

## LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES DEPARTURE OF ARTISTIC DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHER ASHLEY IN 2026

### Tony Award-Winning Director Has Led Playhouse for Nearly Two Decades; Will Take on Role of Artistic Director at Roundabout Theatre Company

San Diego, CA – The Board of Trustees of La Jolla Playhouse announced today that Christopher Ashley, the Playhouse’s Rich Family Artistic Director, will depart the institution to take on the role of Artistic Director of New York’s Roundabout Theatre Company. Ashley will continue as Artistic Director at the Playhouse through December 31, 2025, and will program the 2025/26 and 2026/27 seasons. Over the next 15 months, he will also direct the world premiere of *3 Summers of Lincoln*, along with two more world-premiere musicals to be announced shortly.

Ashley’s departure will mark the end of a nearly two-decade tenure as Artistic Director of the Tony Award-winning La Jolla Playhouse, during which time he directed more than 20 productions, oversaw the development of 50 world premieres and shepherded 20 shows to Broadway, among them the hit musicals *The Outsiders* and *Come From Away*, for which he won the 2017 Tony Award for Best Director. Ashley also spearheaded the creation of the Playhouse’s popular and widely-acclaimed Without Walls (WOW) program of immersive and site-inspired work, including the annual WOW Festival. In 2013 Ashley launched the Playhouse’s DNA New Work Series, creating an incubator for playwrights and directors to develop their works – many of which have later been programmed as part of the Playhouse’s subscription season.

A champion of the San Diego theatre community, Ashley established the Resident Theatre Program in 2010, which provides a home and resources to an itinerant local theatre company each year. His vision has also helped launch such programs as the annual Director Fellowship, paid internships, and the Veterans Playwriting Workshop, while also building on the success of the Playhouse’s signature Performance Outreach Program (POP) Tour for young audiences. Over the last 18 seasons, Ashley has brought extraordinary artists to develop their work at the Playhouse, among them Pulitzer Prize winners Ayad Akhtar, Paula Vogel and Doug Wright, along with celebrated artists Joe DiPietro, Anna Deavere Smith, Matthew Broderick, Danya Taymor, Moisés Kaufman, Idina Menzel, and countless others. He has continued to foster numerous community partnerships, including the Native Voices Play Festival, Latinx New Play Festival and Voices of Our City, to name just a few. Ashley’s legacy of innovation, community engagement, and new work development has cemented La Jolla Playhouse as the place to see what’s next on the American theatre landscape.

“We are profoundly saddened to see Chris depart the Playhouse, but we wish him well on this wonderful new adventure. He has been a true visionary, a dynamic leader, and a beloved Playhouse artist and colleague over the last two decades, growing the Playhouse’s reputation as one of the most vital and esteemed theatres in the country,” said **Playhouse Board Chair Sheri L. Jamieson**. “Chris is leaving on a supremely high note, having spearheaded several acclaimed programs, including the annual WOW Festival and the DNA New Work Series, as well as overseeing the development of numerous world premieres and Broadway transfers. We are deeply grateful for his stellar artistic leadership and for fostering the mission and values that the Playhouse will continue to embody as we look toward the future.”

-- more --

“I am so appreciative of Chris’s unflagging passion for bold and transformative theatre. It has been a true joy working with him at the Playhouse over the last 18 seasons. An inspirational artist, leader, colleague, and friend, Chris’s thrilling artistic vision for the Playhouse, along with his incredible warmth and generosity have made working in partnership with him a dream. He will be dearly missed by the entire San Diego arts community,” said **Playhouse Managing Director Debby Buchholz**.

“It has been my utmost honor, privilege and joy to serve as the Playhouse’s Artistic Director for the past 18 seasons. While I am excited for this new chapter at the acclaimed Roundabout Theatre Company, La Jolla Playhouse will always remain a cornerstone of my career, both as an artist and a member of this extraordinary creative community,” remarked **Ashley**. “I am beyond grateful to all those who have supported the Playhouse mission: our incredible Board of Trustees; my partner, Managing Director Debby Buchholz, whose tremendous friendship and stewardship have helped this institution – and me personally – thrive; Artistic Producing Director Eric Keen-Louie, who keeps the Playhouse’s numerous artistic endeavors flowing seamlessly; our unparalleled staff, artists and production teams, who work tirelessly to develop, build and sustain the exciting new work on our stages; as well as our passionate and loyal audiences – all of whom have contributed to making La Jolla Playhouse one of the most vibrant and innovative theatres in the country – if not the world.”

The Board will launch a national search for Ashley’s replacement in the coming months.

Tony Award winner **Christopher Ashley** has served as La Jolla Playhouse’s Artistic Director since 2007. During his tenure, he directed the world premieres of *Come From Away*, *Babbitt*, *The Untitled Unauthorized Hunter S. Thompson Musical*, *Diana*, *Memphis*, *Escape to Margaritaville*, *The Squirrels*, *A Dram of Drummhicit*, *Restoration* and *Chasing the Song*, as well as *As You Like It*, *His Girl Friday*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Freaky Friday* and *Xanadu*. He also spearheaded the Playhouse’s acclaimed Without Walls (WOW) initiative of site-inspired and immersive theatre, the Theatre-in-Residence program, and the popular the DNA New Work Series. Ashley’s Broadway credits include *Come From Away* (Tony and Outer Critics Circle Awards), *Diana: The Musical*, *Escape to Margaritaville*, *Memphis* (Tony nomination), *Xanadu*, *Leap of Faith* (Drama Desk Award nomination), *All Shook Up* and *The Rocky Horror Show* (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle Award nominations). He also helmed productions of *Come From Away* in London (Olivier Award nomination), Toronto, Australia and on national tour. Other national tours include *Escape to Margaritaville*, *Memphis*, *Xanadu*, *All Shook Up* and *Seussical: The Musical*. Additional New York stage credits include *Blown Sideways Through Life*, *Jeffrey* (Lucille Lortel and Obie Awards), *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told*, *Valhalla* (Lucille Lortel Award nomination), *Regrets Only*, *Wonder of the World*, *Communicating Doors*, *Bunny, Bunny*, *The Night Hank Williams Died* and *Fires in the Mirror* (Lucille Lortel Award), among others. Ashley recently directed *Come From Away* for AppleTV+ and *Diana: The Musical* for Netflix. Other screen credits include the feature films *Jeffrey* and *Lucky Stiff*, and the American Playhouse production of *Blown Sideways Through Life* for PBS. Ashley is the recipient of the Princess Grace Award, the Drama League Director Fellowship and an NEA/TCG Director Fellowship.

-- more --

**La Jolla Playhouse** is a place where artists and audiences come together to create what's new and next in the American theatre, from Tony Award-winning productions, to imaginative programs for young audiences, to interactive experiences outside our theatre walls. Founded in 1947 by Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire and Mel Ferrer, the Playhouse is currently led by Tony Award winner Christopher Ashley, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse, and Managing Director Debby Buchholz. The Playhouse is internationally renowned for the development of new works, including mounting 120 world premieres, commissioning 70 new works, and sending 36 productions to Broadway, garnering a total of 42 Tony Awards, as well as the 1993 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

# # #