2017/18 SEASON

SEASON BONUS OPTION
Matthew Bourne’s production of
THE RED SHOES
Based on the film by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger and the Hans Christian Andersen Fairytale
Music by Bernard Herrmann
Directed and Choreographed by Matthew Bourne
American Premiere
Sep 15 – Oct 1, 2017

FIRST SEASON PRODUCTION
BRIGHT STAR
Music, Book, and Story by Steve Martin
Music, Lyrics, and Story by Edie Brickell
Choreography by Josh Rhodes
Directed by Walter Bobbie
Oct 11 – Nov 19, 2017

SECOND SEASON PRODUCTION
SOMETHING ROTTEN!
Book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O’Farrell
Music and Lyrics by Wayne Kirkpatrick and Karey Kirkpatrick
Directed and Choreographed by Casey Nicholaw
Nov 21 – Dec 31, 2017

THIRD SEASON PRODUCTION
SOFT POWER
Play and Lyrics by David Henry Hwang
Music and Additional Lyrics by Jeanine Tesori
Choreography by Sam Pinkleton
Directed by Leigh Silverman
World Premiere
May 3 – June 10, 2018

FOURTH SEASON PRODUCTION
THE HUMANS
By Stephen Karam
Directed by Joe Mantello
June 19 – July 29, 2018

FIFTH SEASON PRODUCTION
AIN’T TOO PROUD
The Life and Times of The Temptations
Book by Dominique Morisseau
Music and Lyrics from The Legendary Motown Catalog
Choreography by Sergio Trujillo
Directed by Des McAnuff
Aug 21 – Sep 30, 2018
May 3 – June 10, 2018

Ahmanson Theatre
Los Angeles, CA

Performances

Center Theatre Group presents the world premiere of

Soft Power

Choreography by
Sam Pinkleton

Directed by
Leigh Silverman

May 3 – June 10, 2018
Ahmanson Theatre

Play and Lyrics by
David Henry Hwang

Music and Additional Lyrics by
Jeanine Tesori

With
Billy Bustamante
Kara Gyu
Jon Hoche
Kendyl Ito
Francis Jue
Austin Ku
Raymond J. Lee
Alys Alan Louis
Jaygee Macapugay
Daniel May
Paul Hee Sang Miller
Kristen Faith Oei
Maria-Christina Oliveras
Geena Quntos

Center Theatre Group

Performs in association with East West Players and The Curran

Soft Power was originally co-commissioned by Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles, CA, Michael Ritchie, Artistic Director, Stephen D. Rountree, Managing Director, and The Public Theater, New York, NY, Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director, Patrick Willingham, Executive Director.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the following donors who have made extraordinary investments in Center Theatre Group’s future. Their support will ensure that Center Theatre Group—and Los Angeles audiences and artists—enjoy another 50 years of theatrical excellence.

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Center Theatre Group would also like to thank the following donors for making commitments to the 50th Anniversary Campaign through legacy gifts to our Endowment:

Legacy Gifts

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Reene & Robert Nunn
Nan Rae
Randy & Bruce Ross
Wes Schaefer & Cathy King-Schaefer
Margaret White.
CAST

Billy Bustamante, Jon Hoche, Kendyl Ito, Austin Ku, Raymond J. Lee, Jaygee Macapugay, Daniel May, Paul Hee Sang Miller, Kristen Faith Oei, Maria-Christina Oliveras, Geena Quintos, Trevor Saller, Emily Stilings

ASSISTANT DANCE CAPTAIN
Geena Quintos

STAGE MANAGERS
Shelley Miles
Ellen Goldberg (New York)
David S. Franklin (Los Angeles)

TIME/PLACE
Los Angeles, early 21st century; and Shanghai, China, early 22nd century.

INTERMISSION
Soft Power will be performed with one intermission.

ORCHESTRA
Music Director/Conductor—David O
Associate Music Director—Alex Harrington
Associate Conductor/Keyboard—Ally Potts
Woodwinds—Sal Lazaro, Joe Stone, Jeff Osnick, Paul Curtis
Trumpets—Dan Ferrero, Rob Schaer
Trombones/Conductor—Robert Payne
Harps—Amy Wilkins
Bass—Ken Wild
Drums—Ed Smith
Percussion—Matt Ordaz
Concertmaster—Jon Ohr Fischer
Violins—Grace Oh, Rebecca Chung, Marisa Kuney, Nest Hammond, Mark Cargill
Vaios—Diane Gilbert
Cele—David Morgen

WHO’S WHO

BILLY BUSTAMANTE (Ensemble, understudy for Xue Xing) is a New York City-based performer, director, and photographer. Broadway: Miss Saigon (Engineer u/s), The King and I (Lun Tha u/s), NY Regional. He loves all of The Public Theater, Area Stage, Old Globe, Paper Mill Playhouse, Sacramento Music Circus, Walnut Street Theatre, San Jose Rep, North Shore Music Theatre, Pan Asian Rep, Prospect Theater Project, and Arden Theatre Company. Billy recently directed the NYC revivals of The Adding Machine and LaChiusa’s The Wild Party. He is co-founder of Broadway Barkada and on the teaching faculty at Jen Waldman Studio. Billy is passionately committed to the development of new works and new artists. Thanks to Peyton, his family, and this wonderful company! BillyBustamante.com, Instagram: @bjcb

KENDYL ITO (Jing/Ensemble) is excited to join Soft Power amongst a crew of beautiful artists! International/national tour: Matilda. Regional/other theatre credits: A Chorus Line (dir. Baayork Lee), Grease, Rent, Seussical, Oliver, American Idiot, Tananarime. Kendyl is a proud member of the National Asian Artists Project (NAAP), a Pace University alum, and has also been seen in concerts at Feinstein’s 54 Below including 54 Sings Little Women, Music and Laughter, and Samantha Spade. Endless love and gratitude to Mom, Dad, Kelsey, Jeremy & Dave.

FRANCIS JUE (DHH) is happy to return to Center Theatre Group after last season’s King of the Yees. Broadway: Pacific Overtures, Overthrust: Modern Millie, and M. Butterfly. Other favorite theatre credits include Yellow Face (Obie and Lucile Lortel Awards, plus Drama Desk and Drama League nominations), In the Next Room (or the vibrator play) (ariZoni Award), Miss Saigon (Elliott Norton Award), Kiss of the Spider Woman (Natioanl Theatre). Other select credits: (Ma-Yi Theater); (American Globe Theatre); (Atlantic Theater Company); (South Coast Repertory); (National Theatre). Other select credits: (American Globe Theatre); (Atlantic Theater Company); (South Coast Rep). Film and TV credits include: Madam Secretary, Law & Order: SVU, and The Good Wife.

AUSTIN KU (Bobby Bob/Ensemble). International/Broadway tour: David Henry Hwang’s Chinglish (dir. Leigh Silverman). Off-Broadway: Pacific Overtures (dir. John Doyle) and Anne Washburn’s Iphigenia in Aulis (dir. Rachel Chavkin), both at Classic Stage Company; Tokyo Confidential (Atlantic Theater). Regional: Berkeley Rep, Delaware REP (The Bellamy), Stoneham Theatre (BroadwayWorld Award) Walnut Street Theatre (Barymore nomination), and many more. Film: Detective Chinatown 2, Creative Control, Sleeping with Other People, The Woman in the Dress. TV: Shades of Blue (recurring), Billions, Bull, Homeland, Sneaky Pete, The Affair, Younger,

Please turn off all electronic devices such as cellular phones and watch alarms. The use of any recording device, either audio or video, and the taking of photographs, with or without flash, is strictly prohibited.

PERFORMANCES MAGAZINE P5
and more. Training: Boston Conservatory, upright citizen's Brigade. Thanks to the soft power team and as always to ct/db and ag. @secretastinman, Austin-Ku.com

RAYMOND J. LEE (Randy Ray/Dee/ ensemble, understudy for DHH) is excited to make his center theatre group debut! Thanks to the soft power team for letting him be part of this world premiere. Ray recently originated the role of ralph in groundhog day on broadway. Other broadway credits: Honeycomb in Vegas, Anything Goes, mamma mia! Off-broadway: The two gentlemen of verona (the public), the wild party (Encore!). regional: Fagar style! (Jolla playhouse), stuck elevator (A.C.T.), Nerds (PTC), Great Wall (Village theatre). TV: Billions, red oak, smash, the jim Gaffigan show, fame, Succession. Film: The greatest showman, Ghost Town, The Mikiad project. Ray's voiceover work includes the guardian Brothers on Netflix, audiobooks, and several animated shows. Thanks to Nicolosi & Co. and Sullivan talent group. Love to Robbi and ella. Go u o Northwestern! Visit raymondjlee.com for more info and follow @raymondjlee.

ALYSE ALAN LOUIS (Zoe/ Hillary).
Broadway: Amélie (original cast recording), Disaster!, Mamma Mia! Off-Broadway: A New Brain (Encore Off-Center), the original Broadway recording; the civilians' pretty filthy (Abrons Arts Center) cast recording; the coven's low country belle. Regional: amelie (center theatre group and berkley rep), the rocky Horror Show (Buccaneer County playhouse), Nerds (philadelphia theatre Co.), spring Awakening (Olene theatre center), pop? Who shot Andy Warhol? (city theatre PA).

RAYMOND J. LEE

JAYCEE MACAPUGAY (Ensemble). Broadway: original company of School of Rock (cast recording), Off-Broadway: School of Rock (Gramercy). Here Lies Love (Imelda Marcos, Public theatre), Hello, Dolly! (Irene Molloy, Pershing Square Signature), Sondheim Suites (Lincoln center's Alice Tully hall), The rockfee (Prospect theatre). Regional favorites: Here Lies Love (Imelda, Seattle Repertory), King Fu (University of Chicago), Jee fate (Brenda, Matt Juma), Miss Saigon (Myn, 5th avenue, casa Mañana), The King and I (KC Starlight). International: where Elephants Weep. Jaycee has a passion for collaborating on new musicals including tears of Heaven by Frank Wildhorn. till soon, Anne by Christine toy Johnson & Bobby Cronin, honor by Pete Mills, and good times Roll by the cars. She proudly sings for our troops with the USO. Thankful for the support of my friends, eric, friends, and david.

DANIEL MAY (Ensemble/Assistant Dance captain). Is overjoyed to be a part of soft power and dedicates his performance to his nephew nathan. Daniel was born in south korea and grew up in southern California, attending the Orange County High school of the Arts. Daniel first worked with David Henry Hwang in the original Broadway revival cast of Flower Drum Song starring Lea salonga and then went on the road with the first national tour of Jeanine tesor's thoroughly modern millie, where he took over the role of Ching Ho. other theatre credits include, Off-Broadway: Red Eye of Love (Amas), and regional: Beijing Spring, Pippin (east West players); I Only Have Eyes For You (Montalban); Maria Poppins (tucatian); Miss Saigon (McCoy rigby). Thanks to the creative team for everything! Love to his family, friends, and mateo, who makes this all possible. Instagram: @boydanoh

PAUL HEESANG MILLER (Ensemble). Broadway: Miss Saigon, The King and I (Lincoln center), Mamma Mia! Regional: Walnut St, PCOL, Music theatre USO, wchita, North Shore music theatre, Weston Playhouse, Saint Michael's Playhouse, Kansas City Starlight, Artpark. BFA Elon University. Excited to be here in California premieres of DHH, going to be grateful to all at center theatre group! huge thanks to the genius soft power team and to Harden Curtis Kirsten Riley Agency. Follow me @paulheesangmiller.

KRISTEN FAITH DEI (Ensemble). Ecstatic to be back home in california, Kristen, a Bay area native, was most recently seen in the Broadway revival of David Henry Hwang's M. Butterfly. other NYC productions include the original Broadway cast of the King and I (LCT), the original Broadway cast of spider-man: Turn off the dark (Lin Manuel-miranda), The Broadway premiere of DHH, Kung Fu, Special Theatre, and, In Your Arms (NYSF). International/first national tours and sit-downs include wicked (dance captain), we Will Rock

You in Las Vegas, elton John & Tim rice's Aida (us/Amneris), West Side Story in Europe, and fama. various TV appearances include The Suite Life on Deck, mozart in the jungle, and the film isn't it romantic: endless gratitude and love to DHH, the sp team, family, friends, and most of all, to god. Romans 8:38 & 39. @dragonyfly02

MARIA-CHRISTINA OLIVERAS (Campaign Manager/Ensemble). Broadway: Amélie (original cast recording), Machina, Bloody bloody Andrew Jackson. Dedicated to new works, Maria-Christina has originated roles in a number of World premiers including Here Lies Love (The Public, original cast recording), Pretty Filthy (The Civilians, original cast recording), Taylor mac's 24 decade (...St. Ann's Warehouse), and Miles to go (PCP), Reading Under the Influence (DR2), The Really Big One (Target Margin), After (PCP). Other NYC credits include Romeo and Juliet (NYSF/ The Public), Zorbi/(City centre Encores), Night sky (SPAC). Regional: Berkeley Rep, ACT, williamstown, Long Wharf, Huntington, Baltimore Center stage, Sundance, Hudson valley Shakespeare, O'neill theatre Center, among others. Selected film/TV: Manhattan Night, St. Vincent, The Humbling, Time out of Mind, Nurse Jackie, Law & Order: SVU. Education: BA Yale; MFA National theatre Conservatory.

GEENA QUINTOS (Ensemble/Dance captain). Broadway/national tours: Miss Saigon, A Chorus Line. Off-Broadway: Regional. Here Lies Love (Seattle Rep); Normativity: Held Momentarily (PTC); Miss Saigon (Paramount theatre). Thanks to the creative team of DHH, going to be grateful to all at center theatre group! huge thanks to the genius soft power team and to Harden Curtis Kirsten Riley Agency. Follow me @paulheesangmiller.

CONRAD RICAMORA (Xue king/Broadway: The King and I. Off Broadway: Here Lies Love (Theatre world award, Lortel nomination). Regional: Allegenage (Old globe), Tartuffe, wayne, Fuddy Meers (Clarence Brown theatre); Romeo and Juliet (Utah Shakespeare Festival); The Taming of the Shrew (North Carolina Shakespeare Festival). Film: Talagadga Nights, The Light of the Moon, raising Christopher (writer/producer/actor). TV: How to Get Away with Murder (Olive), education: MFA, university of tennessee. Awarded 2016 human rights campaign Visibility award and 2017 Equality California visibility award. Twitter/Instagram: @conradricamora

TREVOR SALTER (Swing). Off-Broadway: Here Lies Love (The Public theatre, original cast); revolving Rhythms (Lucille lortel theatre). Regional: Here Lies Love (Seattle Rep). Other theatre credits include cabaret (the secret theatre), The loon (Abrons arts center, JACK), to the left of the pantry and under the sugar shack (La MaMa). Film: Ricki and the flash (2015). BFA NYU. Trevor is thrilled and thankful to be a part of this production. Thank you to the cast, crew, and creative team for all your hard work. Special thanks to ma & Pop, mom, Juno, and of course my darling Anna, for all your unconditional love and support.

EMILY STILLINGS (Branding). Broadway: The King and I (Lincoln Center). TV: multiple episodes of Saturday night Live (Lin-manuel Miranda, saoirse Ronan, Jeremy Affen, Kevin Hart), Including the welcome to hell digital short, and multiple episodes of Lip Sync Battle (LL Cool J, John Krasinski). So much love for mom. Thank you for being my biggest supporter always. @emylstillings

DAVID HENRY HWANG's (Play and lyrics) stage works include the plays M. Butterfly, Chinglish, Yellow Face (Mark Taper Forum 2007), Kung Fu, cold Child, The Dance and the Railroad, and FOB, as well as the Broadway musicals elton John & Tim rice's Aida (co-author, ampherson 2002), flower Drum Song (revival, mark Taper Forum 2001), and Disney's Tarzan. Hwang is a Tony award winner and three-time nominee, a three-time Obie award winner, and a two-time finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He is also America's most-produced living opera librettist, whose works have been honored with two Grammy Awards, and a writer/consulting producer for the golden globe-winning television series The affair. Hwang serves on the board of the Lark Play Development Center, as head of playwriting at Columbia university School of the arts, and as Chair of the American theatre Wing.
JEANINE TESORI (Music and Additional Lyrics) has written a diverse catalog for Broadway, opera, film, and television. Her Broadway musicals include Fun Home (2015 Tony Award winner, Pulitzer finalist), Violet, Caroline, or Change, Shrek the Musical, Thoroughly Modern Millie, Twelfth Night (LCT), and John Guare’s A Fierce Man of Color. Delacorte: Mother Courage (starring Meryl Streep). She has received five Tony nominations, three Obie Awards, and three Drama Desk Awards. Her operas include The Lion, the Unicorn and Me (2013). She took a Tony nomination (second place) for The Madman and set and costume design for Man of La Mancha (revival). She music directed the Kennedy Center revival of Amélie.


CHRIS FENWICK (Music Supervisor) most recently music supervised the Broadway revival of Once On This Island and music directed the Kennedy Center revival of Chess and the Broadway revival of Sunday in the Park with George, starring Jake Gyllenhaal. He music directed the Public Theater and Broadway productions of Fun Home (2015 Tony Award, Best Musical) and music supervised the national tour. He is the founding music director of City Center Encores! Off-Center and has music directed 11 productions with the program. He music directed the original productions of Michael John LaChiusa’s Giant, Los Otros, Queen of the Mist, See What I Wanna See, and the Transport Group revival of Hello Dolly! at Rattlestick Theatres. Broadway credits include Rocky, The Pajama Game and The (Curious Case of the) Watson Intelligence (Signature), Bubble Boy (Public Theater), and Notes from Underground, Chair (Theatre for a New Audience). Other NYC: numerous productions with Elevator Repair Service, BAM, Soho Rep, Juilliard Opera, Encores! Off-Center 2013–2017 (NYCC). Regional: A.R.T., Giffords, Hale Rep, Bethel, Lake Reps. Regional: The Pajama Game (2006 Tony Award, Best Revival), Here Lies Jenny, Mother Courage at Shakespeare in the Park, starring Meryl Streep, and more. Upcoming: music supervisor, Fun Home (Young Vic, London).

DAVID ZINN (Scenic Design). Broadway includes set and costume design for Spongebob Squarepants, Amelie, Fun Home (Tony nomination), and The Last Ship; set design for The Humans (Tony Award); and costume design for A Doll’s House, Part 2 and Amélie (both Tony nominations). Off-Broadway includes set design for Torch Song (Second Stage), Hamlet (Public Theater), and (Paris Hilton) (second stage). Regional includes Steppenwolf, The Guthrie, and Berkeley Rep. Center Theatre Group: set and costume design for Amelie and Girlfriend; costume design for Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo and The Cider House Rules.

ANITA YAVICH (Costume Design). Broadway: Fool for Love, Venus in Fur, Chinglish, and Anna in the Tropics. NYC: Oedipus El Rey, Measure for Pleasure (NYSF), The View Upstairs (Lynn Redgrave Theater); The Legend of Georgia McBride, Coraline, The Wooden Breeks (MCC), Tumacho (Clue: II, Thumb), Nathan the Wise, Caucasian Chalk Circle, Orlando, New Jerusalem, and Texts for Nothing (CSC); Big Love, Kung Fu, Golden Child, Iphigenia 2.0 (Signatures), The Oddest Boy (LCT); The Explorers Club (MTC); Lives of the Saints, All in the Timing (Primary Stages); Macbeth, Coriolanus, and Sweeney Todd (TFANA). Opera: Aida (SF Opera, Washington Opera, Seattle Opera); Cyroano de Berenguer (La Scala, MET, Royal Opera); Les Troyens (MET). Puppet and costume designer for The Son of Songs (Salzburger Marionetteentheater). Awards: Obie, Lucille Lortel, and Drama Desk Awards.


KAI HARADA (Scenic Design). Broadway includes set and costume design for Spongebob Squarepants, Amelie, Fun Home (Tony nomination), and The Last Ship; set design for The Humans (Tony Award); and costume design for A Doll’s House, Part 2 and Amélie (both Tony nominations). Off-Broadway includes set design for Torch Song (Second Stage), Hamlet (Public Theater), and (Paris Hilton) (second stage). Regional includes Steppenwolf, The Guthrie, and Berkeley Rep. Center Theatre Group: set and costume design for Amelie and Girlfriend; costume design for Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo and The Cider House Rules.


PERFORMANCES MAGAZINE P9

JOY LANCETA CORONEL (Design Coach) is a voice and speech coach based in New York City. She served as voice and speech faculty at American Academy of Dramatic Arts New York campus, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, College of Staten Island-CUNY, and internationally at University of Essex East 15 Acting School, Trinity Laban Conservatoire, and St. Dominick’s Sixth Form College in England. She specialized in dialect, text, voice, and speech coaching with National
Tuck Everlasting


DAVID B (Music Director) is a music-theatre artist specializing in contemporary music for the stage and concert hall. Compositions include the Ovation Award-winning score for Ubu Roi (A Noise Within), The Very Persistent Gappmers of Frip (Kirk Douglas Theatre; inaugural season), and the choronal compositions “A Map of Los Angeles” (LA Master Chorale) and “One With the Wind” (Vox Femia), Musical direction: 13 World premières, Mark Taper Forum; The Wild Party, See What I Wanna See (West Coast premières, The Blank Theatre); Floyd Collins, American Idiot, Cabaret, Little Shop of Horrors (La Mirada Theatre); The Fantasticks (Pasadena Playhouse). Film scores include Broncos: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fauns of My Little Pony. David was known for years as The Professor in Summer Sounds at the Hollywood Bowl.

Wanna See (La Mirada Theater); (Pasadena Playhouse). Film scores include Rodgers and Hammerstein's for which he won his second (Drama Desk nom.). String Special: (Pasadena Playhouse). Film scores include Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Cinderella, for which he won his second Drama Desk Award. Since then, he orchestrated Aladdin for the stage, which is currently playing in six locations worldwide. In 2006 he orchestrated Jeanine Tesori’s Shrek and is now slated to orchestrate the new version of Lucy Simon’s The Secret Garden. He has worked in the UK, France, Germany, Russia, China, and all over the United States. Realist. Optimist. Ready for new adventures...

HEDDI GRIFFITHS, CSA (Casting) has cast at The Public Theater in New York for more than 25 years. Broadway: The Iceman Cometh, Sweat, Eclipsed, Shuffle Along, The Crucible, A View From the Bridge, A Delicate Balance, A Raisin in the Sun, Lucky Guy, The Mother** with the Hat, Merchant of Venice, Hair, Passing Strange, Caroline, or Change, Take Me Out, Topdog/Underdog, Wild Party, Noise/Funk, On the Town, and Tempest. Film: Lady Bird, Saving Face, The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love.

KATE MURRAY, CSA (Casting) is a casting director at The Public Theater. Additional credits include work with The Cherry Lane, Bedlam, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Labyrinth, New Georges, TheaterWorks Hartford, The Studio Theatre, and Two River Theater. Broadway (as casting associate): The Crucible, A View From the Bridge, A Delicate Balance, A Raisin in the Sun, Lucky Guy (casting assistant).


ELLEN HOLTZMAN has served as Artistic Director at the Mark Taper Forum. He directed the New York premières of Rinne Groff’s Compulsion, The Ruby Sunrise, Larry Wright's The Human Scale, Julius Caesar at Shakespeare in the Park, as well as World premières by David Henry Hwang, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Eduardo Machado.

LUCAS KUSHNER (Director) is an American director, playwright, and screenwriter. His plays have been produced in 30 countries and translated into 18 languages. Kushner’s Angels in America and directed its World premiere at the Mark Taper Forum. He directed the New York premières of Rinne Groff’s Compulsion, The Ruby Sunrise, Larry Wright’s The Human Scale, Julius Caesar at Shakespeare in the Park, as well as World premières by David Henry Hwang, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Eduardo Machado.

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representation for communities whose voices have been marginalized.

THE CURRAN (Associate Producer). Built in 1922, the Curran has housed some of the biggest productions in theatre history, and has maintained a reputation over the course of its life as one of the premier live-entertainment venues in North America. Under the curation of eight-time Tony Award winner Carol Shorenenstein Hanses, the 1,600-seat Curran reopened in January 2017 following an extensive and celebratory two-year renovation and restoration project. The Curran’s goal has been to create a new kind of artistic hub in San Francisco—one that engages new and existing audiences, and attracts the most visionary artists in the world by presenting bold, daring work. The Curran continues to search for the globe of the kind of works we’ve always dreamt would play our stage.

THE PUBLIC THEATER (Co-Commissioner) produces theatre of, by, and for the people. It first opened its doors in 1967 with the musical Hair. Most recently Fun Home and Hamilton won Best Musical Tony Awards in consecutive years. It has a proud legacy of game-changing plays and musicals that include A Chorus Line, Runaways, For Colored Girls, The Normal Heart, Sweat, and Latin History for Morons. The Public is a civically-engaged theatre that engages new and existing audiences, and attracts the most visionary artists in the world by presenting bold, engaged theatre for communities whose voices have been marginalized. The Public’s mission is to create theatre that is of, by, and for the people. It first opened its doors in 1967 with the musical Hair. Most recently Fun Home and Hamilton won Best Musical Tony Awards in consecutive years. It has a proud legacy of game-changing plays and musicals that include A Chorus Line, Runaways, For Colored Girls, The Normal Heart, Sweat, and Latin History for Morons. The Public is a civically-engaged theatre that engages new and existing audiences, and attracts the most visionary artists in the world by presenting bold, engaged theatre for communities whose voices have been marginalized. The Public’s mission is to create theatre that is of, by, and for the people.

KELLEY KIRKPATRICK (Associate Artistic Director). Since arriving at Center Theatre Group in 2005, Kelley has produced over 60 productions at the Ahmanson Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, and Kirk Douglas Theatre, many of which have gone on to future lives on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and beyond. In addition to producing shows across Center Theatre Group’s three stages, he has had the privilege of collaborating with numerous local and national artists to commission and develop new works.

JEFFREY UPAH (General Manager, Ahmanson Theatre) has worked in management at Center Theatre Group since 2006 on more than 50 musicals, plays, and special events including both pre-Broadway productions and Broadway tours. Some of his favorites include Follies, God of Carnage, and The Black Rider (having previously worked on Robert Wilson productions in Boston, Houston, and Sao Paulo, Brazil). Prior to Center Theatre Group, he worked in various capacities at the Santa Fe Opera, Yale Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, and Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival, among others.

GORDON DAVIDSON (Managing Director) joined Center Theatre Group in 2014 as Managing Director. He was previously the President and CEO of The Music Center (2002–2014) and concurrently the CEO of the Los Angeles Opera (2008–2012). He served the J. Paul Getty Trust for 22 years, starting in 1989 as Deputy Director of the Getty Museum, then Director of the Getty Center Building Program, and in 1998, the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for the Getty Trust. He currently serves as a trustee of Occidental College, The Ahmanson Foundation, Children’s Hospital of Los Angeles, and Polytechnic School.

The Kentucky Cycle and Angels in America (Part One) won the Pulitzer in consecutive years, and in 1994, three of the four plays nominated for the Tony Award for Best Play were from the Taper (Angels in America). In 1989, Gordon took over the Ahmanson and, in 2004, he produced the inaugural season in the Kirk Douglas Theatre.
Four Years, Two Breakfasts, and One Big Commission
Michael Ritchie and David Henry Hwang Discuss the Creation of Soft Power

How does a new (play with a) musical get made? To quote Soft Power, “It Just Takes Time.” In this case, that’s four years, 13 readings and workshops, and the partnership of a crackerjack creative team of American theatre all-stars. But before all that, there was breakfast, as Center Theatre Group have become the national theatre of America. Collectively, we’re responsible for not only maintaining the art form but pushing it forward by commissioning and developing and producing new plays. We’re uniquely capable of creating new works on a grand scale, without the commercialized limitations of Broadway, because we can give a creative team enough space to realize something that is truly special. And that’s what I think we’ve done with Soft Power.

MICHAEL RITCHIE: Nonprofit regional theatres like Center Theatre Group have become the national theatre of America. Collectively, we’re responsible for not only maintaining the art form but pushing it forward by commissioning and developing and producing new plays. We’re uniquely capable of creating new works on a grand scale, without the commercialized limitations of Broadway, because we can give a creative team enough space to realize something that is truly special. And that’s what I think we’ve done with Soft Power.

DAVID HENRY HWANG: About four years ago, Michael met me for breakfast, and made me this amazing offer: he wanted to commission a piece from me, and not only that, there was a slot open, so the piece was guaranteed to be produced. Really, who can say no to that? What I was interested in at the time, and what has continued to remain the seed for the show that’s become Soft Power, were two things. Number one, China’s quest for soft power—for intellectual and cultural influence. China is a nation that increasingly has a lot of hard power; most people kind of feel that China’s likely to be the other major superpower if not the superpower of the 21st century. And China has this desire to gain soft power, a desire I began to experience. I would get a lot of meetings with Chinese producers or Chinese theatres, since they wanted to create a Broadway show…and I happen to be the only even nominally Chinese person who’s ever written a Broadway show. Nothing ever came of these meetings, but it was interesting to me that you had a system that wants international artistic and cultural influence but is very top-heavy when it comes to authoritarian power and content restrictions. Number two, was, I had seen the recent revival of The King and I. I’ve always loved The King and I. It’s been a show that has moved me since I was a kid. But as I’ve gotten older, there’s this complicated feeling where I know it is kind of inauthentic and making a political point subtly—reinforcing the dominance of the West. But it’s done so beautifully that by the end of it I’m still in tears.

RITCHIE: Now one of the things that I find most intriguing about Soft Power is that it’s not a mirror to The King and I, but it certainly follows some of the impulse. It wasn’t until I sat with you at breakfast and you reframed it for me through your eyes that I realized that The King and I is actually demeaning to an entire country and a culture. The basic plot is that a white woman comes to this country and saves itself from its own stupidity by teaching the king how to dance and be nice to his children.

HWANG: This idea that it takes a white nanny to come into Siam or Thailand and teach the king how to bring his nation into the community of civilized countries—that’s not that great. It’s a trope that exists consistently in Western stories about the East. I wrote the first draft of the movie that eventually became Seven Years in Tibet. Any time you get a white person in an Asian country who writes a memoir, somehow they end up becoming the advisor to the ruler. And the question is, when we talk about issues like appropriation, how do you express that, how do you replicate that feeling for a general American audience? If we look at appropriation in a future where China is dominant over the US, then I think we begin to perceive that in a different fashion, because we understand the power context. And that’s what the show’s trying to do—a complicated thing for a musical to achieve.

RITCHIE: The first time we talked about the commission, this was going to be a new play—the final show of our 50th Season at the Mark Taper Forum. At our second meeting though, when we sat down to breakfast again about a year and a half later, you had an expanded idea of what you wanted to do with this play.

HWANG: I wanted to do a play that becomes a musical. The first 20 minutes of it would be a contemporary comedy, and then that comedy becomes mythologized, and 50 years down the road it becomes the source material for a beloved East-West musical in China. So we are then watching a Chinese musical based on the incident we saw. And that seemed to me to bring together a twist on The King and I and also this exploration of what would it mean for China to gain soft power, and how soft power would manifest itself in the musical form. So I said, “Michael, I kind of want to do a musical.”

RITCHIE: And I was completely intrigued by it. And then you mentioned someone you were thinking of working on it.

HWANG: It was my dream that we could work with the composer Jeanine Tesori. My thought was, if we pull this off, you should have that same feeling that you do at the end of The King and I, which is, this is kind of not true but it’s so beautiful. So the person I thought of was Jeanine, because she’s a fantastic composer of course, but she’s also a scholar of musical theatre, she understands the form so well.

RITCHIE: How did you and Jeanine decide on the style and how the music should come across?

HWANG: Jeanine says that musicals—and I’ve now incorporated this into the play—are an incredibly powerful delivery system. When the music is great, you kind of let the idea it expresses seep into your heart. Which means that in a show like this, the music has to be as rich and seductive and as reminiscent of classic Broadway as possible. So Jeanine set out to write her most beautiful score, and I think she has. People sometimes asked, is she trying to write in an Asian or Chinese vein? I would say not so much. We’re going for the idea that China 50 years from now really appropriates the American musical form.

RITCHIE: Thank you, David. There is nothing better in the world than working on a new musical.

HWANG: Thank you and Center Theatre Group. You committed to this huge project when we only really had a title. Thanks so much for your faith. Listen to the full recording of Ritchie and Hwang in conversation on our podcast at CTGLA.org/Blip.

PERFORMANCES MAGAZINE P15