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## **TOM ROSS TO STEP DOWN AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF AURORA THEATRE COMPANY IN JULY 2019**

**Departure will conclude 15 years in this role, 27 at Aurora**

**(Berkeley, May 8, 2018)**--Aurora Theatre Company today announced that long-time artistic director Tom Ross will step down at the end of the company's 27th season in July 2019. When Ross departs, he will have been on staff at Aurora for 27 years, 15 of which he will have served as artistic director.

A search committee is being formed for a new artistic director, said Aurora managing director Julie Saltzman Kellner.

Ross joined Aurora at its inception in 1992, when a group of theatre professionals, including the late Barbara Oliver, launched the company at its original Berkeley City Club location.

"Aurora has absolutely been one of the great joys of my life," said Ross. "I am proud of all of the work we have done since its very humble beginning — the hundreds of artists we have hired, the great productions we have produced. But I believe it's now time for a change: New leadership and ideas injected into the company can raise our accomplishments to an even higher level.

"And," he continued, "I believe that I'm ready to go back out into the world: Freelance direct at other theaters, write and produce my own shows like I used to do, teach, get back to painting, and hang out in rooms with windows and sunshine."

Saltzman Kellner lauded Ross and his contributions to the theatre. "Tom is so much of who Aurora is and has been," she said. "He's set the tone for the values of the organization: Fairness,

honesty, intelligence, and creativity. I'll miss working with him everyday, but I know that he'll have left a permanent mark on the company, and we're all the better for it.”

## **LEGACY**

After joining Aurora in 1992 as general manager, he later served as managing director and producing director before his 2004 appointment as artistic director after a national search.

During Ross's tenure as Aurora's artistic director, the award-winning nonprofit continued its rise to become one of the most important regional theatres in the area and has presented nearly 50 world, West Coast premieres and Bay Area premieres.

Under his leadership Aurora has earned a national reputation as a center for showcasing work by top artists as well as emerging ones. He has championed new plays and playwrights, a commitment underscored first by Aurora's Global Age Project, and now with its Originate + Generate program. This includes world premiere productions by Jonathan Spector, Joel Drake Johnson, Allison Moore, and Anthony Clarvoe.

Ross oversaw the theatre's move in 2001 from the Berkeley City Club to its current downtown Berkeley arts district location and the construction of a 150-seat theatre and administrative offices. A \$2.5 million capital campaign with tremendous community, government, and foundation support made the move possible.

In 2009, he oversaw the opening of Aurora's second, contiguous performance space known as the Dashow Wing, which now includes Harry's UpStage, a 49-seat black box venue. Aurora's subscription seasons now regularly include performance both in the 150-seat Alafi Auditorium, and the smaller Harry's UpStage.

An award-winning director, to date, Ross has staged 30 productions at Aurora, including *Edward Albee's A Delicate Balance*, *The Homecoming*, *The Birthday Party*, *Betrayal*, the USA premiere of *Temple*, the world premiere of *The First Grade*, the Bay Area Premieres of *Luna Gale*, *A Bright New Boise*, *This Is How It Goes*, *SEX*, *Blue/Orange*, *The Shape of Things*, *The Weir* as well as *Fifth of July*, *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, *The Best Man*, and *The Entertainer*.

Ross also co-directed Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* with Muriel Maffre, *The Mystery of Irma Vep* with Danny Scheie which transferred to the Magic Theatre in San Francisco and the Bay Area Premiere of *Lobby Hero*, which transferred to the Napa Valley Opera House.

He wrote and directed the long-running *A Karen Carpenter Christmas* which played in both San Francisco and Seattle, and for eight years was a producer of San Francisco's legendary Solo Mio

Festival.

Before coming to the Bay Area, Ross worked for eight years at New York's Public Theater as executive assistant to Joseph Papp and co-director of play and musical development. While at the Public, he wrote the book adaptation for the Joe Orton/Todd Rundgren musical *Up Against It!* and collaborated on projects with artists including Larry Kramer, Kathy and Mo, Malcolm McLaren and Jonathan Larson. He was a site reporter for the National Endowment for the Arts for 16 years.

### **ABOUT AURORA**

The Aurora Theatre Company is known for work that invigorates audiences and artists through a shared experience of professional, intimate theatre. Aurora challenges itself and the broader community to do better, think deeper, laugh louder and cast wider nets of empathy toward the world. Through its productions of both classic and new works, it supports the Bay Area community by hiring local artists and artisans. It has an operating budget of just over \$2 million.

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