



NEWS RELEASE

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Fountain Theatre co-founding artistic director Stephen Sachs announces retirement

LOS ANGELES (February 20, 2024) — After 34 years as artistic director, **Fountain Theatre** co-founder **Stephen Sachs** has announced his retirement at the end of 2024.

“The more than three decades spent launching, nurturing, developing and leading the growth of the Fountain Theatre have been the most joyous and meaningful years of my professional life.” Sachs wrote to the board of directors in a letter announcing his decision. “Thousands of artists have worked on our stage and in our arts education programs. Hundreds of thousands of patrons have walked through our door, sat in our seats, and been transported. Fountain plays are now produced around the world. We’ve been home to Pulitzer and Tony Award winners. Our artistic integrity is respected locally and across the country. We stand strong as an organization. My co-founder, beloved colleague and dear friend, Deborah Lawlor, passed away last May. This year, I turn 65. I look forward to many pleasant years traveling with my wife, relishing our two adult sons, perhaps writing a novel or two.”

Sachs and Lawlor, who passed away in 2023, assumed leadership of the Fountain Theatre in 1990. Together, they transformed the charming two-story building into one of the most highly regarded theaters in Los Angeles. Under Sachs’ guidance, the award-winning, intimate Fountain Theatre has established a national profile for excellence, producing new plays that reflect the diversity of Los Angeles and the nation, and serving young people throughout Southern California with its arts education programs. In recent years, a perilous time for performing arts organizations everywhere, he led the theater out of the pandemic, installing an outdoor stage in 2021 — the first performance venue permitted to serve the public by the City of Los Angeles and Actors’ Equity Association during COVID-19. He leaves the Fountain in the strongest financial position in its history.

“Our extraordinary founding artistic director, Stephen Sachs, leaves the Fountain healthy and vibrant, with a board of directors eager to protect and nourish his inspiring living legacy of great theater, community engagement, and brilliant innovation,” stated Fountain board president **Dorothy Wolpert**. “We are committed to finding a worthy successor who will carry that legacy into the future.”

A playwright, director and producer, Sachs has received every theater award in Los Angeles. He was recently honored by the Los Angeles City Council for “his visionary contributions to the cultural life of Los Angeles.”

Sachs is the author of 18 produced plays. His writing career began with his 1987 acclaimed stage adaptation of Italo Calvino’s *The Baron in the Trees* at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in Los Angeles of which the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, “If you know some people who have never witnessed a real play in action and might be wondering what all this theater stuff is about, take them to *The Baron in the Trees*.” His production of *The Golden Gate*, the first play he adapted and directed for the Fountain in 1990, traveled to San Francisco. *Central Avenue*, his chronicle of the Black L.A. jazz scene, ran for seven months in 2001. His deaf-themed *Sweet Nothing in my Ear* was made into a TV movie starring Marlee Matlin and Jeff Daniels, for which Sachs

wrote the screenplay. *Open Window* debuted in 2005 at the Pasadena Playhouse. His adaptation of Claudia Rankine's *CITIZEN: An American Lyric* earned rave reviews at the Fountain, was produced at the Kirk Douglas Theatre to launch CTG's Block Party in 2017, and is now produced nationwide. His modern ASL spin on the classic *Cyrano* starred Oscar winner Troy Kotsur. After an extended run at the Fountain, *Miss Julie: Freedom Summer* was produced in Vancouver and Toronto. Sachs' comedy/drama *Bakersfield Mist* premiered at the Fountain in 2011 and remains one of the theaters most beloved productions; after a seven-month sold-out run at the Fountain, the play was produced in London's West End starring Kathleen Turner. Now produced throughout the United States, it's been translated into many foreign languages and is performed worldwide. The world premiere of his current work, *Fatherland*, which he also directs, opens February 25.

In a career spanning decades, Sachs has directed dozens of award-winning productions at the Fountain, in regional theaters across the country, and off-Broadway. He inaugurated the Getty Villa's outdoor classical theater with *Hippolytos* in 2006, and he directed *Top Secret: The Battle for the Pentagon Papers* on a three-city tour of China for L.A. Theatre Works. Sachs received special permission from Arthur Miller to direct Miller's rarely seen *After the Fall*. After seeing Sachs' Los Angeles premiere production of *The Road to Mecca*, Athol Fugard asked him to direct the world premiere of *Exits and Entrances*; thus began a ten-year artistic partnership, with Sachs directing premieres of Fugard's new plays at the Fountain, as well as off-Broadway at Primary Stages.

Under Sachs' leadership, the Fountain also debuted new plays by such prominent playwrights as Robert Schenkkan, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Martyna Majok, Stephen Adly Guirgis, Dael Orlandersmith, and Branden Jacobs-Jenkins.

Sachs was instrumental in the formation and early development of Deaf West Theatre, giving the company's founder, Ed Waterstreet, office space and a stage at the Fountain in 1991. Deaf West is now the foremost deaf theater company in the United States, honored with a Tony Award in 2004 for its innovative staging of the musical *Big River*.

In partnership with Los Angeles City Councilman Mitch O'Farrell, Sachs launched a new program that brought celebrity actors into Council Chambers for one-night readings of plays free to the public. *All the President's Men* starred cast members from *The West Wing*, and a new spin on *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* featured Sam Waterston. In 2019, O'Farrell hailed Sachs as "one of the great citizens and artists in our city."

A national search is underway to identify the Fountain Theatre's next artistic director.

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