FIRST SEASON PRODUCTION
SWEAT
By Lynn Nottage
Directed by Lisa Peterson
August 29 – October 7, 2018

SECOND SEASON PRODUCTION
VALLEY OF THE HEART
Written and Directed by Luis Valdez
Presented in Association with El Teatro Campesino
October 30 – December 9, 2018

THIRD SEASON PRODUCTION
LINDA VISTA
By Tracy Letts
Directed by Dexter Bullard
January 9 – February 17, 2019

FOURTH SEASON PRODUCTION
LACKAWANNA BLUES
Written, Directed, and Performed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson
Music Composed and Performed by Bill Sims Jr.
March 5 – April 21, 2019

FIFTH SEASON PRODUCTION
HAPPY DAYS
By Samuel Beckett
Directed by James Bundy
With Dianne Wiest
May 15 – June 30, 2019
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Scenic Design
Christopher Barreca
Costume Design
Emilio Sosa
Lighting Design
Anne Militello
Composer and Sound Design
Paul James Prendergast

Projection Design
Yee Eun Nam
Casting
Heidi Levitt
NY Casting
Billy Hopkins
Ashley Ingram

Dialect Coach
Joel Goldes

Directed By
Lisa Peterson

AUGUST 29 – OCTOBER 7, 2018 MARK TAPER FORUM

Sweat was co-commissioned by
Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle and Arena Stage.
World premiere produced by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.
Sweat was first presented in New York by The Public Theater, Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director, Patrick Willingham, Executive Director.
Originally produced on Broadway by Stuart Thompson and Louise L. Gund.
CAST
(In Order of Appearance)

Evan..........................................................Kevin T. Carroll
Jason..........................................................Will Hochman
Chris......................................................Grantham Coleman
Stan................................................................Michael O'Keefe
Oscar........................................................Peter Mendoza
Tracey......................................................Mary Mara
Cynthia.....................................................Portia Project
Jessie.........................................................Amy Pietz
Brucie................................................................John Earl Jelks

UNDERSTUDIES
Understudies never substitute for a listed performer unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance.

Evan, Chris, Brucie........................................La Shawn Banks
Jason................................................................Adam Findley
Stan................................................................James Shanklin
Oscar................................................................Eddie Ruiz
Tracey, Jessie...............................................Anita Ruz
Cynthia................................................................Joy DeMichelle

Stage Manager
Michelle Blair

TIME: 2000 and 2008
PLACE: Reading, Pennsylvania
INTERMISSION: Sweat will be performed with one intermission.

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.

WHO'S WHO


GRANTHAM COLEMAN (Chris). Off-Broadway: The Public Theater's Buzzer (dir: Anne Kaufmann), Manhattan Theatre Club's Choir Boy (dir: Trip Cullman), Rattlestick Playwrights Theater's One Night (dir: Clinton Turner Davis), Soho Rep Theatre's We Are Proud to Present... (dir: Eric Ting). The Public Theater's As You Like It (dir: Daniel Sullivan), Regional: The Old Globe's Hamlet (dir: Barry Edelstein), Geffen Playhouse's Choir Boy (dir: Trip Cullman), Actors Theatre of Louisville's Romeo and Juliet (dir: Tony Speciale). Film: Against All Enemies (independent). Television: The Carmichael Show (NBC), NCIS (CBS), Doubt (CBS), 11/22/63 (Hulu), Murder in the First (TNT), The Night Shift (NBC), The Americans (FX). Training: Juilliard School of Drama (Group 41).

WILL HOCHMAN (Jason). Theatre: The Sound Inside (WTF, original cast); The Little Foxes (MTC); Dead Poets Society (CSG, original cast). Film: Paterno (HBO); Love (short film). Will was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from Coby College with a degree in economics.

MARY MARA (Tracey). New York theatre: Mad Forest, Kindertansport (Manhattan Theatre Club), The Dream of a Common Language (The Women's Project), And Baby Makes Seven (Lucille Lortel Theatre, written by Paula Vogel, with Cherry Jones), Regional: Ivanov (Yale Rep., directed by Lloyd Richards with William Hurt) and Paula Vogel’s How I Learned to Drive (Seattle Intiman Theatre, directed by Mark Rucker), L.A. theatre: Two-Headed (Henry Ford Theatre, directed by Veronica Brady) and Anna Christie (Odyssey Theatre, directed by Kim Rubenstein). Film and television: Love Potion No. 9, Civil Action, ER (recurring role), Nash Bridges (series regular), and most recently Ray Donovan. Mary is thrilled to be included in this beautiful play, written by Lynn Nottage, one of her classmates at the Yale School of Drama, where they were both guided by such brilliant teachers as Earle Gister and Lloyd Richards.

PETER MENDOZA (Oscar). Center Theatre Group: Elliot in Eliot, A Soldier’s Fugue (Kirk Douglas Theatre) and Henry Reyna in Zoot Suit (understudy, Mark Taper Forum). Other theatre: Belyae in Three Days in the Country (Antaeus Theatre Company), Paco in Salvar Mexico, Don Juan in El Buitrero de Seville/The Trickster of Seville (Bilingual Foundation of the Arts), and Angelo in Measure for Measure (ELAC Performing Arts)

PERFORMANCES

INTERMISSION:

PLACE:

Sweat will be performed with one intermission.
Portia (Cynthia). Theatre: Jackie Zinner in Arthy Jackson and Fiona in The Rose tattoo (Willisam Theatre Festival), Mrs. Dickson in Intimate Apparel (Bay Street Theatre), The Selector in How We Got On (Cleveland Playhouse), Rose in Fences (McCarter Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre), Stage Manager in Our Town (Ford’s Theatre), Mama Nadi in Ruined (MTC, The Geffen Playhouse), McReele (Roundabout Theatre Company), Our Lady of 1211 St., and In Arabia We’d All Be King (LABYrinth Theatre Company). Television/new media: Madam Secretary, Buit, Big Dogs, Elementary, She’s Gotta Have It (Netflix), The Blacklist, Blue Bloods, CSI. Feature film: Skin, St. Vincent de Van Nuys, Silver Tongues, The Greatest, The Messenger, Please Give, Synechoche, Homeland. Portia is a member of the LABYrinth Theatre Company and Actors’ Equity Association.

La Shawn Banks (Understudy for Evan, Chris, Bruce). Hails from Buffalo, NY but spent the last 13 years working and performing in Chicago and theatres throughout the Midwest. He has been living in the Los Angeles area for the past year. Recent television credits include episodes of Better Call Saul, Ghosted, Alex Inc., Heathers, Chicago Justice, The Exorcist, and Shameless. Most recent theatrical productions include Theresa Rebeck’s The Scene and Lucas Hnath’s Isaac’s Eye (Writers Theatre); Macbeth and Twelfth Night (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre); The Island, Seascape, A Streetcar Named Desire, Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s The Critic, and Of Mice and Men (American Players Theatre); and The Wheel (Steppenwolf Theatre). Thanks to Lisa Peterson and the team of Swaid for the opportunity.

Joy Di/Michelle (Understudy for Cynthia) is thrilled to make her return to theatre here at the Mark Taper Forum. Off-Broadway: American Place Theatre, Stonewall Jackson’s House; Actors Theatre of Louisville: A Raisin in the Sun and The Water Hole; Denver Center Theatre: Seven Guitars and Blues for an Alabama Sky. Crossroads Theatre; Piano Lesson, Sport North, a one-woman piece entitled Hamlet’s Return, and Fountain Theatre: Darker Face of the Earth. Television/film: For the People, Criminal Minds, Parenthood, Lie to Me, Outlaw, American Gun, Taking Back Our Town (with the late Ruby Dee), Judging Amy, Kingpin, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Strong Medicine, and One Life to Live: Education. BFA, North Carolina A&T State University; MFA from Rutgers University: Mason Gross School of the Arts and was awarded the prestigious Bestenberger Outstanding Performance Award. Joy is grateful for her amazingly supportive family!

Adam Findley (Understudy for Jassir). Born in Oklahoma and raised in Gothenburg, Sweden, Adam Findley is a classically trained actor who has performed lead roles in theatre productions such as Brian Friel’s Dancing at Lughnasa, Neil Simon’s Biloxi Blues, and Tennessee Williams’ The Glass Menagerie. Trained at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, Adam has also found success in television and film, recoring on Lionsgate Television’s series Swedish Dick opposite Peter Stormare and Keanu Reeves, and MTV’s Awkward. He also played a supporting role opposite Frankie Muniz in the television-action motion picture Hot Bath ain’t a Silver Spoon 2, and opposite Gina Gershon, Cameron Monaghan, James Frecheville, and Vincent D’Onofrio in the independent drama Mall. Most recently, Adam wrapped a large guest appearance in season two of David Fincher and Joe Penhall’s serial killer series Mindhunter.

JAMES SHANKLIN (Understudy for Stark). New York: Julius Caesar, As You Like It, Hamlet, Titus Andronicus, Ibsen, Caesars, and Claudius. As Julius Caesar, he played Crafty Caesar, a role that he later played on Broadway, in London, and on tour in Stockholm. As a Shakespearean director, he has directed productions of Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and King Lear. His upcoming projects include directing King Lear and The Winter’s Tale at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C.

Jana Stone (Understudy for memorial role). A native of Kentucky, Jana has appeared in many productions throughout the country, including A Christmas Carol (Hermione), How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (Sally Durant), and The Importance of Being Earnest (Gwendolen). She recently starred as Harriet’s Return in Taking Back Our Town, opposite Peter Stormare as Dicks, and was a founding member of the Trinity Repertory Company. She is a graduate of the University of Virginia and the University of New Mexico, where she received her BFA in Acting.

Eddie Ruiz (Understudy for Oscar) trained at The Central School of Speech and Drama in London, UK. Recent theatre credits include Chavo in Angel of the Desert (South Coast Rep), Pinocchio in Pinocchio (Will & Company), Martinez in The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit (Fremont Centre Theatre), Feste in Twelfth Night (East L.A. Rep), and Noel in The Boxcar (Frida Kahlo Theatre). Recent TV credits include A Man’s World alongside Don Johnson (NBC), That’s So Rawen (Disney), Tosh.0 (Comedy Central). Recent film credits: Jerry & Lalo (Luminary Productions), Perception (Cruz Productions), The American Dream (Little Pow Films), Ambush (Joe Bauer Inc Productions), Russell Fish: The Sausage and Egg Incident alongside Chris Cotler (Trebutech Productions). Dedicating this show to my wife Jean Ruiz and newborn son Eriberto Tomas Ruiz and my parents. Grateful to be working on this great show. eddie-ruiz.com
LYNN NOTTAGE (Playwright) is a playwright and a screenwriter, and the first woman in history to win two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. Her plays include Sweat (Pulitzer Prize, Obie Award), which moved to Broadway after a sold-out run at The Public Theater, Mimi’s Tale (Outer Critics Circle nomination), By the Way, Meet Vera Stark (Lilly Award, Drama Desk nomination), Ruined (Pulitzer Prize, Obie Award), Intimate Apparel (American Theatre Critics and New York Drama Critics’ Circle Awards for Best Play), Fabrication, or the Re-education of Undine (Obie Award), Drums from the Table of Joy, Las Meninas, Mud, River, Stone, Pornkickers, and POOP! In addition, she is working with composer Ricky Ian Gordon on adapting her play Dachniki, Zolotoy Soffit (Almeida, London). Directing: Macbeth (A Modern Ecstasy); The House of Bernarda Alba. She was writer/producer of the film Dachniki, Zolotoy Soffit (Russia). Teaching: CalArts. chrisbarreca.com


ANNE MILITELLO (Lighting Designer) is thrilled to return to the Taper. Previous productions at the Taper include the regional Chavel Raveler (dir. Lisa Peterson), The Waiting Room, and Blade to the Heat. Premiere works include A Lie of the Mind, Simpatico, The Late Henry Moss with Sam Shepard, Mud, Abingdon Square, and And What of the Night with Maria Irene Fornes. She received an Obie Award for Sustained Excellence. Broadway credits include Cuba and His Teddy Bear with Robert DeNiro. She recently designed The House is Black (Wallis Annenberg) and Center Theatre Group’s 50th Anniversary Celebration at the Ahmanson. Concert tours include Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits, and Josh Groban, among others. She is currently the Head of Lighting Programs at CalArts and in design for The Flying Dutchman for the Dallas Opera. She is the founder of Vortex Lighting and Principal Designer/Producer for Mode Studios.

YEE EUN NAM (Projection Designer). Yee is a video and projection designer for opera, theatre, and any form of live performance currently based in L.A. Recent theatre works include projection design for Bordentown Now (Pasadena Playhouse), Cruzar la Cara de la Luna (Theatre of Image), Sapo (Getty Villa), Citizen: An American Lyric (Kirk Douglas Theatre), Sweep (Aurora Theatre, Lawrenceville), Dementia, Sweetheart Deal, and A Mexican Trilogy: An American History (LATC). Recent opera works include Backwards from Winter (The Center for Contemporary Opera, NY), Lohengrin (New World Center, Miami), The Turn of the Screw (DC Public Opera, Washington DC), A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Les contes d’Hoffmann, La Bohème, The Crucible, Cunning Little Vaaen (Miami Summer Music Festival). Yee is a recipient of Cirque du Soleil Fellowship Award. BFA in metal craft and MFA in theatre design, UCLA, yeeeenam.com

HEIDI LEVITT (Casting Director). Heidi is a graduate of Barnard College and the AFI where she now is an adjunct professor in the directing department. She has cast such successful films as The Artist, The Joy Luck Club, JFK, Natural Born Killers, and The Rock. Most recently Heidi has worked as both a casting director and co-producer with film maker Sally Potter on The Party and she is currently casting and co-producing films with Sally Potter, Wayne Wang, and Victor Nunez. Heidi is thrilled to be casting Sweat at the Taper and working again with Lisa Peterson and Center Theatre Group where she also cast Bent by Martin Sherman and directed by Moisés Kaufman, and different works for the same thing by Kimberly Lee and directed by Neel Keller. Heidi has won three Artios Casting Awards, including one for Center Theatre Group’s production of Bent in 2015. She is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, and in 2010 she co-created the iPhone app Actor Genie. Follow her @theactorgenie and at heidelevittcasting.com.


ABIGAIL BUCHANAN (Dialect Coach) is thrilled to return to the Taper. Previous productions at the Taper include The Mirror, The Song of Rome, and a musical with Todd Almond, The Idea of Order. She was Resident Director at the Taper from 1995–2005, and is currently Associate Director at Berkeley Rep.


LYNN NOTTAGE (Playwright) is a playwright and a screenwriter, and the first woman in history to win two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. Her plays include Sweat (Pulitzer Prize, Obie Award), which moved to Broadway after a sold-out run at The Public Theater, Mimi’s Tale (Outer Critics Circle nomination), By the Way, Meet Vera Stark (Lilly Award, Drama Desk nomination), Ruined (Pulitzer Prize, Obie Award), Intimate Apparel (American Theatre Critics and New York Drama Critics’ Circle Awards for Best Play), Fabrication, or the Re-education of Undine (Obie Award), Drums from the Table of Joy. Las Meninas, Mud, River, Stone, Pornkickers, and POOP! In addition, she is working with composer Ricky Ian Gordon on adapting her play Dachniki, Zolotoy Soffit (Almeida, London). Directing: Macbeth (A Modern Ecstasy); The House of Bernarda Alba. She was writer/producer of the film Dachniki, Zolotoy Soffit (Russia). Teaching: CalArts. chrisbarreca.com


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PAUL JAMES PRUNDERGAST (Composer and Sound Designer). Center Theatre Group: Chavez Ravine, different works for the same thing; Palestine, New Mexico; Water & Power, Electricidad, and others. Broadway: Drama Desk nomination for All The Way, Select theatre: Oregon Shakespeare Festival (25 productions), La Jolla Playhouse, Guthrie, American Conservatory, American Repertory, Seattle Rep, Berkeley Rep, South Coast Rep, Long Wharf, Atlantic, Playmakers Rep, Geffen Playhouse, People’s Light, Hartford Stage, Cal Shakes, Utah Shakes, Alley, Kennedy Center, Asolo Rep, Great Lakes, Florida Stage, Actors’ Gang, Cornerstone (former ensemble member). Theme parks: Universal Studios, Disney, Knott’s Berry Farm. Museums: J. Paul Getty, Geffen Contemporary, LACMA, Autry National Center. Dance: Diavolo Dance Theater, Momix, Parsons Dance. His work as a singer/songwriter has appeared in films, on recordings, and in music venues nationwide.
**STEVEN RANKIN (Fight Director)**
Broadway: Carousel (Drama Desk Award Outstanding Fight Choreography), Summer, Jersey Boys, Memphis, Henry IV, Dr. Zhivago, Macbeth, Guys and Dolls, The Farnsworth Invention, The Who’s Torn, Getting Away With Murder, Two Shakespearian Actors, Twelfth Night, The Real Inspector Hound, Anna Christie, Dracula.

**MICHELLE BLAIR (Stage Manager)**
has worked on over 30 productions for Center Theatre Group. Some highlights include War by the Spoonful, Head of Passes, Heisenberg, Archduke, Zoot Suit, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, The Christians, Bent, Marjorie Prime, Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike, The Sunshine Boys, Joe Turner’s Come and Gone, Red, Vge, Leap of Faith, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, Parade, Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson, Nightingale, all wear bowlers, Topdog/Underdog, and “OED” at Lincoln Center Theater. Other favorites include Henry IV with Shakespeare Center Los Angeles, The Pee-wee Herman Show at Club Nokia, A Long Bridge Over Deep Waters with Cornerstone Theater Company, and Jersey Boys in Las Vegas. Graduate of the University of Southern California and the University of Amsterdam. Mom to ten-year-old Liam and six-year-old Imogen.

**CENTRE THEATRE GROUP**

**MICHAEL RITCHIE (Artistic Director)** is in his 14th season as Center Theatre Group’s Artistic Director, and has led over 200 productions to the Ahmanson, Taper, and Douglas stages since his arrival in 2004. In 2006, Michael was the Producer of the Williamstown Theatre Festival and prior to that he was a production stage manager in NYC. At Center Theatre Group, he premiered six musicals that moved to Broadway—the Drowsy Chaperone (which won 13 Tony Award nominations), Curtains (eight Tony nominations), 13, 9 to 5: The Musical, Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson, and Leap of Faith. He has produced 40 World premieres including the musicals Soft Power, Minsky’s, Venice, and Sleeping Beauty Wakes, and the plays Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo (a Pulitzer Prize finalist that also moved to Broadway), Water & Power, and Yellow Face, and presented a broad range of plays and musicals ranging from Dead End to The Black Rider to Edward Scissorhands to blockbusters such as God of Carnage, Mary Poppins, Jersey Boys, and August: Osage County. In addition, Michael inaugurated Center Theatre Group’s Artistic Development Program, designed to foster the development and production of new work.

**STEPHEN D. ROUNTREE (Managing Director)** joined Center Theatre Group in 2014 as its new Managing Director. He was previously the President and CEO of The Music Center (2002–2014) and held the position of CEO of the Los Angeles Opera concurrently from 2008–2012. Prior to The Music Center, Rountree served the J. Paul Getty Trust for 22 years, starting in 1980 as Deputy Director of the Getty Museum. In 1984, he was appointed Director of the Getty Center Building Program, with responsibility for managing all aspects of project development, design, and construction of the Getty Center in Los Angeles. In January 1998, he was named 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 the Polytechnic School. He advises numerous nonprofit institutions on matters relating to nonprofit management and building programs. His involvement was critical to the building of Walt Disney Concert Hall at The Music Center, serving on the boards of the LA Phil and Walt Disney Concert Hall, Inc.

**DOUGLAS C. BAKER (Producing Director)** is now in his 29th season at Center Theatre Group. Previously, he managed Broadway and touring productions including Tru, Born Yesterday, The Gospel at Colonus, Annie, A Chorus Line, Working, and Lend Me a Tenor. Michael, who premiered in the Ahmanson Theatre in 1986 and starred Maria Martin and Carol Channing. Doug is a member of the Achievement Hall of Fame of Chargin Falls Schools in Ohio and a graduate of Albion College. He is an active member of the Broadway League, the Independent Presenters Network, and is a proud member of the Association of Theatrical Press Agents and Managers. In May 2013 Doug received the Broadway League’s prestigious Outstanding Achievement in Presenter Management Award.

**NEIL KELLER (Associate Artistic Director)** for Center Theatre Group, Neil has directed the World premieres of Lucy Alibar’s ‘Throw Me On The Bumfalo and Light Me Up, Dael Orlandersmith’s Forever, Kimber Lee’s different words for the same thing, Jennifer Haley’s The Nether, and Jessica Goldberg’s Good Thing, as well as productions of Sheila Callaghan’s Women Laughing Alone With Salad, David Greg’s Pyreenees, and Marie Jones’ Stones in His Pockets. He has also directed for New York Theatre Workshop, The Public Theater, the Abbey Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, South Coast Repertory, Long Wharf Theatre, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, Portland Center Stage, and Williamsstown Theatre Festival. As a producer at Center Theatre Group, Neil has worked closely with dozens of creative teams on the development and production of a wide range of plays and musicals. He is a member of The Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Directors Guild of America.

**NAUSICA STERGIOU (General Manager)** MAGAZINE P 11 PERFORMANCES  MAGAZINE

(Center, Taper Forum and Kirk Douglas Theatre) has worked professionally supporting artists in theatres of all shapes, sizes, and locales including many seasons at Center Theatre Group as General Manager and, previously, as Audience Development Director. She oversees mainstage productions at the Taper and Douglas, as well as new play commissions and developmental productions through Center Theatre Group’s New Play Development. Nausica has taught at USC’s School of Dramatic Arts, and advised and worked with local nonprofits including Hollywood Orchard.

**GORDON DAVIDSON (Founding Artistic Director)** led the Taper throughout its first 38 seasons, guiding over 300 productions to its stage and winning countless awards for himself and the theatre—including the Tony Award for theatrical excellence, Margo Jones Award, The Governor’s Award for the Arts, and a Guggenheim fellowship. 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 won). In 1985, Gordon took over the Ahmanson and, in 2004, he produced the inaugural season in the Kirk Douglas Theatre.
ADDITIONAL STAFF FOR SWEAT

Assistant Director....................................................Michael A. Shepperd
Dramaturg...........................................................Lydia G. Garcia
Assistant Scenic Designer.................................Carlo Maghirang
Resident Assistant Costume Designer........Whitney Oppenheimer
Assistant Lighting Designer..................................Briana Pattillo
Associate Fight Director...................................Bobby C. King
Costume Design Assistant..............................Kat Patterson
Wig Artisan............................................................Morgan Sellers
Stitcher..........................................................Stephanie Molstad
Prop Lead..........................................................Eric Babb
Assistant Prop Lead/Shopper.........................Ryan Howard
Prop Carpenter..................................................Kitty Murphy-Youngs
Production Assistant.................................Benjamin Altman
Casting Associate..............................................Marin Hope
Casting Assistant..............................................Leesa Kim

CREDITS

Costumes and props provided by the Center Theatre Group Shop. Scenery constructed by F&D Scene Changes, Ltd. Hair styling for Portia by Shelli Moseley. Rehearsal and production photography by Craig Schwartz. Production B-roll by Cinevative. Special thanks to Padraic Duffy and The Broadwater Plunge bar for hosting our promotional photo shoot.

Center Theatre Group dedicates this production to the memory of Nancy Hereford, our longtime Press Director.

The company during the design presentation at the first rehearsal for Sweat. Photo by Craig Schwartz.

Sweat REHEARSAL PHOTOS

A) Portia.
C) Will Hochman and Mary Mara.
D) Grantham Coleman.

Photos by Craig Schwartz.
Lisa Peterson Discusses Returning to L.A. and Tackling the Modern Struggles of America in Sweat

Director Lisa Peterson is happy to be back in Los Angeles and at the Mark Taper Forum with Sweat. The Obie Award-winning director has collaborated with some of the best playwrights in the world, including Tony Kushner, Beth Henley, David Henry Hwang, Donald Margulies, and Caryl Churchill, at regional theatres across the country. She also spent a notable 10-year stint as Resident Director at the Taper from 1995–2005, during which she directed The House of Bernarda Alba (adapted by Chay Yew and featuring Chita Rivera in the title role), Luis Alfaro’s Electricidad, and the World premiere of Culture Clash’s Chavez Ravine, among numerous others.

Since then, Peterson hasn’t been a total stranger to Center Theatre Group, returning to direct the 2015 revival of Chavez Ravine at the Kirk Douglas Theatre. She has also come back as a playwright, as part of a completion commission she and Denis O’Hare (with whom she co-wrote the critically acclaimed An Iliad) received for The Good Book, a theatrical, semi-historical exploration of the Bible. (The Good Book premieres at Berkeley Rep next spring.)

Los Angeles, like the rest of America, has changed since Peterson lived here last—which in her opinion has only made theatre, and this particular play, more important.

“We are hungry to be in each other’s actual presence. So much of our lives can and do happen through a screen, mediated by technology. We’re watching a movie, Skyping into work, Facetiming with our loved ones,” said Peterson. “While those things give us the freedom to work from anywhere, a lot of people are realizing that they are hungry to be in a room where other people are breathing along with them, watching real actors with the danger that anything could happen or go wrong. I feel that the more technology embeds itself into our daily lives, the more theatre stays necessary.”

That’s particularly true in Los Angeles. “There’s an abundance of great actors and writers and in L.A. people who love theatre, really love theatre,” she said. “Theatre in L.A. has this very special place. It’s this hand-crafted art that people are hungry for. Also, L.A. is so spread out and you have to get in your car to get anywhere, so the packed feeling you get when you sit in a theatre with a bunch of strangers is really special.” She added, “When you can really pull from a variety of neighborhoods in L.A. and gain a wonderful blend of folks interested in a show, that’s exciting. L.A. audiences are really enthusiastic about good, live art.”

She is excited about what these audiences are going to take away from Sweat. “I want them to get swept up in the story and in the lives of these characters,” she said. It seems especially timely to be bringing Angelenos a play that delves so deeply into what has gone wrong in recent American history; how the economic fallout faced by so many communities has bled into every aspect of people’s lives and psyches. Peterson emphasized that one of the main triumphs of the play is its ability to “take all these amazing characters and let you in to their lives and show their desperation, so by the end you really have to empathize with everybody.” Peterson commended Nottage for “creating a play in which absolutely every character can immediately seem like a person you know.”

In a time of such political divisiveness, Peterson emphasizes this relatability and empathy the play forges onstage: “The main thing that Sweat can do is that it can sort of shake up your expectations and judgements of people who are not like you,” she explained. “I hope audiences leave the theatre understanding that you have to really dig in to people around you and not just make assumptions about them.”