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PRESS CONTACT:
Ryan Hallett / Otto & Friends
ryan@ottoandfriends.com

THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING OUTLINES PHASE ONE OF ITS NATIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE EFFORT

NEW RELIEF FUND FORMED TO SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN THE COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS WORKING OFF- AND OFF-OFF-BROADWAY

IMMEDIATE ROUND OF GRANTS BEING OFFERED TO *ALL* PREVIOUS NATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY GRANT RECIPIENTS TO SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN 82 REGIONAL THEATERS FROM COAST TO COAST

LAUNCHING NEW SERIES OF LIVE ONLINE MASTERCLASSES AND OTHER VIRTUAL EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

THE 2020 OBIE AWARDS CEREMONY IS BEING RECONCEIVED AS A VIRTUAL EVENT, AND WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR ONLINE VIEWING AT A DATE T.B.A.

New York, NY (April 7, 2020) — The **American Theatre Wing** (**Heather Hitchens**, President & CEO; **David Henry Hwang**, Chairman) has outlined the first phase of its National COVID-19 Response Effort, which includes brand new, rapid funding mechanisms to help support and sustain the theater community at both the local and national level, as well as a series of new, online educational offerings to continue its mission of enriching and empowering students and emerging leaders. Details of these initiatives follow. Those wishing to support the Wing's efforts to uphold the national theater community during this time of unprecedented need can make a donation by visiting AmericanTheatreWing.org/Support-U.s.

"When the arts get lost or diminished in the conversation about federal relief, we rely on the non-profit sector to ensure that a 'full recovery' includes the true pride of our nation: its cultural institutions and the artists that make them shine. This is just the first step in what will be a long road back, but it's a vital one," said American Theatre Wing President & CEO Heather Hitchens. "Providing relief during dark and difficult times is baked deeply into the Wing's DNA and, just as we have since our founding in the midst of World War I, we will rise to the occasion and serve as a beacon of light and hope."

The Wing has also announced that the 65th Annual Obie Awards, originally scheduled to be held at Terminal 5 on Monday, May 18, will be postponed and reconceived as a virtual event, with awards being handed out for shows that opened between May 1, 2019 and March 12, 2020. Additional details on the 2020 Obie Awards ceremony, New York's preeminent celebration of Off- and Off-Off Broadway theater, including its new date and time, will be announced in the coming weeks.

In addition to the usual celebration of the remarkable work that's happened this season, this year's Obie Awards will also shine a light on the loss of the productions that were in rehearsal and performance at the time the theaters closed.

Ms. Hitchens commented, "There has likely never been a more important time to celebrate the work of Off- and Off-Off-Broadway artists. While we won't be able to hold the kind of ceremony we normally do, we knew we needed to find a way to preserve the Obie tradition and honor the work of this remarkable season. We will, as usual, provide the laughs and the awards, but this year the beer is strictly BYOB."

THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING'S NATIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE EFFORT – PHASE ONE:

The first phase of the American Theatre Wing's National COVID-19 Response Effort encompasses three separate initiatives, the first offering relief to New York's Off- and Off-Off-Broadway community of artists, the second providing immediate funds to regional theaters everywhere, and the third offering new educational resources that students can access remotely.

A) THEATRE ARTISTS RELIEF FUND

The shuttering of more than 90 Off- and Off-Off-Broadway productions has left an untenable number of theater workers suddenly without work. The Wing, with the council and guidance of the Obie Awards' Judges Panel (co-chaired by Obie-winning scenic designer Rachel Hauck and choreographer Sam Pinkleton), has created a \$250,000 Theatre Artists Relief Fund in order to get money directly into the hands of artists. This fund, which is generously supported by the Edwin Barbey Charitable Trust and the theatrical production company No Guarantees, will grant each of these artists \$500 to help sustain them during this period of mandatory shutdowns.

To aid in distributing these funds, the Wing has created an online resource database which is striving to assemble a comprehensive list of each theater, production, freelance artist, technician, and theater worker affected by the shutdown. Artists who were working on these productions may each receive \$500 in aid by simply registering via a form on our website. While the Wing has worked to assemble the information for all productions Off- and Off-Off-Broadway that were affected by the shutdown, artists who have been unintentionally excluded are also encouraged to apply. There is a limited pool of funds, which will be paid by check, on a first come, first serve basis.

For a complete list of eligible theater artists from these productions, please visit <http://www.obieawards.com/resources>. To apply for a Theatre Artists Relief Fund grant, please visit <http://www.obieawards.com/relief-fund/>.

B) NATIONAL RAPID RELIEF FUND

With regional theaters going dark in communities all across the nation, the Wing is committed to supporting as many of these institutions as possible during their time of need. Through the newly formed National Rapid Relief Fund, the Wing will be making immediate gifts, in the amount of \$1,000, to each of the 82 prior recipients of the National Theatre Company Grants. These companies, large and small, play very important cultural and economic roles in their communities, and their survival is fundamental to the nation's wider recovery effort.

For a complete list of eligible regional theaters, please visit <https://www.americantheatrewing.org/program/national-theatre-co-grants>.

C) VIRTUAL MASTER CLASSES

Educating and empowering the next generation of theater professionals has long been central to the Wing's mission. As long as gathering in classroom settings remains impossible or inadvisable, the Wing will be offering a new series of live masterclasses via Zoom and Facebook Live that will feature an array of top tier theater talent.

Similarly, monthly meetings for the Wing's The Network (formerly known as Theatre Intern Network - TIN), serving emerging leaders in the theatre, will move online. The digitization of these programs will instantly dissolve any geographic barriers, opening these resources to a national audience, while still providing developing industry professionals with advanced education, networking opportunities, and tools for career advancement within a supportive community.

More information about these online resources will be available shortly at AmericanTheatreWing.org.

For the latest news and information on how the American Theatre Wing is responding to COVID-19, visit AmericanTheatreWing.org and follow the Wing on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

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ABOUT THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING

On the eve of America's entry into World War I, seven suffragists - all women of the theatre - came together to form The Stage Women's War Relief. Through their work supporting the troops and raising funds for American soldiers, they became one of the most significant active relief organizations in the world. In 1940, amidst another World War gaining traction, Antoinette Perry picked up where the Stage Women's War Relief left off, renaming the effort the American Theatre Wing. The organization went on to establish the Stage Door Canteen which served soldiers through theatrical entertainment. They donated \$75,000 dollars to the USO to inaugurate drama as legitimate entertainment for troops overseas while sparking excitement for theatre back home.

Over a century later, the Wing continues to nurture an American theatre that is as vital, multi-faceted, and diverse as the American people by focusing on developing the next generation of artists, and advancing the future of American theatre by celebrating excellence and nurturing the next generation on the stage, behind the scenes, and in the audience.

The American Theatre Wing's programs span the nation, providing theatre education opportunities for underserved students through the *Andrew Lloyd Webber Initiative*, giving high school songwriters the opportunity to professionally record their original songs through the *Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge*, developing the next generation of theatre professionals through the *SpringboardNYC* and *Theatre Intern Network* programs, incubating innovative theatre across the country through the *National Theatre Company Grants*, fostering the songs of American Theatre through the *Jonathan Larson® Grants*, and illuminating the creative process through the Emmy-nominated "*Working in the Theatre*" documentary series. In addition to

founding the Tony Awards® - co-presented with The Broadway League - the American Theatre Wing co-presents the Obie Awards®, Off-Broadway's highest honor, with The Village Voice.

Visit AmericanTheatreWing.org to gain insight into the American theatre artistic process and to learn more about the extensive programming and grant opportunities for students, aspiring & working professionals and audiences.

ABOUT THE OBIE AWARDS

The Village Voice created the Obie Awards, at the suggestion of then editor Jerry Tallmer, soon after the publication's own inception in 1955, to encourage the newly burgeoning Off-Broadway theater movement and to acknowledge its achievements. The Obies are structured with informal categories, to recognize artists and productions worthy of distinction in each theatrical year. Over the decades, the Obie Awards have played a major role in the Voice's long history of championing work of innovative and exceptional quality Off- and Off-Off Broadway. The Village Voice put the new downtown theater movement on the map with its in-depth coverage, becoming a forum for conflicting viewpoints which helped generate excitement over new works and new approaches to theater-making. The Obies have become a theatrical tradition, a meaningful way to acknowledge the best artistic achievements of downtown theater. The list of actors, writers, directors, and designers who have received Obies at pivotal moments in their careers is a virtual who's who of contemporary theater. While the categories of the awards have continued to change almost annually, the creative spirit remains the same. The Obie Awards salute a theatrical movement that's as important, and as vibrant, today as it was in 1955. ViacomCBS is the Sustaining Sponsor, Athletics is the Design Partner, and the Howard Gilman Foundation is the Supporting Sponsor of the 2020 Obie Awards.

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