



**LORRAINE HANSBERRY THEATRE
ANNOUNCES APPOINTMENT OF
MARGO HALL
AS NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
First female Artistic Director in company's history**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (10 September 2020) – San Francisco's premiere Black theatre company **Lorraine Hansberry Theatre** has announced the appointment of Bay Area theatre titan **Margo Hall** as its new Artistic Director. An award-winning actor, director, playwright, and educator, Hall has been a leading presence in the Bay Area theatre community for more than 30 years. The first female Artistic Director of the theatre named for the trailblazing Black female playwright of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hall takes the helm of the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre at a moment where artists of color demand representation and change in the American Theatre. "I am thrilled to assume this position now," said Hall, "during this dynamic, pivotal moment in our cultural history, as the nation turns its focus to Black lives. This is an extraordinary opportunity to reach new levels of participation and offer meaningful and compelling works that speak to the Black community's issues, challenges, dreams, and accomplishments."

With a career dedicated to bringing the stories of people of color to life, Hall is committed to creating a safe space for fostering Black artists, particularly Black female and nonbinary artists who continue to be deeply underrepresented, as well as increasing society's exposure to diverse perspectives. With her appointment, Hall and the theatre introduce **The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre Fund for New Black Voices**, dedicating resources to supporting rising Black playwrights, directors, choreographers, actors, and theatre makers. Among the aims of this groundbreaking fund is the support of new works developed at the theatre company. To donate or read more about The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre Fund for New Black Voices, the public may visit **LHTsf.org/donate**.

"Black artists, and to a greater degree Black female and nonbinary theatre makers, are not receiving the representation they deserve on our stages," said Hall about the Fund. "Transforming the systemic racism of the American theatre demands financial investment. It is crucial to pledge resources in

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order to amplify the works of talented artists of color and to ensure that diverse, essential stories take centerstage. Presenting works by women of color is a part of Lorraine Hansberry Theatre’s DNA; this theatre has long nurtured Black female playwrights such as Ntozake Shange early in their careers. In honor of our revolutionary Black female namesake, I aim to make this mission central to the operations of this theatre as its Artistic Director, further establishing the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre as the place where emerging Black playwrights find a haven to develop their voices.”

Hall also has plans to increase awareness of Lorraine Hansberry herself, the first Black female playwright to have a play performed on Broadway, as well as the youngest American and only fifth woman to receive the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play. Politically active, Hansberry worked tirelessly on U.S. civil rights issues as well as global struggles against colonialism and imperialism, particularly crusading for the role of women in activism. She died tragically young at age 34, of pancreatic cancer, but left an enormous legacy, with her essays and plays continually adapted into new works, including songs (“To Be Young, Gifted, and Black” by Nina Simone) and musicals (the Tony Award winning Best Musical “Raisin.”). A supporter of gay rights and member of the queer community, Hansberry was posthumously inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in 1999. Said Hall, “I hope to attract those who have studied and written about Lorraine to our theatre, to share with our audiences the many facets of her life and legacy. These conversations will lend themselves particularly well to our current shelter-in-place restrictions, and I hope to unveil some inventive digital programming in the near future.”

Inspired by the meteoric rise of its activist and playwright namesake, the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre was founded in 1981 to present a diverse selection of professional productions of works by leading and emerging Black and multicultural playwrights, as well as provide opportunities for theatre artists from multicultural backgrounds. In 2010, co-founders Quentin Easter and Stanley E. Williams both passed away, leaving the theatre community bereft. Steven Anthony Jones became the new Artistic Director, leading the theatre through that crisis, retiring from the position in 2017. Interim Artistic Directors Aldo Billingslea and Darryl V. Jones, successively, have helmed the company for the past three years, providing continuity until a permanent Artistic Director could be found. Said Board Chairman **Robert Shoffner**, “We are more than grateful to Aldo and Darryl for shepherding the company through the past three years, helping to keep our theatre vibrant and creating collaborations

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with arts organizations throughout the Bay Area. Their contributions were significant, and we thank them both for their commitments to keeping the Lorraine Hansberry a leader in the Black theatre community.”

Says Executive Director **Stephanie Shoffner**, “I am thrilled to have Margo join me in leading the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre. She is the perfect fit for this role, continuing the legacy and hard work of the leaders that came before her. She is an indelible force of nature in the Bay Area theatre community and outspoken advocate for artists of color. Margo is also a talented actress and director, whose incredible intellect and ability to inhabit complex characters influences her aptitude for bringing thrilling new works to life. Together, we look forward to ushering in a new chapter for the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, one focused on nurturing and promoting exciting new Black theatre makers in the spirit of our namesake.”

Hall’s appointment has been celebrated by leading voices across the arts world, who are excited for her groundbreaking tenure at the helm of the West Coast’s oldest and most renowned Black theatre and praising Hall as a titan within the American Theatre. Said award-winning playwright **Dominique Morisseau**, "Margo Hall is an extraordinary Bay Area artist and visionary. Since first meeting her many moons ago through Bay Area Playwrights Festival, I felt a kindred spirit and a trust in her as a director that she would fully protect the integrity of my work. I'm thrilled to know that so many more artists will have the pleasure of working with her and being nurtured by her vision. It's exactly the way things ought to be." Among the Black female Artistic Directors across America lauding her appointment is **Nataki Garrett**, Artistic Director of Oregon Shakespeare Festival, who congratulated Hall and the theatre, exclaiming, “I am so excited to have her voice at the leadership table as we all work together to move the entire industry into a better, more inclusive, complexly diverse and generationally dynamic future.” **Hana S. Sharif**, Artistic Director of The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, added, “There are a very rare few artists that embody the talent, passion, and intellect of Margo Hall. She is a dynamic actor, director, educator, and activist and an unparalleled icon in the Bay Area with a long-standing commitment to the work of the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre. I could not imagine a more compelling leader than Margo Hall to build on the its rich legacy and guide the theatre into the future.” “The Lorraine Hansberry couldn't be getting a greater gift that they will in Margo Hall,” said Tony Award-winning actor **Anika Noni Rose**. “An

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amazing theatre artist, she is well versed in both classical and contemporary works and has a deep well of knowledge of Black Theatre. She knows how to lead with head and heart and will be nothing short of a wonderful asset.” Award-winning actor, writer, director, and producer **Colman Domingo** also commended the theatre for its choice, declaring “Margo’s heart, commitment, passion, drive and leadership will now be on full display as she will strive to champion this next important and critical chapter in the evolution of the theatre and its practices. I know that her voice will be heralded not only in the Bay Area but on the national stage.” Award-winning actor and playwright **Nambi E. Kelley** said, “To say Margo Hall is a force is an understatement. She's a mountain. A raging and compassionate fire. It has been one of my great joys to be in her presence and be warmed by her flames, her deep diving into work in a way that is humbling and that of a true master artist.”

Hall’s appointment was also cheered on by veterans of the Bay Area Theatre scene including **Eric Ting**, Artistic Director of California Shakespeare Theater, who said “I can think of no fiercer advocate, no greater champion for artists, than Margo Hall. That she has chosen to bring that mighty voice to the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre offers me, especially in this moment, such great hope. This is the beginning of a new Renaissance in Bay Area theater, and such an extraordinary gift to our community and our field. Make way.” House/Full of Blackwomen co-director **Ellen Sebastian Chang** exclaimed, “Margo’s artistic vision and guidance will uphold the promise of the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, showcasing and developing the diversity of African American Theater.” **Jonathan Moscone**, Chief Producer of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, stated, “She is one of the most wildly talented, intelligent, engaged artists in this country. She inspires and guides me through profound commitment to excellence in artistry, serving community and fighting for equity.” **Sean San José**, Co-Founder and Program Director of Campo Santo, added, “What is clearly evident is Margo's immense talent, her unending abilities, and her relentless realness. What you may not have noted is that she has always been ready to lead. And now she can lead rightfully: out front, empowered, and supported.”

Hall’s ambitions as Artistic Director also include finding a permanent facility. The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre currently performs at the Buriel Clay Theater at the African American Art and Culture Complex on Fulton Street, as well as at various partner venues in and around the Bay Area, including The Museum of the African Diaspora, I.T. Bookman Community Center, and the San

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Francisco Main Library. “I dream of finding a dedicated home for the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre to grow and establish roots,” said Hall. “The sad truth is most Black theatres in American are lacking a permanent space to nurture our artists and to provide them resources to develop their works. With the help of our community, I hope we can realize that dream for our company.”

As an actor, Hall has been lauded for her masterful performances in works by some of the America’s foremost playwrights, including Lorraine Hansberry, August Wilson, Dominique Morisseau, Lynn Nottage, Zora Neale Hurston, Marcus Gardley, Tarrell Alvin McCraney, and Stephen Adly Guirgis. Beginning her career as a company member at Arena Stage in Washington D.C., Hall later relocated to the Bay Area where she has dazzled audiences and critics alike for decades in starring roles. *The Mercury News’s* Sam Hurwitt called Hall “incomparable,” adding “If you don’t know Margo Hall, you’re missing out. The longtime Oakland actor and director is a forceful standout in any play she’s in.” *San Francisco Chronicle’s* Lily Janiak exclaimed “Hall can give every character she portrays a titanic righteousness, as if she’s spewing lightning from heaven itself.” *San Francisco Examiner’s* Jean Schiffman called Hall “one of the Bay Area’s finest theatre artists,” and heralded Hall’s performance in Marin Theatre Company and TheatreWorks Silicon Valley’s co-production of *Skeleton Crew* as “so richly expressive it’s hard to take your eyes off her.”

She has appeared at nearly every one of the Bay Area’s leading theatres, including the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, California Shakespeare Theater, American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, Aurora Theatre Company, San Francisco Playhouse, and Shotgun Players. Hall is also a founding member of Campo Santo, the award-winning multi-cultural theatre company, and has toured France with Word for Word. Hall’s T.V. and film credits include performing as the mother for Daveed Diggs’s character in Lionsgate’s *Blindspotting*, Netflix’s *All Day and a Night*, Hulu’s “Chance,” Miramax’s *Love & Taxes* and *Haiku Tunnel* with Bay Area comedic monologist Josh Kornbluth, and in CBS TV’s “Nash Bridges.”

Hall has directed productions for major Bay Area theatres, including the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, San Francisco Playhouse, Shotgun Players, Campo Santo, Oakland Theater Project, Word for Word, Chabot College, and U.C. Berkeley. She collaborated with

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Tectonic Theatre Project's Leigh Fondakowski (*The Laramie Project* and *Laramie Ten Years Later*) on her first writing project: the World Premiere of *The People's Temple* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Hall and Fondakowski worked with Greg Pierotti and Stephen Wangh to form this play, which won the 2005 Will Glickman Award and was later performed at theatres across the country, including Minnesota's Guthrie Theatre and Alaska's Perseverance Theatre. In 2013 Hall premiered her semi-autobiographical piece, *Be Bop Baby: A Musical Memoir*, at Z Space, with original music composed by Marcus Shelby.

Hall, who holds a B.F.A. in Drama from Adelphi University and an M.F.A. in Drama from Catholic University of America, is also a dedicated theatre educator. For decades, she has mentored and trained the next generation of theatre artists, leading courses for American Conservatory Theater's MFA Program, University of California Berkeley, University of San Francisco's Performing Arts and Social Justice degree program, and Chabot Community College. She has also served as a facilitator and director for workshops through Rising Voices, a program that promotes healing and recovery for women age 18-25.

Hall has won several San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle (SFBATCC) Awards for direction and acting, as well as a Theatre Bay Area (TBA) Award for acting. In 2018 Hall was honored with SFBATCC's Jerry Friedman Award, celebrating her contributions to furthering the creativity and growth of Bay Area theatre throughout her career, and in 2015 Hall received TBA's Charles Dean Award, which recognizes actors who have dedicated their career to Bay Area theatre.

The **Lorraine Hansberry Theatre** is devoted to providing employment and career building opportunities for actors, directors, designers, and technicians from the Black and multicultural communities. The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre has produced more than 135 plays, including West Coast and World Premieres, experimental works, classics in the Black theatre canon, lively musicals, and poignant socio-political dramas. The theatre's presentations range from the works of Nobel Laureates Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, and Toni Morrison and Pulitzer Prize-winning writers Lynn Nottage, Charles Fuller, Alice Walker and August Wilson; to large-scale musicals celebrating Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith, Lester Young, Fats Waller, Eubie Blake and others; to award winning dramas by James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and the company's namesake Lorraine Hansberry; to

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pioneering experimental works by Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange and Maria Irene Fornes, and new works by Robert Alexander, Roger Guenveur Smith, David Rousseve, Prince Gomolvilas, and Samm-Art Williams, among others.

To learn more or make donations to **The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre Fund for New Black Voices**, the public may visit: www.LHTsf.org.

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos will be available here: <http://cbpr.co/press/LHTnewAD>