

GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

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“BACKSTAGE AT THE GEFFEN” RAISES \$1 MILLION TO BENEFIT ARTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT

DEBBIE ALLEN AND GREG BERLANTI WERE HONORED AT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

SURPRISE CELEBRITY GUEST APPEARANCES INCLUDED ADAM KANTOR, DAVID KWONG, JAY LENO, MIMI ROGERS AND JULIA SWEENEY

LOS ANGELES (May 22, 2023) – Geffen Playhouse raised \$1 million for the theater’s education, community engagement and artistic initiatives at its signature *Backstage at the Geffen* annual fundraiser held May 20, it was announced today. Emmy-winning cinematographer **John Simmons** presented the Distinction in Theater Award to Emmy-winning actor, director and choreographer **Debbie Allen**, and *All American* executive producer **Nkechi Okoro Carroll** presented the Distinction in Service Award to WGA, DGA, Golden Globe, and Emmy-nominated writer, director, and producer **Greg Berlanti**.

The evening of unscripted, unannounced storytellers and performers was hosted for a third consecutive year by comedian, actor, writer and producer **Tone Bell** and featured personal behind-the-scenes anecdotes from a lineup of surprise celebrity guests including **Jay Leno**, **Mimi Rogers**, **Julia Sweeney** and magician and *The New York Times* crossword constructor **David Kwong**, who also led the audience in solving a bespoke crossword puzzle he created for *Backstage at the Geffen*. Welcoming the crowd was Geffen Playhouse Executive Director Gil Cates, Jr., who thanked the audience for their ongoing support of the arts and helping to keep storytelling alive on the Geffen stages for years to come.

The evening opened with a rousing performance by **The String Queens**, with a specially curated playlist that paid tribute to Debbie Allen and Greg Berlanti and their prolific careers. Praised for its authentic, soulful and orchestral sound, The String Queens is a dynamic trio that creates stimulating musical experiences that inspire diverse audiences to love, hope, feel and imagine. Next up for the audience was a raucous, irreverent set from the raucous and irreverent **Broadway Barbara** (aka Barbara Dixon). According to Dixon, she is no mere entertainer; she is the living, breathing, dancing, screaming embodiment of entertainment itself. The evening came to a close with an original song written for *Backstage at the Geffen* by Grammy and Emmy winner **Adam Kantor** and composer **Matt Gould**, who also performed the piece with Kantor on vocals and Gould accompanying on piano.

Backstage at the Geffen recognizes the accomplishments of leaders in the artistic community, supports the theater’s mission to produce original, quality work and raises funds for its education and community

engagement programs, which bring live theater to more than 15,000 youth, seniors and veterans in communities across Los Angeles.

Debbie Allen – Distinction in Theater Award

Debbie Allen, a B.F.A. graduate of Howard University in Theater and Classical Greek Studies, holds five honorary Doctorate degrees, has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, was named a Kennedy Center honoree, and is an award-winning director/choreographer who has choreographed the Academy Awards a record ten times. She has directed and choreographed for legendary artists such as Michael Jackson, Mariah Carey, James Earl Jones, Phylicia Rashad, Janet Jackson, Whitney Houston, Gwen Verdon, Lena Horne, Sammy Davis, Jr., Dolly Parton, Savion Glover, and most recently Tyler Perry's *A Jazzman's Blues*. Ms. Allen received the Golden Globe for her role as Lydia Grant in the 1980s hit series *Fame*, the Drama Desk Award for her portrayal of Anita in *West Side Story*, and is a four-time Emmy Award winner in Choreography for *Fame* (twice), *The Motown 25th*, and *Christmas on the Square*. She has also received the Emmy Award for Outstanding Movie Made for Television as Executive Producer of *Christmas on the Square*, and the Governors Award at the 73rd Emmys. Awarded ten Image Awards as director, actress, choreographer and producer for *Fame*, *A Different World*, *Motown 25th*, *The Academy Awards*, *The Debbie Allen Special*, and *Amistad*, she has also directed the best that TV offers, including *Scandal*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, *Jane the Virgin*, *Empire*, *Insecure*, *Ms. Pat*, and Samuel L. Jackson's *The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey*. She currently serves as Executive Producing Director of *Grey's Anatomy*, where she recurs as Dr. Catherine Fox. She is the daughter of poet Vivian Ayers and Dr. Andrew Allen, wife to NBA All-Star Norman Nixon, sister to Phylicia Rashad, Tex Allen, and Hugh Allen, mother of Vivian and Thump, and grandmother of Shiloh and Aviah.

Greg Berlanti – Distinction in Service Award

WGA, DGA, Golden Globe, and Emmy nominated writer, director, and producer, Greg Berlanti, is the force behind some of the most creative and acclaimed works in film and television. He began his career in television as a staff writer on the hit show *Dawson's Creek* and became an executive producer and showrunner of the series after only one year on staff. Since then, Berlanti has served as creator, writer, and producer behind several of the most inventive and biggest hits on television, including *Everwood*, *Brothers & Sisters*, *Political Animals*, *Arrow*, *Blindspot*, *The Flash*, *Supergirl*, *You*, *Riverdale*, *Titans*, *Doom Patrol*, *All American*, and *The Flight Attendant*. For the past few years, Berlanti Productions has had as many as 15 shows on the air at one time—a record breaking number of shows to air at one time for a TV producer and creator. Berlanti made his film directorial debut in 2000 with *The Broken Hearts Club*. He also directed the critically acclaimed film, *Love, Simon*, and he is currently directing *Project Artemis*, starring Channing Tatum and Scarlett Johansson for Apple Original Films. Berlanti has produced numerous feature films including the recently released *My Policeman* for Amazon, starring Harry Styles and Emma Corrin; Jennifer Kent's *Alice & Freda Forever*; HBO Max's *Moonshot*; Rachel Lee Goldenberg's *Unpregnant*; Shawn Levy's *Free Guy*, and the upcoming adaptation of *Red, White and Royal Blue* directed by Matthew López. The film division of his company, Berlanti/Schechter Films, has an exclusive first-look feature film deal with Netflix. Berlanti was included in *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2020. He currently resides in Los Angeles with his husband and two children.

UCLA Health served as Title Sponsor for *Backstage at the Geffen*, marking its third consecutive sponsorship of the theater's annual fundraiser.

City National Bank and The Adi and Jerry Greenberg Foundation served as Presenting Sponsors, continuing longstanding relationships with Geffen Playhouse.

The Event Committee included Merle Dandridge, Adi Greenberg, Loretta Everett Kaufman, Linda Bernstein Rubin and Marc Weinstock.

The Honorary Host Committee included Calista Flockhart and Harrison Ford, Cindy and Alan Horn, Quincy Jones, Gloria Calderón Kellett and David Kellett, Sherry Lansing, Lyn and Norman Lear, Fay and Frank Mancuso*, Rita Moreno, Bruce* & Madeline Ramer, Jazmyn Simon and Dulé Hill, and Rita Wilson and Tom Hanks. **Founding Trustees.*

The pre-show reception and dinner featured design elements by Derrick Lemont Johnson – Interior and Event Design, florals by Vida en Bloom, and spirits sponsored by House of Suntory.

A silent auction was held and included unique one-of-a-kind items and experiences, as well as hotel packages provided by *Backstage at the Geffen* supporters including the Four Seasons Resort Maui, Fairmont Empress in Victoria BC, and Petrossian.

ABOUT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays, provocative new works and second productions, the not-for-profit organization continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates and is currently helmed by Executive Director Gil Cates, Jr. and Board Chair Adi Greenberg. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains extensive education and community engagement programs, designed to involve underserved young people and the community at large in the arts. www.geffenplayhouse.org

ABOUT CITY NATIONAL BANK

With \$95.9 billion in assets, City National Bank provides banking, investment and trust services through 69 branches, including 22 full-service regional centers, in Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, Nevada, New York City, Nashville, Atlanta, Washington, D.C. and Miami*. In addition, the company and its investment affiliates manage or administer \$88.2 billion in client investment assets. City National is a subsidiary of Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), one of the world's leading diversified financial services companies. RBC serves more than 17 million personal, business, public sector and institutional clients through offices in Canada, the United States and 27 other countries. For more information about City National, visit the company's website at cnb.com. **City National Bank does business in Miami and the state of Florida as CN Bank.*

ABOUT UCLA HEALTH

UCLA Health is where discovery leads to world-class care. Among the world's most comprehensive academic health systems, UCLA Health's mission is to provide state-of-the-art patient care, support pioneering research and train top medical professionals. It includes four hospitals on two campuses — [Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center](#), [UCLA Mattel Children's Hospital](#), and the [UCLA Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital](#), in the Westwood area of Los Angeles, and [UCLA Santa Monica Medical Center](#) – and more than 250 community clinics across Southern California. UCLA Health hospitals are ranked in the country's top 5 by U.S. News & World Report, and for 33 consecutive years have appeared on the national honor roll of only 20 hospitals providing the highest-quality care. UCLA Health also includes the [David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA](#). Visit uclahealth.org

ABOUT ADI AND JERRY GREENBERG

Adi Greenberg joined the Geffen Playhouse Board of Directors in 2009 and currently serves as its Chair. She became a theater actress at the age of six, appearing in numerous productions regionally and in New York. After completing her B.A. in theater at Barnard College, Columbia University, she moved to Los Angeles where she pursued a successful career in television and film. In addition to the Board of the Geffen Playhouse, Ms. Greenberg serves on the Board of No Limits for Deaf Children and Families, a nonprofit that teaches underserved deaf children and their families the skills to succeed in school and in life through its after-school educational centers and distinguished theater arts program, promoting advocacy and awareness worldwide. A mother of three, Ms. Greenberg currently resides in Santa Monica, CA with her husband and children.

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