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SHELDON EPPS JOINS FORD'S THEATRE SOCIETY AS SENIOR ARTISTIC ADVISOR

Epps Joins Team as Theatre Reevaluates 2020-2021 Season

Washington, D.C.— Ford's Theatre Director Paul R. Tetreault today announced that Sheldon Epps will join the theatre's leadership team as Senior Artistic Advisor. Epps steps into the new role as the theatre reevaluates its 2020-2021 season amid the national reckoning for racial justice and the impacts of COVID-19 on live performances.

"I am thrilled to welcome Sheldon Epps to the Ford's Theatre family," said Tetreault. "D.C. audiences will know Sheldon from his 2019 production of *Twelve Angry Men*, when he gave new relevance to this iconic drama and its themes of racism in America. I have known Sheldon for more than 20 years and been an admirer of his work as a director and producer. Over the last several years, I have relied on his counsel not only for the works he has (and will) direct but also on his programming ideas and direction of the company. Sheldon's insight, leadership, talent and deep capacity for empathy will be vital to our path forward. As we revisit our 2020-2021 season, we commit to using our power to tell stories that speak to the present moment with courage, hope, inspiration, joy and healing. We rededicate ourselves to the great work that consumed Lincoln's life, building a more just and peaceful world, through the power of our creative voices."

"Over the past several years I have developed a richly rewarding connection to Paul and the staff at Ford's Theatre, which has enhanced my admiration for the theatre's long history and strong artistic reputation," Epps said. "It is very gratifying to be invited to join the artistic staff in this position. This will allow me the very welcome opportunity to build an even stronger

collaboration with Paul and the company. I believe that I can make important contributions as Ford's Theatre continues its already admirable efforts in the areas of diversity, inclusion and ongoing artistic excellence. I am especially happy to be of service at a time when all American theatres are exploring ways to transform today's challenges into creative opportunities for the future. I look forward to being an integral part of that valuable process."

"Since Sheldon first began working with Ford's, his work exemplified an immediate and innate understanding of our mission and the importance of the stories we choose to tell on our stage," added Ford's Theatre Deputy Director and Director of Programming Kristin Fox-Siegmund. "He quickly became a trusted advisor to our entire artistic team, and I am thrilled to continue expanding our relationship."

Epps joins an artistic programming team that includes Tetreault, Fox-Siegmund, Director of Artistic Programming José Carrasquillo, Program Operations and Music Manager Sarah R. Hewitt and Artistic Programming Manager Erika Scott.

In July, Ford's Theatre canceled its fall production of Horton Foote's *The Trip to Bountiful*. The Theatre continues to evaluate local health and safety guidelines and will announce plans for the rest of the 2020-2021 season in mid September. While the theatre is closed to on-site visits and programming, it continues to produce a variety of virtual programming, including:

- Cabinet Conversations: bi-weekly live streamed discussions featuring historians, artists and leaders; <https://www.fords.org/visit/virtual-events-and-special-tours/cabinet-conversations/>
- Virtual Play Readings: monthly live streamed readings of plays exploring history and the American experience; <https://www.fords.org/performances/current-and-upcoming/virtual-play-reading-series/>
- Distance-Learning Programs: through live video-conferencing, students learn the story of President Lincoln's assassination and the world of Civil War Washington <https://www.fords.org/for-teachers/programs/distance-learning/>

Sheldon Epps

Sheldon Epps was Artistic Director of the renowned Pasadena Playhouse for 20 years (1997-2017) and now serves the theatre as Artistic Director Emeritus. Before beginning his tenure at the Playhouse, he served as Associate Artistic Director of the Old Globe Theatre for four years.

He was also a co-founder of the Off-Broadway theatre The Production Company. Epps has directed both plays and musicals at many of the country's major theatres including the Roundabout, Manhattan Theatre Club, the Guthrie, Playwrights Horizons, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Arena Stage and the Goodman Theatre. He conceived the highly acclaimed musicals *Play On!* and *Blues In the Night*, which both received Tony Award nominations. He directed productions of both of those shows on Broadway, in London and at theatres throughout the world. He co-directed the Broadway production of *Baby It's You!*, which had its world premiere at The Pasadena Playhouse. He also has had a busy career as a television director helming episodes of shows such as *Frasier*, *Friends*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Girlfriends* and many others. Epps received the James Irvine Foundation Leadership Award for his efforts and accomplishments at the Pasadena Playhouse. He served for many years on the SDC Executive Board and was previously also the Chair of the SDCF Board of Trustees.

Ford's Theatre Society

One of the most visited sites in the nation's capital, Ford's Theatre reopened its doors in 1968, more than a hundred years after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Operated through a partnership between Ford's Theatre Society and the National Park Service, Ford's Theatre is the premier destination in the nation's capital to explore and celebrate Abraham Lincoln's life and legacy.

Ford's Theatre Society was founded under the guidance of executive producer **Frankie Hewitt**, who, during her 35-year tenure, established Ford's as a living, working theatre producing performances that highlighted the diversity of the American experience. Since the arrival of **Paul R. Tetreault** as Director, critics and the theatregoing public have recognized Ford's for the superior quality of its artistic programming. With works from the Tony-nominated *Come From Away* and the nationally acclaimed *Big River*, to the world premieres of *Meet John Doe*, *The Heavens Are Hung In Black*, *Liberty Smith*, *Necessary Sacrifices*, *The Widow Lincoln* and *The Guard*, Ford's Theatre is making its mark on the American theatre landscape. In the past decade, the mission of Ford's Theatre Society expanded to include education as a central pillar. This expansion led to the creation and construction of the Center for Education and Leadership, which opened in February 2012. Under the current leadership of Board of Trustees Chairman **Phebe N. Novakovic** and through the lens of Lincoln's leadership and legacy, Ford's today endeavors to advance Lincoln's "unfinished work" with programs and performances that cultivate empathy, encourage dialogue and bridge divides in American life.

For more information on Ford's Theatre and the Ford's Theatre Society, please visit www.fords.org.

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