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## **CENTER THEATRE GROUP LAUNCHES CTG LEADERSHIP CIRCLE**

### **Eleven Participants Are Part of the Inaugural Group That Recognizes and Supports Excellence in Emerging Leaders**

Center Theatre Group has launched the **CTG Leadership Circle**, a program intended to uplift, celebrate and support early- and mid- career staff members at Los Angeles' largest theatre company. The focus of CTG Leadership Circle is on employees who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color), as well as individuals from intersectional and marginalized identities. The first cohort, which started at the end of September and is slated to continue through Spring 2022 includes 11 participants from five different departments at Center Theatre Group.

"The people selected for the inaugural CTG Leadership Circle exemplify ethical leadership, creativity and commitment to challenging status quo," said Center Theatre Group Deputy Managing Director Camille Schenkkan. "It is only by elevating and empowering colleagues like these that we can cultivate more equitable, joyful theatre practices and continue our evolution into the organization we want to become."

"The CTG Leadership Circle explores what it means to be an arts leader today and celebrates the leaders of the future," explained Center Theatre Group's Education and Community Partnerships Department Manager Aurora Ilog, who is the program lead for CTG's Leadership Circle. "These hour-long sessions, that typically meet on a weekly basis, allow members of our staff to have the space to cultivate and navigate their individual career journeys. In response to Center Theatre Group's Commitments to Change, we implemented an initiative to celebrate, uplift and support our staff. From learning what it means to develop strong teams, identifying components to a shared leadership model and cultivating their own unique leadership style, the CTG Leadership Circle creates a space for staff to grow as leaders in their own regard and within our organization."

This first cohort of the CTG Leadership Circle includes: Nakisa Aschtiani (Finance), Eric Babb (Production), Katie Chen (Production), Courtney Clark (Education and Community Partnerships), Jessica Hernandez (Finance), Juan Martinez (Finance), Paula Matallana (Institutional Advancement), Nikki Michela (Institutional Advancement), Priya Patel (Institutional Advancement), Ayu Tanaka (Communications) and Janelle Torres (Information Technology).

The CTG Leadership Circle was created to connect participating staff members to individual career coaching and group sessions focused on building skills in arts management leadership. Participants also engage in additional one-on-one and small-group networking opportunities, from informational interviews to topic-based sessions on everything from personal financial management to navigating an arts career as a caregiver. In addition, each member is provided with a professional development stipend.

**Center Theatre Group**, one of the nation's preeminent arts and cultural organizations, is Los Angeles' leading nonprofit theatre company, which, under the leadership of Artistic Director Michael Ritchie, Managing Director / CEO Meghan Pressman and Producing Director Douglas C. Baker, programs seasons at the 736-seat Mark Taper Forum and 1,600 to 2,100-seat Ahmanson Theatre at The Music Center in Downtown Los Angeles, and the 317-seat Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City. In addition to presenting and producing the broadest range of theatrical entertainment in the country, Center Theatre Group is one of the nation's leading producers of ambitious new works through commissions and world premiere productions and a leader in interactive community engagement and education programs that reach across generations, demographics and circumstance to serve Los Angeles.

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### **BIOS**

**Nakisa Aschtiani** (she/her), an Orange County native, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts. Currently, she works in Center Theatre Group's Finance Department and looks forward to furthering her career here. Her passion for learning and her dream of working at CTG pairs perfectly with being a part of the Leadership Circle's inaugural class. Nakisa, a playwright herself, is a member of the She NYC Arts' Board, a non-profit organization that showcases womxn writers and theatre artists. Outside of work, she loves spending time with her husband and their three dogs.

**Eric Babb** was born and raised in Los Angeles and is a graduate of the LACC Theatre Academy. Eric is the Assistant Prop Director at Center Theatre Group. Prior to switching to prop work exclusively, Eric stage managed and crewed shows all around LA's intimate theatre scene. While working in the Los Angeles theatre community for nearly a decade Eric has worked on productions for many companies, with some of his favorites being: The LA LGBT Center, Latino Theatre Company, Circle X, InterACT, Independent Shakespeare Company, and of course Center Theatre Group. Eric's tenure with CTG began as an intern in the Prop Department in 2013, where he's been involved in varying prop capacities for 66-plus mainstage productions (and counting).

**Katie Chen** (she/her) is an Assistant Production Manager at CTG. She enjoys supporting all facets of the production process and crafting the perfect spreadsheet. Previously, she’s traveled the world on cruise ships as a stage and production manager. Aside from production management, she enjoys working as a stage technician in lighting and sound and has recently found a new interest in virtual production and immersive events. Her pandemic pivot has included becoming an associate technical director and livestream engineer for several virtual interactive broadcasts — one of which has been nominated for an Emmy! Katie holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the University of California, San Diego, where she also minored in Computer Science and Theatre.

**Courtney Clark** (they/them) is a digital designer and project manager, specializing in content creation, web design, and building authentic communities in person and online. They are especially interested in innovative interactions between art and technology. In their role as Temporary Program Manager at Center Theatre Group’s Education and Community Partnerships Department, they support Educator and School Programs. Prior to Center Theatre Group, they were the Deputy Director of Communications and Educational Programs at LA STAGE Alliance and the Marketing Chair for Emerging Arts Leaders/Los Angeles. They also served as an inaugural councilmember on the LA County Arts Education Collective's Youth Advisory Council in 2019. Courtney graduated Summa Cum Laude and with departmental honors from the University of La Verne with their degree in Arts Education and Theatre Arts.

**Jessica Hernandez** has worked at Center Theatre Group for a little over four years in the Finance Department. With 20 years of accounting and payroll experience, she has excelled in her career and now holds a Manager title for our incredible finance team. Jessica currently manages a specialist and oversees a highly paced level of union and non-union payroll. This includes maintaining payroll records, calculating taxes, audits and meeting state and federal guidelines. In addition to her current role, she has been working with a director on implementing a new payroll software. She was raised in the Los Angeles area and has accomplished many personal goals. She is a very proud single mother of two college graduates who she raised while she was holding down a full-time career. Jessica strives for success at all levels in life and enjoys seeing others achieve their success and goals.

**Juan Martinez** has been with Center Theatre Group as a Payroll Specialist for more than four years. He went to California State University, Long Beach and graduated in 2016 with a degree in Business Management. Juan’s favorite hobbies include listening to music, going to concerts, watching sports and spending time with friends and family. Juan’s favorite shows while at CTG are “Sweat” and “Something Rotten!” He is excited to be a part of CTG’s Leadership Circle’s inaugural class.

**Paula Matallana** is a fundraising professional who is passionate about creating more equitable and inclusive access to the arts. As Center Theatre Group's Grants Manager, Paula's work includes creating proposals and reports for foundation and government grants, stewarding institutional funders, and handling administrative duties. Prior to Center Theatre Group, she worked at Impact Silver Spring — a nonprofit organization focused on building equitable and resilient communities in Montgomery County, Maryland — where she started as Development and Administrative Assistant and was promoted to Development and Communications Specialist. She also served as the Youth Media Organizer at Gandhi Brigade Youth Media in Silver Spring, Maryland, where she led programs for high school students that combined media arts and social justice. She has interned at the Bowers Museum, Arlington Arts Center, and Provisions Library. Paula holds a Master of Arts in Arts Management from George Mason University and a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art from Grinnell College.

**Nikki Michela** is the Associate Director of Institutional Grants at Center Theatre Group and has been with the company for two years. In this role, she is responsible for raising funds from foundation and government partners and managing key institutional relationships. Prior to joining Center Theatre Group, Nikki has spent the last decade working for arts organizations across various artistic disciplines in Los Angeles, including Film Independent where she was the Grants Manager, and LA Opera where she also worked with foundation, corporate and government agencies at the local, state and national levels. Nikki has served on grants panels for the California Arts Council and Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture. She earned her Bachelor's degree at Cal State Long Beach. She resides in Torrance with her husband, one year old son Milo and dog Mia.

**Priya Patel** is the Corporate Relations Officer at Center Theatre Group, working to secure corporate funding and strengthen and build relationships with corporate partners. Her background is in nonprofit advocacy and communication with specialized experience in development and digital strategy. Prior to CTG, Priya led and expanded GLAAD's membership program in her role as Senior Membership Manager. She has also worked to advance fundraising goals for large-scale nonprofits like March of Dimes and World Food Program in addition to focusing on community engagement for smaller, direct service organizations. Her interests are in social impact and change, intersectional feminism, and pop culture. Priya holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Florida and a Master of Arts in Media and Communications from Florida State University. She resides in Los Angeles with her husband and two cats, Baby Monkey and Padma.

**Ayu Tanaka** (she/her) is the co-founder of Happy Hour Fund (@happyhourfund), a mutual aid organization that she started to provide financial aid to excluded workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since its inception in March 2020, HHF has raised and redistributed over \$45,000 to excluded workers in Los Angeles County and the Washington metropolitan area. She is also the Communications Coordinator at Center Theatre Group.

Ayu graduated from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., with a major in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and a minor in American Studies.

**Janelle Cabrera Torres** is the Senior Tessitura Database and Website Administrator for Center Theatre Group. She has held various roles on The Music Center campus, which began as an usher, where she quickly became a supervisor at Walt Disney Concert Hall for the Guest Services Department. While majoring in Computer Information Systems at California State University, Los Angeles, Janelle began her IT career at the Los Angeles Opera as a Database Support Technician where she assisted in managing the website and Tessitura consortium, which included LA Opera, The Music Center and the LA Master Chorale. Prior to CTG, she was the Manager for Digital Initiatives for The Music Center's Marketing department overseeing the website, email communication and ticketing system. In 2018, she joined CTG's IT department where she oversees the website, has launched new software and equipment and assists in the management of CTG's ticketing and fundraising software, Tessitura. Janelle adores musical theatre and believes her Mexican heritage adds to the essence of her life and career. A Northeast Los Angeles native, she and her husband welcomed their first child in October 2020 and are preparing for life with a toddler.