



MEDIA CONTACT:

Amelia Peacock

Communications Manager

amelia.peacock@acttheatre.org | 206.292.7660 x1333

ACT Prepares to Launch New Season with 2020 Vision

The theatre has a new strategic plan and an updated mission and vision that clearly define objectives for 2020 and beyond.

Immediate Release—February 28, 2020, Seattle, WA —ACT — A Contemporary Theatre brought down the curtain on a wildly successful 2019. Two reimagined classics, *Romeo + Juliet* and *Dracula*, bookended the year and increased new single ticket buyers by 40 percent over 2018. Mainstage productions welcomed over 68,000 patrons into ACT's historic building and ACTLab worked with 11 community partners bringing in 12,143 patrons over the course of the year. ACT's Young Playwrights Program (YPP) served over 325 students in 16 classrooms, including a new placement in general education classes at Garfield High School to help the theatre reach students who may not otherwise have benefited from an education fortified by the arts.

2019 also marked the unveiling of ACT's new strategic plan, mission and vision.

- **ACT Mission:** ACT is a contemporary theatre where artistic ambition and civic engagement unite.
- **ACT Vision:** ACT envisions a world where the power of theatre expands our collective understanding of community and our own humanity.

These values are also reflected in the two objectives at the heart of ACT's strategic plan:

- **Equity** is integrated into every element of ACT's practice and purpose.
- **Financial Sustainability** informs all decision-making.

"I am humbled by the challenging, uplifting milestones ACT's Board of Trustees and staff have already achieved as part of our strategic planning process," says ACT Managing Director Becky Witmer. "I look forward to a new year filled with even more of this vital work."

2019 Milestones:

Nationally Acclaimed Productions: Led by Artistic Director John Lings, ACT's 2019 productions garnered glowing accolades. *Romeo + Juliet*, a reimagined telling of the classic romance starring Joshua Castille and created in partnership with Seattle's Deaf and hard of hearing community, was named one of the New York Times "Best of Live Theatre in 2019". ACT was recognized by Deaf Friendly as part of the "Best of 2019: Deaf-Friendly Businesses Who Went the Extra Mile." At the same time, ACTLab partnered in producing Deaf Spotlight's inaugural Short Play Festival featuring new, 10-minute plays created by Deaf and hard of hearing artists entirely in ASL. ACT's 2019 Mainstage Season also included the theatre's 49th world premiere, *Yussef El Guindi's*, *People of the Book*, and ACT's production of *Pass Over*, directed by Tim Bond, as one of the top productions of the decade by The Seattle Times.

A Commitment to Civic and Community Engagement: ACT hosted 2,609 patrons at engagement events throughout the season and expanded community engagement efforts through the creation of the Community Council. The Council provides an opportunity for local leaders to gather and learn about ACT's mission, vision, and programming. 2019 Community Council members were invited to attend engagement events,

performances and donor receptions throughout the year. Members also met with John Langs, Becky Witmer, and ACT's Education and Engagement Manager, Tracy Hyland to discuss the Mainstage Season and give their feedback before and after each production. All 2019 Council Members valued this pilot year and would like to continue in 2020. The 2019 Community Council included Russell Brooks, Executive Director of Red Eagle Soaring Native Youth Theatre; Felicia Cross, Community Outreach Program Manager at the Seattle Police Department; Frank Nam, We Belong Here Project Manager at the Seattle Foundation; Lisa and Lewis Horowitz; and Kendra Smith. Lisa and Lewis are active congregants at Temple De Hirsch Sinai in addition to Lewis' work as a law practitioner and board member for The Seagull Project. Kendra Smith is a professional at Boeing, a Past President and member of Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle and an active member of Junior League. Information about the 2020 Community Council information will be available on ACT's website in March.

New Roles Added to ACT's Board of Directors: ACT welcomed new Board Members, Sharyn Skeeter and Sarah Pierre-Louis. Sharyn is a prolific writer, poet, editor, and educator. She has worked in top positions at several magazines including Essence and Black Elegance. She is author of the new book Dancing with Langston and taught journalism, literature, black American theatre, and writing at Emerson College and the University of Bridgeport. Sara is a career coach specializing in team development. She is currently the Senior Manager for Marketing Team Development at Tableau. The Board also created two new positions, Equity Liaison and Public Affairs Liaison, to help with the implementation of ACT's strategic plan.

The new Officers of the Board are:

- **Leslie Bernstein**, Chair
- **Gary Houlahan**, Immediate Past Chair
- **Bill Kuhn**, Vice Chair
- **Michael Crystal**, Treasurer
- **Diane Lind**, Secretary

Increased Reach for the Young Playwrights Program (YPP): The program saw a nearly 24 percent increase in students served from 2018. Racial diversity among students also increased by 13 percent. YPP worked with consultants at Heartwork Collective to identify how YPP curriculum can be more inclusive and ACT continues to seek funding to provide YPP at low or no cost to schools. This included applying for and gaining a grant from the City of Burien to have YPP at Highline High School in both 2019 and 2020. A 2018 YPP Alumnus said,

“Playwriting has become a very healing thing for me—I write a lot now—and I’m so grateful for this program for teaching me not only to create but to heal myself.” —2018 YPP Alumnus

About ACT

Located in Seattle's Downtown Theatre District, ACT is home to five performance spaces under one roof. Since 1965, ACT has been a destination for experiencing new voices, stories, and art. ACT is steadfast in its dedication to producing work with contemporary playwrights and local performing artists through its Mainstage play series, ACTLab producing partnerships, and Young Playwrights Program. With more than 350 performances each year under Artistic Director John Langs and Managing Director Becky Witmer, ACT is a community hub where artists and the public connect about today's issues and ideas and celebrate the shared experience.

#####