

# McCarter

## THEATRE CENTER

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Dear Editor:

As I enter my final week as Artistic Director and Resident Playwright of McCarter Theatre Center I wanted to thank all of you who sustained our dream.

30 years... It seems impossible to imagine. I came here in the summer of 1990, expecting to stay for 3-5 years. And here I am 30 years later. Why? How did that happen? I have been thinking about this a lot this week, and I think it is very simple.

I fell in love—with my staff and Board, with our audience, an audience Athol Fugard called “the best audience in America”, I fell in love with this beautiful garden of a town, graced by one of the finest universities in the world; I fell in love with my extraordinary friends here. I fell in love with my husband here. It became home—my artistic home and my personal and spiritual home.

Here— I have been able to live out my dreams as an artist— both with my own work, writing and directing— and by nurturing and supporting the work of the artists I most admire.

The audience here believed in my vision of the classic repertoire seen as if new and new work seen as if it were already classic. They believed, too, in giving voice to the voiceless. They flocked to new work by Ntozake Shange, Nilo Cruz, Regina Taylor, Athol Fugard, Will Power, Lydia Diamond, Edward Albee, Dael Orlandersmith, Danai Gurira, Chris Durang, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Marina Carr, Ken Ludwig, Joyce Carol Oates, Rachel Bonds, August Wilson and so many others. And they supported my new work as well—from *BETSEY BROWN* and *HAVING OUR SAY* to this season’s *GLORIA: A LIFE*. They reveled in the classics of Marivaux, Ibsen, Chekhov, Shakespeare and Strindberg and cheered for the finest actors, designers, and directors in this country and abroad.

Because we were an artist driven theater, we were able to give the finest artists in the country the support they needed to do their best work. Over and over, they created magic, plays and productions that became some of the most frequently produced work in America.

Of course, I did not do it alone. Theater is a complex collaboration. First with Loretta Greco, then producer Mara Isaacs, dramaturg Janice Paran, Production Manager David York and managing

director Jeff Woodward by my side for the first 18 years; and then Adam Immerwahr, Tim Shields and Harold Wolpert; now Debbie Bisno, Dixie Uffelman and Mike Rosenberg, we partnered with a devoted production staff and stage management staff—brilliant literary managers—IT, marketing, finance and development—shops and artisans and stage ops working at gold standard levels. Together, we were able to bring to Princeton both the most exciting emerging artists and legendary artists to work on our stages and create new work at our Sallie B. Goodman retreats. And throughout my tenure, the magnificent Bill Lockwood brought the finest musicians, dancers, and performers from around the world to McCarter.

We developed an extraordinary, nationally recognized Education and Engagement department led by Erica Nagel, now with Brooke Boertzel with Paula Alekson, to bring the healing magic of theater to all in our community, both those who could afford a ticket and those who could not—to those in shelters and challenged school districts, to those in senior facilities and half way houses.

I often said ‘I have the best job in the American Theater’. That was not hyperbole. I cannot imagine a more fulfilling life in the theater.

In closing—let me borrow the words of my dear friend and colleague Gloria Steinem when asked who she was passing her torch to. She said— ‘I’m not passing my torch, thank you, I’m using my torch to light the torches of other people.’

I have tried to do that throughout my time at McCarter— from those I have mentored to those I have been honored to welcome here as masters in their craft and art. And now, please allow me to light the torch of the new Artistic Director of McCarter Theatre, Sarah Rasmussen. May she enjoy this extraordinary audience, community and staff as much as I have. Long may she blaze.

And one more thing—do know I am not retiring. I will be writing and directing as long as I have breath. So—let’s all take this time of national reckoning to reflect and look to the future, as uncertain as it may seem right now, knowing theaters have been closed before by plague and remembering—they reopen. I look forward to being with you all again, embracing you again in person—live—at the theater—in a new and hopefully, stronger and more just America.

Until then, stay safe. Stay well. My most profound gratitude for the past—astonishing—30 years.

**EMILY MANN**