beautiful life in her private mind and heart.” Miss Harris won her fifth Tony Award as Best Actress for her portrayal, and Clare Bloom won an Emmy for her London Thames television performance. *The Belle of Amherst* has been translated into many languages, with thousands of productions in the United States, Canada and around the world.

Barbara Dana is an award-winning author, screenwriter, and actor both on stage and in film. Her Broadway stage credits include Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and William Inge’s *Where’s Daddy?* Ms. Dana has appeared in films and television programs including the PBS production of *An Enemy of the People* and the daytime drama *As the World Turns*.

A passionate reader and scholar of Emily Dickinson, Ms. Dana is the co-editor of *Wider than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson* and the author of the 2009 novel for young adults, *A Voice of Her Own: Becoming Emily Dickinson*. Her work as a writer gives Dana a unique perspective on portraying Dickinson on stage: “What actor gets to study their “character” for 10 years before they play it? What a gift!”

Directing Ms. Dana in her portrayal of *The Belle of Amherst* is Austin Pendleton, who has directed many plays on and off Broadway, including *The Little Foxes*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *Toys in the Attic*. A director, playwright, and actor, Pendleton was once Barbara Dana’s acting teacher, has appeared with her in films and television, and directed her original play *War in Paramus*.

The Emily Dickinson Museum, located at 280 Main St. in Amherst, Massachusetts, comprises the Dickinson Homestead and The Evergreens. The Museum is devoted to the story and legacy of poet Emily Dickinson and her family. Both properties are owned by the Trustees of Amherst College. The museum is overseen by a separate Board of Governors charged with raising its operating and capital funds. The Homestead was the birthplace and residence of the poet (1830-1886). The Evergreens was the 1856 home of the poet’s brother and sister-in-law, Austin and Susan Dickinson. The official museum website is www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org.

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