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**JOSÉ LUIS VALENZUELA AWARDED WITH
STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS FOUNDATION (SDCF) GORDON
DAVIDSON AWARD FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AND DISTINGUISHED
SERVICE IN THE AMERICAN THEATRE**

(New York, February 20, 2025) Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation (SDCF), the not-for-profit foundation of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), announced today that director **José Luis Valenzuela** has received its 2024 Gordon Davidson Award. Named in honor of the founding artistic director of Los Angeles's Center Theatre Group and one of the visionary leaders of the resident theatre movement **Gordon Davidson**, the award recognizes a director or choreographer for lifetime achievement and distinguished service in the national not-for-profit theatre. The award will be presented to Valenzuela at a ceremony in the Spring.

The selection committee was chaired by **Neel Keller**, former Associate Artistic Director of Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles. He said in a statement:

“José Luis Valenzuela is a Los Angeles institution and an irrepressible force in the American Theatre. The Gordon Davidson Committee is thrilled that this award can celebrate his artistic achievements, legacy of mentorship, and dedication to the city that he and Gordon loved so much. Like Gordon, José Luis is an artist, a mentor, a teacher, a passionate advocate, and an engaged citizen. He has directed acclaimed productions throughout our regional theatre and internationally. He has supported generations of theatre artists and students who have gone on to dazzle and challenge audiences around the globe. He has built a vibrant, important theatre company. He has championed civic investment in the arts, making a powerful statement about the theatre's importance at the center of civic life and dialogue.

José Luis's boundless energy and passion for the theatre have allowed him to serve simultaneously, and for many years, as the Artistic Director of the Latino Theater Company (LTC), and The Los Angeles Theatre Center (LATC), while also serving as a Distinguished Professor and served as Head of the MFA Directing program at UCLA's School of Theater, Film & Television. As a founder of the Latino Theatre Lab at LATC and the Latino Theater Initiative at the Mark Taper Forum, as well as Producer of the national and international Encuentro Festivals he has changed engrained notions of

how theatre is made, who can make it, and who it is for. Over more than four decades he has used theatre to uplift and inspire community. He has been a living example of how creativity and inclusion can amplify voices, strengthen institutions, and improve our quality of life. The Gordon Davidson committee cannot think of anyone more deserving of this award. We congratulate José Luis and join the field in thanking him for a lifetime of remarkable service and achievement.”

Valenzuela shared in a statement in response to receiving the award, “Gordon Davison was a mentor, friend, and a significant part of my life and career. I had the privilege of working with him for five years at CTG. He was incredibly knowledgeable about theater, community, and people. We had numerous discussions about our work, shared our thoughts and ideas, and reached agreements and disagreements. We had a special relationship as theater makers who shared a passion for the art form and a commitment to its impact on society. He emphasized the importance of creating “theater that matters” and letting the world see it.

When I resigned from the Mark Taper, he was disappointed. But we managed to navigate through the situation, and I was overjoyed to see him come to see my work and continue our conversations. He was curious about my artistic and cultural development. He visited the LATC when we acquired the theater to congratulate me and then asked, “Where are you going to get the money to run it?” We laughed when I replied that I didn’t know.

I consider Gordon to be one of the great leaders and a pillar in the American Theater and I am honored to receive this award. I am proud to be part of such a brilliant and incredible group of recipients before me and want to express my gratitude to the committee that supported my nomination. I am having a Sally Field moment.”

Keller was joined on the selection committee by **Sheldon Epps**, Artistic Director Emeritus of Pasadena Playhouse; **Michael John Garcés**, Artistic Director Emeritus of Cornerstone Theatre Company; **Laura Penn**, Executive Director of SDC; **Lisa Peterson**, Resident Director at the Mark Taper Forum from 1995 to 2005; and **Warner Shook**, who directed Davidson’s final Taper production. **Rachel Davidson**, daughter to Gordon Davidson, served as an advisor.

The Gordon Davidson Award has previously been presented to **Oskar Eustis** (2018), **Lisa Peterson** (2019), **Seret Scott** (2020), **Emily Mann** (2021), **Donald Byrd** (2022), and **Anne Bogart** (2023).

BIOGRAPHIES

José Luis Valenzuela is the Artistic Director of the Latino Theater Company (LTC) and the Los Angeles Theatre Center (LATC). He is a UCLA Distinguished Professor Emeritus and served as head of the MFA directing program at UCLA’s School of Theater, Film & Television. Valenzuela is an award-winning theater director and has been a visionary and advocate for Chicanx/Latinx Theater for over 40 years. His artistic career is rooted in art and service to the Los Angeles community. He has directed critically acclaimed productions both internationally and nationally including at the LATC where he created the Latino Theatre Lab in 1985 (now the Latino Theater Company) and the Mark Taper Forum where he

established the Latino Theater Initiative in 1991. Now in its 40th year, the Latino Theater Company is considered one of the best ensembles in the American Theater and runs one of the most vibrant theater centers in the country.

As the Artistic Director of the Latino Theater Company and the LATC, he has developed its artistic vision and organizational mission of producing programming that represents the diversity of Los Angeles on and behind the stage and its groundbreaking initiatives in support Latinx theater companies, playwrights, and students. These initiatives include the National Latinx Theater Initiative, Circle of Imaginistas, Impact Theater Initiative and a robust theater education and training program for college and high school students. He envisioned and led the National/International theater festivals *Encuentro 2014*, *Encuentro de las Americas in 2017* and *Encuentro 2024*. He has inspired countless theater makers with his innovative approach and created traditions such as the annual holiday pageant, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *Dios Inantzin* at Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral now in its 21st year, free for all Angelenos.

His artistic vision and community commitment has garnered distinction from the City of Los Angeles and the State of California; and the Ann C. Rosenfield Distinguished Community Partnership Award and the Hispanic Heritage Month Local Hero of the Year Award sponsored by Union Bank and KCET – both awards recognize distinguished individuals for their contributions to improving the quality of life throughout their respective communities. Valenzuela also serves on the national Steering Committee of the Latinx Theatre Commons.

You can read more about Valenzuela’s illustrious career and accomplishments on [our website](#).

Gordon Davidson (1933-2016) was the founding artistic director of Los Angeles’s Mark Taper Forum, which he led from 1967 to 2005, as well as artistic director of the Ahmanson Theatre from 1989 to 2005. In 2004 Davidson produced the inaugural season at the Kirk Douglas Theatre. Under his leadership, numerous works were developed or made their premieres in Los Angeles, including *Zoot Suit*, *Angels in America*, *The Shadow Box*, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, *Jelly’s Last Jam*, and *Children of a Lesser God*. The Taper received the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1977, and Davidson received the Tony as Best Director of a Play for *Children of a Lesser God* in 1980. He was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 2000. He began his career as a stage manager and briefly served as managing director for the Theatre Group at UCLA.

Founded in 1965, **Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation (SDCF)** celebrates, develops, and supports professional stage directors and choreographers throughout every phase of their careers. SDCF works to build a theatrical community that reflects the cultural, racial, and gender diversity of our nation by creating opportunities for artists of all backgrounds to bring their full, authentic selves to their work as creative leaders in the theatre. SDCF’s goals are to provide opportunities to practice the crafts of directing and choreography; to gather and disseminate craft and career information; to promote the profession to emerging talent; to provide opportunities for exchange of knowledge among directors and choreographers; to increase the awareness of the value of directors’ and choreographers’ work; and to convene around issues affecting theatre artists. sdcfoundation.org.

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