

For immediate release

SNEHAL DESAI WILL BE THE NEXT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF CENTER THEATRE GROUP

Desai joins Center Theatre Group following seven years as Producing Artistic Director of L.A.'s historic East West Players

Snehal Desai will become the next artistic director of Los Angeles' **Center Theatre Group (CTG)**, joining Managing Director / CEO **Meghan Pressman** to lead one of the nation's largest theatre organizations. Desai's appointment follows a national search led by **Arts Consulting Group (ACG)** and an internal Search Committee comprised of members of CTG's Board, under the leadership of Search Chair Gail Berman, Board President Amy Forbes, and Managing Director / CEO Meghan Pressman. Desai will join the company in August of this year. Desai currently serves as Producing Artistic Director of L.A.'s historic East West Players (EWP), where he has led the company since 2016. His first public appearance as the incoming artistic director will be at Center Theatre Group's "Light Up Los Angeles" Gala at the Mark Taper Forum this Saturday, April 15.

In 2021 — after Artistic Director Michael Ritchie announced his departure — CTG engaged ACG to partner on the widest and most equitable search possible for a new artistic director. They began with an exploration and alignment of the company's mission and values, including dialogue with internal and external stakeholders, and comments and perspectives from more than 800 individuals who participated in written surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one conversations. The results were distilled into a detailed job description, including the core competencies and qualities needed for CTG's next artistic director to succeed.

In August of 2022, CTG shared the artistic director profile widely in partnership with ACG and opened the application period for candidate submissions. Over 100 applications were received, of these, about 30 applicants were interviewed, sending more than a dozen qualified candidates on to the CTG Search Committee. After speaking to each of these candidates, semi-finalists, and, subsequently, finalists were chosen from the group of applicants. The finalists spoke extensively with ACG, the Search Committee, and multiple groups of stakeholders within the Center Theatre Group community. In March of 2023, the Search Committee met to deliberate and make their recommendation to the Board of Directors, who in turn voted unanimously to appoint Snehal Desai as the company's next artistic director.

"Center Theatre Group is a cultural force in the American theatre, and I am honored to be its next artistic director. CTG's vibrant legacy has been built by being the home for the preeminent

theatrical artists of our time and the next great American play. I am humbled by the opportunity to enrich that legacy by uplifting and centering the diverse and thriving communities that comprise the beating heart of Los Angeles. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that comes with the rarest of gifts for an Angeleno — an even shorter morning commute,” said incoming Center Theatre Group Artistic Director Snehal Desai. “I look forward to working with Center Theatre Group’s board, artists, staff, and patrons in ensuring that CTG is a vital, timely, and relevant cultural home for all of Los Angeles.”

As Producing Artistic Director of East West Players, the largest and longest running Asian American theatre in the country, Snehal Desai produced and directed three of the highest-grossing and most-attended shows in EWP's 57-year history including the post-Broadway premiere of “Allegiance” starring George Takei. During his tenure at East West Players, Desai led co-productions with Center Theatre Group, Pasadena Playhouse, Rogue Artists Ensemble, the Los Angeles LGBT Center, The Robey Theatre Company, The Fountain Theatre, API Rise, the Japanese American Cultural Community Center and TAIKOPROJECT. East West Players' collaboration with singer/songwriter Daniel Ho was nominated for a 2022 Grammy Award. As an artistic leader, Snehal has sought to raise awareness of social issues that affect Angelenos through impactful and empowering storytelling.

A Paul & Daisy Soros Fellow and the recipient of a Tanne Foundation Award, Desai was in the inaugural class of Theatre Communications Group’s (TCG) “Spark” Leadership Program and the first recipient of the Drama League’s Classical Directing Fellowship. He was named by LA Weekly as one of its people of the year in 2018 and received L.A.’s Heritage of Pride Award in 2021. Desai has served on the boards of the Consortium of Asian American Theaters & Artists (CAATA), Theatre Communications Group, and Los Feliz Charter School for the Arts (LFCSA). He currently serves on the board of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT). Desai has been on the faculty of USC's graduate program in Arts Leadership and is a graduate of Emory University and received his MFA in Directing from the Yale School of Drama.

“Words cannot truly express just how elated I am to have Snehal join me in leadership at Center Theatre Group,” shared Pressman. “I first met Snehal in graduate school, and I have watched him in admiration navigate a career that established his reputation as being both an extraordinarily talented and passionate artist, as well as an innovative and fearless leader. As we embark on a new chapter, I look forward to no longer having to simply admire his work from afar, but to get to work alongside Snehal to carry on the great legacy of Center Theatre Group, while creating a theatre that is built not just for this moment, but also for the future.”

The search for a new visionary artistic leader at CTG was guided by the company’s core values: Artistic Ambition; Artistic Identity, Risk-Taking and Innovation; Centering Los Angeles; Lifelong Learning, Inspiration, and Human Connection; and Respect, Compassion, Social Conscience, and Anti-Racism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. These values were created in dialogue with the CTG and greater Los Angeles communities.

“When we created the Search Committee for Center Theatre Group’s new artistic director, we cast a wide net, conducting an expansive search for our next visionary leader,” explained Search Chair Gail Berman. “Ultimately, we received more than 100 applications from both across this

country and abroad. But when it was all said and done, we are delighted to have found our next artistic director right in our own backyard. Snehal was chosen for his articulation and commitment to these values, as well as his artistic vision for the organization. The work Snehal has been doing just down the street as Producing Artistic Director of East West Players has been nothing short of astonishing, and we are overjoyed to welcome him to our Center Theatre Group family.”

Both the Search Committee and Board of Directors recognize the challenge ahead, coming off one of the hardest chapters in the history of not just Los Angeles theatre, but theatre around the globe – and they were committed to appointing a leader who has the experience and thoughtful determination to pave the way forward.

“I am pleased to welcome Snehal as our new artistic leader,” added Center Theatre Group Board President Amy Forbes. “He’s an ideal and invigorating leader for this inflection point in Center Theatre Group’s history, as we navigate the hard realities of the post-pandemic theatrical landscape. We need to get folks back experiencing shows. We need to retain and grow audiences and remind people of the excitement that is live theatre. And we need to engage with the entire Los Angeles County. Snehal impressed us all with his thoughtful and entertaining vision for the future. He is bold and resourceful and has done an amazing job at East West Players. We know he’ll bring that same exuberance and energy to our stages. He has long committed himself to Los Angeles, and we know he will continue to rally this city and undauntedly chart our course forward, both locally and nationally. He is the perfect partner for our fabulous Managing Director / CEO, Meghan Pressman, who has courageously led us through the most challenging period in the theatre’s history and can now look toward the future with an exciting new artistic partner. I personally look forward to working with them both and making exciting things happen.”

Desai is no stranger to Center Theatre Group audiences, and a longtime admirer of both the organization and the artistic vision established by Founding Artistic Director Gordon Davidson. During his tenure at East West Players, Desai helped shepherd “Soft Power” at the Ahmanson Theatre and the recent “Kristina Wong, Sweatshop Overlord” at the Kirk Douglas Theatre, both co-productions with CTG. In addition, Desai has worked closely with many artists who have also called Center Theatre Group home throughout the years. He is looking forward to honoring the institution’s past while also leading it into a new era.

As Berman noted, “In his meetings with the Search Committee, the Board, and members of the Center Theatre Group staff, Snehal articulated a vision that is firmly grounded in the type of entertaining programming CTG has become known and celebrated for, while also presenting a well-rounded scope of new programming ideas that will appeal to a broad range of audiences and across all three of CTG’s unique stages.”

“I couldn’t be more excited that Snehal Desai has been tapped to lead Center Theatre Group into its thrilling next chapter,” said Playwright David Henry Hwang. “Having worked with Snehal as Literary Manager during East West Players’ excellent production of ‘Chinglish,’ and most recently as a co-producer of ‘Soft Power,’ I am deeply impressed by his intelligence, artistic voice, expansive vision, and kindness. Snehal will be a transformative artistic director for Center

Theatre Group, one who knows that true artistic excellence will not be achieved until all have equal opportunity to rise.”

Larissa FastHorse, an L.A.-based playwright whose “The Thanksgiving Play” opens on Broadway on April 20, and whose world premiere play, “Fake It Until You Make It,” will close out the Mark Taper Forum season in August, could not agree more. “I’m thrilled with the choice of Snehal to lead Center Theatre Group,” she said. “His history of championing a wide breadth of voices, like mine, as well as giving new life to classic work, is an exciting vision for the premier theatre company of our beautiful city.”

Arts Consulting Group is the leading provider of hands-on interim management, executive search, revenue enhancement, strategic planning & community engagement, and facilities & program planning services for the arts and culture industry. ACG consultants are located in communities throughout North America to best serve the needs of our clients. ACG team members have decades of combined senior leadership experience in every artistic and cultural discipline and area of functional management expertise. As specialists in the management of arts and cultural institutions who are personally and passionately committed to the creative industries, we are recognized internationally for our expertise, personalized approach, and extraordinary results.

Center Theatre Group, one of the nation’s preeminent arts and cultural organizations, is Los Angeles’ leading not-for-profit theatre company, which under the leadership of Managing Director / CEO Meghan Pressman and Producing Director Douglas C. Baker, and in collaboration with the four Associate Artistic Directors, Lindsay Allbaugh, Tyrone Davis, Neel Keller, and Kelley Kirkpatrick, 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 country’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 circumstances to serve Los Angeles. Founded in 1967, Center Theatre Group was led by Founding Artistic Director Gordon Davidson until 2005 when Michael Ritchie was the artistic director until his retirement in 2021; Snehal Desai has been appointed the organization’s next artistic director and will begin in August of 2023. Center Theatre Group has produced more than 700 productions across its three stages, including such iconic shows as “Zoot Suit;” “Angels in America;” “The Kentucky Cycle;” “Biloxi Blues;” “Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992;” “Children of a Lesser God;” “Curtains;” “The Drowsy Chaperone;” “9 to 5: The Musical;” and “Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo.” [CenterTheatreGroup.org](https://www.CenterTheatreGroup.org)

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