



**02 October 2014**

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**STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS FOUNDATION  
AWARDS THE ZELDA FICHANDLER AWARD TO**

**JOSEPH HAJ  
OF PLAYMAKERS REPERTORY COMPANY, CHAPEL HILL, NC**

**COMMITTEE NAMES FINALISTS**

**TRACY BRIGDEN, STEVEN COSSON, KWAME KWEI-ARMAH, PRESTON LANE, BONNIE J. MONTE**

Joseph Haj, Producing Artistic Director of PlayMakers Repertory Company in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, is the 2014 recipient of The Zelda Fichandler Award, an award to recognize an outstanding director or choreographer who is transforming the regional arts landscape through imaginative, brave work in theatre. The \$5,000 award, given by Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation, heralds both accomplishment to date and promise for the future, and lauds deep commitment to a community.

Since 2006 Joseph Haj has been Producing Artistic Director of PlayMakers Repertory Company in Chapel Hill and has a long history working in regional theatre, from the Guthrie to Actors Theatre of Louisville to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. As one of the few Arab-American artistic directors in the country, Mr. Haj has worked to transform the stage at PlayMakers into a place of diversity and inclusion. In addition to his tremendous output in professional theatre environments, he has also made work with non-professionals in maximum security prisons, in the West Bank in Gaza, and in rural South Carolina. In his time at PlayMakers, Mr. Haj has dedicated himself to communicating with his community, giving them tools to engage with the diverse programming of the theatre and educating audiences with outreach initiatives. He has defined the community of PlayMakers as a series of concentric circles from the artists and staff, widening to the larger university community, then the Chapel Hill region, and then the nation.

A review committee selected Mr. Haj from nominees living and working in the Eastern region of the United States. Selection Committee Chairperson Sharon Ott states, "This year the selection committee reviewed a record 63 nominations for the Zelda Fichandler Award, and I think it is a statement to the growing understanding in the field about how significant it is for artists to have deep, meaningful relationships with their communities. We were impressed and deeply moved by the strong commitments these artists have made to their regions. In this stellar group, Joseph Haj's exemplary artistry, diverse and exciting programming choices, and deep commitment to the arts in North Carolina made him the unanimous choice for this prestigious award."

Upon hearing of his receiving this award, Mr. Haj stated, "I am deeply touched and honored to be selected for this award by my peers. To be given an award bearing Zelda Fichandler's name is more than an accolade, it's a call to excellence; and I will strive to live up to its charge."

This year's Fichandler Selection Committee included Karen Azenberg, Dorothy Holland, Mara Isaacs, Mark Lamos, Michael Maso, Robert O'Hara, Sharon Ott (Chair), and KJ Sanchez. The Committee chose to honor five finalists in addition to Mr. Haj. Ott notes, "The Eastern region is rich with theatre and we were pleased to be able to acknowledge five significant directors as finalists: Tracy Brigden in Pittsburgh, Steven Cosson in New York City, Kwame Kwei-Armah in Baltimore, Preston Lane in Greensboro, NC, and Bonnie J. Monte in Madison, NJ. The committee considered each to be a strong candidate for this award for different reasons: Ms. Brigden for her transformation of the Pittsburgh theatre scene; Mr. Cosson for his passion in engaging deeply with the New York community on issues of social change; Mr. Kwei-Armah for his groundbreaking and adventuresome programming in Baltimore; Mr. Lane for his profound commitment to the regional stories of North Carolina; and Ms. Monte for her sustained and forward-thinking dedication to classical theatre and education in New Jersey.

In establishing this award named after Zelda Fichandler, a founder of the American regional theatre movement, SDCF recognizes the profound impact of the founders of regional theatre and honors their legacy. This award is given annually within rotating regions of the U.S. The Fichandler Award serves as a complement to the “Mr. Abbott” Award presented in recognition of lifetime achievement in theatre and the Joe A. Callaway Award for excellence in direction and choreography in New York City. The Zelda Fichandler Award will be presented alongside the Joe A. Callaway Awards this year on November 3 in New York City.

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**Joseph Haj** is the Producing Artistic Director of PlayMakers Repertory Company in Chapel Hill, NC, where he has directed *The Tempest*, *Metamorphoses*, *Cabaret*, *Henry IV & V*, *Amadeus*, *Pericles*, *Big River*, *Cyrano* (also adapted) and others. Joseph has directed and performed at theatres throughout the United States including the Guthrie Theater, the NY Public Theater, the Alley Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum, the Ahmanson, Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Folger Theatre, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and many others. He has worked overseas in Salzburg, Edinburgh, Paris, Berlin, Venice and Japan. Outside of traditional theatres, Joseph has directed projects in a maximum-security prison in Los Angeles and in Batesburg-Leesville, South Carolina, and has conducted workshops in the West Bank and Gaza and with the Oneida Nation outside Green Bay, WI. As an actor, Joseph has worked with many of the theatre's foremost directors including Garland Wright, Anne Bogart (as an original member of SITI Company), Peter Sellars, Sir Peter Hall, JoAnne Akalaitis, Robert Woodruff and others. Joseph has served on peer review panels for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and Theatre Communications Group (TCG), is the recipient of the NEA Millennium Grant awarded in 2000 to “fifty of America’s finest artists,” was a participant in the Career Development Program for Directors through TCG, and was named by *American Theatre* magazine as one of 25 theatre artists who will have a significant impact on the field over the next quarter century. His 2010 production of *Hamlet* at the Folger Theatre in Washington, DC was nominated for six Helen Hayes Awards, winning for Outstanding Production. Joseph has served on the Board of Directors of TCG, is a member of Under the Radar’s Director’s Circle, and serves on the Diversity Task Force for both the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) and the League of Resident Theatres (LORT).

**Zelda Fichandler** dedicated her early career to the establishment of America’s regional theatre movement. In 1950 she founded Washington D.C.’s Arena Stage and in 1968 she produced *The Great White Hope*, which became the first production to transfer from a regional theatre to Broadway, winning the Tony and the Pulitzer Prize, and launching the careers of James Earl Jones and Jane Alexander. Her production of *Inherit the Wind* toured Soviet St. Petersburg and Moscow and Arena Stage was the first American theatre company sponsored by the State Department to do so. Like many other regional theatres afterward, Arena Stage cultivated an evolving but resident company over the decades that included some of America’s best actors: Robert Prosky, Frances Sternhagen, George Grizzard, Philip Bosco, Ned Beatty, Roy Scheider, Robert Foxworth, Jane Alexander, James Earl Jones, Melinda Dillon, Dianne Wiest, Max Wright, Marilyn Caskey, Harriet Harris, and Tom Hewitt. In 1975 it was the first regional theatre to be recognized by the American Theatre Wing and the Broadway League with the Regional Theatre Tony Award for outstanding achievement. When Ms. Fichandler retired as producing artistic director of Arena Stage in 1990, she had achieved the longest tenure of any non-commercial producer in the annals of the American theater. Ms. Fichandler is Chair Emeritus of New York University’s acclaimed graduate acting program where she personally taught, guided, and inspired more than 500 acting students, including Marcia Gay Harden, Rainn Wilson, Billy Crudup, Debra Messing, Peter Krause, and Michael C. Hall. She has received the George Abbott Award, The Acting Company’s John Houseman Award, the Margo Jones Award, and the National Medal of Arts, and in 1999 she became the first artistic leader outside of New York to be inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.

Founded in 1965, **Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation** exists to foster, promote and develop the craft and creativity of stage directors and choreographers. 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; and to increase the awareness of the value of directors’ and choreographers’ work.

**Stage Directors and Choreographers Society** is a national theatrical labor union whose mission is to foster a national community of professional stage Directors and Choreographers by protecting the rights, health and livelihoods of all of its members; to facilitate the exchange of ideas, information and opportunities, while educating the current and future generations about the role of Directors and Choreographers and providing effective administration, negotiations and contractual support.

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