



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**GUTHRIE AWARDED \$1 MILLION GRANT FROM  
THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION  
IN SUPPORT OF GROUNDBREAKING 'LEVEL NINE INITIATIVE'**

**Artistic Director Joseph Haj lays groundwork for a vital theatrical hub on the Guthrie's ninth floor—an intersection between art that addresses important questions of the day and dynamic community dialogue.**

**The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's largest award in Guthrie history will support the initiative over a three-year period.**

**All tickets on the ninth floor will be reduced to \$9, establishing greater access for all.**

*(Minneapolis/St. Paul)*—The Guthrie Theater today announced it has been awarded a \$1 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to underwrite a groundbreaking initiative for the theater's entire ninth floor, home to the 200-seat Dowling Studio, the Citizens of Minnesota Overlook – a signature feature of the lobby known as the “amber box” – and a unique retractable wall that unifies the performance space with its lobby. The six-pronged initiative, conceptualized by Artistic Director Joseph Haj, emphasizes the creation of a theater that wrestles with urgent questions and inspires dynamic dialogue with its audience, expands the diversity of voices, visions and styles on its stages, and engages community members currently underserved by its work.

With the investment of \$750,000 over a three-year period, and an additional \$250,000 through a matching grant, the Guthrie will implement Haj's vision for Level Nine beginning in the 2016-2017 season, his first fully-curated lineup as the theater's leader. What the Guthrie learns through innovative programming there will inform future work on all Guthrie stages and its relationships with other arts organizations and the community.

“Former Guthrie Artistic Director Liviu Ciulei once said that a community can be measured by the questions its theater asks,” said Haj. “In devising this initiative we have allowed that thought to be our guiding principle.”

He added, “In today's world we face increasingly complex questions, yet we have fewer places where we can come together as a community to grapple with and address them. With this funding we are afforded the opportunity to be nimble and responsive to what's happening in the world around us. We are deeply

grateful to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its support of this endeavor.”

### **Haj's initiative encompasses six key elements:**

#### **Access and Engagement**

To ensure access for all communities and that cost is minimized as a barrier to entry, the ticket price for all performances on Level Nine will be set at a deeply discounted rate of \$9. In addition, the Guthrie will appoint a Director of Community Engagement who will conceive, develop, implement and oversee community-based programming to meaningfully connect the Guthrie with communities currently underserved by its work.

#### **Guthrie Productions**

The Guthrie will program three to four shows during each of its next three seasons, either self-produced or presentations of work by national or international companies, and will engage members of the audience at each performance in a pre- or post-show event inspired by the work. Physical upgrades to the Level Nine lobby will be made to better host conversations and salon-style gatherings, shifting the audience experience from mono-directional performance into a shared space for community engagement and dialogue.

In 2016-2017 the Guthrie will produce three plays in the Dowling Studio, including Jeanne Sakata's *Hold These Truths* which explores the life and legacy of Gordon Hirabayashi, a survivor of the Japanese Internment Camps and posthumous winner of the Presidential Medal of Honor; Frank Boyd's *The Holler Sessions*, a “live radio show” and kind of fever dream of a radio DJ as he explores the lineage of jazz; and Jackie Sibblies Drury's *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Südwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915*, a bracing piece that follows a group of six actors attempting to create a play about genocide, while simultaneously exposing their own deep-seated prejudices.

#### **New Play Development**

The Guthrie will commission a major work by an accomplished playwright each year for the next three seasons, creating texts that address pressing questions about individual and societal challenges. Community members and local artists will have opportunities to engage with these new works as they evolve through participation in readings and workshops.

For 2016-2017 the Guthrie has commissioned playwright and American Records' founding CEO **KJ Sanchez** to create a documentary play about refugees, immigrants and support or opposition of their resettlement in the Twin Cities. Based on extensive interviews with a multitude of unheard voices, Sanchez will construct a script to pose critical questions: who are we as Americans as defined by how we accept or refuse refuge to immigrants? What are the risks? What are the gains? Who are these refugees and why do they come to us for help? How is immigration in Minnesota different or the same today as it was decades ago?

Sanchez's work has been produced at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Baltimore's Center Stage, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Two River Theater Company, Round House Theatre, Cornerstone Theater Company, and HERE Arts Center (NYC), among others. Sanchez's play *ReEntry*, based on interviews with US Marines and their families, has toured to theaters and military sites across the country since 2010. She premiered *X's and O's* – a piece about the NFL concussion crisis based on interviews with former professional football players – at Berkeley Rep in January 2015.

### **Devised Theater Ensembles**

The Guthrie will identify and host a devised theater ensemble—based on their commitment to making plays that wrestle with the pressing questions of our time—each year for the next three seasons. Devising ensembles, which start their work with no script, are some of the most dynamic and relevant companies in the field today. This residency will provide salaries for the ensemble members as well as rehearsal space, administrative support and other meaningful resources of the Guthrie. Artistic colleagues will be invited to engage with and learn from the devised theater ensembles in residence through workshops, lectures and observation of open rehearsals. In 2016-2017 the Guthrie will host The Moving Company, core members of the legendary Theatre de la Jeune Lune, as they workshop, rehearse, and later produce the world premiere of *Refugia* on the McGuire Proscenium Stage.

### **Local and Regional Productions**

The Guthrie will continue to identify local or regional companies to present work in the Dowling Studio during each of its next three seasons. Companies will receive support from the Guthrie, and will be in residence during the rehearsal and performance period. These companies and initiatives will be chosen on the basis of their capacity to ask questions that inspire community conversation. Projects will be announced this spring.

### **“Happenings” in Response to Current Events**

The Guthrie will offer “happenings” – periodic events that may include conversations, town hall meetings, salons, dance parties, performances and readings that are responsive to local and national current events and immediately relevant to the world around us. Level Nine will be a space where history in the making is tracked.

### **THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION**

Founded in 1969, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation endeavors to strengthen, promote, and, where necessary, defend the contributions of the humanities and the arts to human flourishing and to the well-being of diverse and democratic societies by supporting exemplary institutions of higher education and culture as they renew and provide access to an invaluable heritage of ambitious, path-breaking work.

**THE GUTHRIE THEATER** (Joseph Haj, Artistic Director) was founded by Sir Tyrone Guthrie in 1963 and is an American center for theater performance, production, education and professional training, dedicated to producing the great works of dramatic literature and to cultivating the next generation of theater artists. Under Haj’s leadership, the Guthrie produces a mix of classic and contemporary plays on three stages, and continues to set a national standard for excellence in theatrical production and performance. In 2006, the Guthrie opened its new home on the banks of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. Designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Jean Nouvel, the Guthrie Theater houses three state-of-the-art stages, production facilities, classrooms, full-service restaurants and dramatic public lobbies. [guthrietheater.org](http://guthrietheater.org)

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