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PASADENA PLAYHOUSE
The State Theater of California
To Receive 2023 Regional Theatre Tony Award

***The 76th Annual Tony Awards to Broadcast Live from United Palace
in Washington Heights, New York on Sunday, June 11 on CBS***

New York, NY (May 23, 2023) - The Tony Awards® Administration Committee has announced that based on the recommendation by the American Theatre Critics Association, **Pasadena Playhouse**, in Pasadena, California, will be the recipient of the 2023 Regional Theatre Tony Award. The honor is accompanied by a grant of \$25,000, made possible by City National Bank's generous support.

"We are thrilled to present the 2023 Regional Theatre Tony Award to Pasadena Playhouse," said Heather Hitchens, President and CEO of the American Theatre Wing and Charlotte St. Martin, President of The Broadway League. "Pasadena Playhouse has made a significant impact - on both a local and global level, by developing some of the most innovative and inspiring works and artists."

"This is an extraordinary honor and a defining moment for our community. Anyone who has worked at or experienced theater at Pasadena Playhouse understands how unique and special a place it is. At its core, the Playhouse is made up of an exceptional community of artists, arts administrators, production professionals, volunteers, audiences, and supporters who are all connected and inspired by our founding ideal of being a theater of, by, and for our community" said Producing Artistic Director Danny Feldman. "This most prestigious award honors every person who has played a role in making and continuing to make Pasadena Playhouse one of the great cultural institutions in America."

Pasadena Playhouse, the official State Theater of California, is internationally recognized for its significant role in the development of American theater. One of the most prolific theaters in the country, the Playhouse has staged thousands of original productions since its founding in 1917 including premieres of works by Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, Suzan Lori Parks and hundreds more. For decades, its pioneering School for Theater Arts was a training ground for actors and theatermakers who went on to make significant contributions to the entertainment industry. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Danny Feldman since 2016, Pasadena Playhouse's productions and community programs are centered on its founding idea of being a living force in its community, making theater for everyone. Today, the Playhouse continues to advance the American theater and serves as a hub for the top theatermakers of our time.

Located in Los Angeles County minutes from Downtown LA, Pasadena Playhouse, the official State Theater of California, is one of the most storied theaters in America. Founded in 1917 by young theater impresario Gilmor Brown, it started as a community theater and that spirit remains core to the Playhouse today. After great success in its early years, Brown brought together over 1,000 citizens to fund the purchase of the land at 39 S. El Molino Avenue to build the greatest state of the art theater in the country at that time. It

would be the first theater in America to be funded entirely by and for its community. In 1925 the current landmarked theater, now on the National Registry of Historic Places, opened its doors with national fanfare. Soon thereafter, Pasadena Playhouse became internationally known, with a campus that took up almost a full square block, five stages, a scene shop and a college. It now had the distinction of being one of the largest theater complexes in the world.

Programmatically, Pasadena Playhouse quickly became a leader in the field. Brown created innovative concepts that have become theatrical norms globally, including the enormously impactful “theater-in-the-round” staging technique. Because of Brown’s audacity in producing the entire Shakespeare canon, a feat no other theater in America could claim, the state legislature unanimously voted Pasadena Playhouse the official State Theater of California in 1937, a mere 20 years after its founding, a title it still holds to this day.

During its “golden era” between 1920-1945, Pasadena Playhouse was home to some of the greats of the American theater including Martha Graham, Agnes DeMille and Tennessee Williams. Its proximity and connection to Hollywood helped the theater to be dubbed the “Star Factory” with the number of celebrities who would be discovered on its stages. When the film industry was transitioning from silent film to “talkies,” the Playhouse became the primary training ground for silent film stars to be taught voice and diction. While Brown’s clairvoyance for talent led to the discovery of many notable actors, it also led to the development of playwrights, directors, and eventual entertainment industry giants who went on to establish the Los Angeles empire of film and television we know today.

In 1928, Brown opened the Playhouse School of Theater Arts (later College of Theatre Arts) that quickly expanded as young performers from across the country came to Los Angeles and enrolled to break into the budding motion picture industry. Its pioneering three-year accredited program offered BFA and MFA degrees in acting, directing, stage technology, playwriting, and theater administration quickly became one of the leading schools for theater training in the country.

Some of the notable Pasadena Playhouse alumni include Gene Hackman, Dustin Hoffman, Sally Struthers, Joanne Worley, Robert Preston, Mako, Raymond Burr, Jamie Farr, Eve Arden, and hundreds more who went on to have successful careers in film, television and theater.

In the 1960s, after the passing of Gilmore Brown, the Playhouse began to suffer from a lack of leadership and direction. Competing theaters began to proliferate in downtown Los Angeles and Playhouse patrons started looking for a new and more cosmopolitan experience, canceling their Playhouse Memberships. USC and UCLA formed their drama departments and the Playhouse college lost enrollment. The College closed in 1969, the same year the theater itself was shuttered and claimed bankruptcy.

During the 16 years during which the Pasadena Playhouse was dark, important work was being done to ensure its future. A volunteer group, The Friends of the Pasadena Playhouse, was formed and became instrumental in securing the building’s California State Landmark status, saving it forever from a wrecking ball. After a succession of real estate transactions, the Playhouse was finally reopened in 1986 as a non-for-profit theater. By the Playhouse’s 75th anniversary in 1992, the theater was thriving once again with more than 24,000 Members from 327 zip codes, producing eight shows per year.

In 1997, Sheldon Epps was appointed Artistic Director, ushering in a new era for the historic Playhouse. Reignited by his leadership, the Playhouse once again took a leadership role, this time in making diversity a priority both onstage and off. In his 20-year tenure the theater became well known for new musicals, revivals of important plays and musicals, growth in the education programs and new play development, and work that celebrated diverse content and casting.

Under Epps, the Pasadena Playhouse productions of *Baby, It’s You*; *Sister Act*; and *Purlie* received Broadway transfers. Through programs that helped bring students and others in the community who might not have the opportunity to attend a live theatrical event to the Playhouse productions, outreach and arts education remained pillars of the Playhouse’s mission. The theater reached further into the

artistic community with co-productions with local theaters including South Coast Repertory and national organizations such as New Jersey's Crossroads Theatre Company. After 20 years of artistic leadership, Epps stepped down in 2016 and Danny Feldman was named Producing Artistic Director.

A Los Angeles native, Feldman joined the theater by way of a successful New York career on the eve of the Playhouse's Centennial Anniversary. With a vision of returning the Playhouse to its roots as a community-centric theater company the Playhouse has undergone yet another renaissance.

Since he began, Feldman has continued moving the Playhouse forward with an eye toward the future, while honoring the past and rectifying the theater's longstanding financial issues. The Playhouse has reclaimed and redefined the honorary title of the State Theater of California. The productions on stage reflect the diversity of the population and perspective of the great state, including the groundbreaking production of *Little Shop of Horrors*, featuring George Salazar and Mj Rodriguez. Innovation is at the forefront of programming, with the exploration of new theatrical models including the current six-month celebration of Stephen Sondheim created by thousands of professional and nonprofessional theatermakers who have come together to honor a giant's legacy. Guided by the idea of making theater for everyone, the stories told on the Playhouse stage belong to the community, and the community has access to be in the audience.

Now, one of the oldest theater complexes in the country, the Pasadena Playhouse historic theater will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2025. With an eye toward the future, the Playhouse will continue to lead the field with artistic excellence and quality, grow its educational opportunities for everyone, expand its family programming to develop future audiences, and secure funding to modernize the historical building and ensure its future. With the support of the community to which the Playhouse belongs, it will continue to be a beacon of innovation, excellence, and extraordinary storytelling. The Playhouse will continue to be an organization that makes theater for everyone.

The American Theatre Wing's 76th Annual Tony Awards, presented by the Broadway League and the American Theatre Wing, will air LIVE on Sunday, June 11, 2023 from the historic United Palace in Washington Heights, in New York City from 8:00-11:00 PM, ET/5:00-8:00 PM, PT on the CBS Television Network, and streaming live and on demand on Paramount+*.

CBS and Pluto TV will present The Tony Awards: Act One, a pre-show of live, exclusive content leading into the 76th Annual Tony Awards. The celebration commences at 6:30-8:00 PM, ET/3:30-5:00 PM PT, on Pluto TV, the leading free streaming television service (FAST). Viewers can access the show on their smart TV, streaming device, mobile app or online by going to Pluto TV and clicking on the "Pluto TV Celebrity" channel (no payment, registration or sign-in required).

Follow @TheTonyAwards on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook.

A limited number of tickets to the 76th Annual Tony Awards are now available at www.TonyAwards.com/tickets.

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About the Tony Awards

The American Theatre Wing's Tony Awards are presented by The Broadway League and the American Theatre Wing. At The Broadway League, Lauren Reid is Chair and Charlotte St. Martin is President. At the American Theatre Wing, Emilio Sosa is Chair and Heather A. Hitchens is President & CEO.

Sponsors for The Tony Awards include: Carnegie Mellon University - the first-ever, exclusive higher education partner; City National Bank - official bank of The Tony Awards; Playbill; Rainbow Room – the official partner of the Tony Nominee Luncheon; Sofitel New York - the official hotel of The Tony Awards;

United Airlines - the official airline of The Tony Awards for over 20 years; and Zacapa Rum, Baccarat and Ketel One Vodka - who join as official partners of The Tony Awards for the first time.

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