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Media Contact: Kevin Kopjak, Charles Zukow Associates | 415.296.0677 | kevink@charleszukow.com

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**WELLESLEY CENTERS FOR WOMEN
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
CONCLUDES GROUNDBREAKING THREE-YEAR STUDY
INTO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN RESIDENTIALS THEATERS**

A.C.T. COMMISSIONED STUDY ANNOUNCES RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SAN FRANCISCO – **American Conservatory Theater** (A.C.T.) released the findings from the **Women's Leadership in Residential Theaters** research study conducted by the **Wellesley Centers for Women** (WCW). The study emerged from a partnership with WCW, one of the largest gender-focused research-and-action organizations in the world, to find out why so few women hold the top leadership positions in nonprofit theaters and what can be done to increase that number.

Commissioned in 2013 by A.C.T. Artistic Director Carey Perloff and former A.C.T. Executive Director Ellen Richard, and conducted by WCW Senior Scholar Sumru Erkut and WCW Research Associate Ineke Ceder, the Women's Leadership in Residential Theaters research study sought to identify why there were so few women in leadership roles in America's nonprofit theater organizations. The study launched by engaging members of the League of National Theatre's (LORT) and set out to explore what could be done to increase the participation of women at the most senior levels of the arts in America. The purpose of the project was to provide real data about pathways and obstacles to leadership, and to paint a clearer picture of professional development for those seeking leadership positions in the arts, particularly women and people of color.

The preliminary findings of the study were presented at a Women's Leadership Conference held on August 22, 2016, at A.C.T.'s Strand Theater in San Francisco. Attended by over 200 people, the Women's Leadership Conference also featured panelist presentations, learning-based workshops on topics and themes inspired by the research discoveries, and networking opportunities. The Women's Leadership in Residential Theaters research study findings were also shared as the keynote at the Statera Foundation Conference held in Colorado October 14–16, 2016, and were presented at the TCG Fall Forum on Governance held November 11–13, 2016, in New York City.

"With our longstanding commitment to research and action on women's leadership, the commission from A.C.T. was an exciting opportunity for us to learn about the scarcity of women and particularly women of color in theater leadership," say Erkut and Ceder from the WCW. "We hope that our research-based recommendations will move the dial on women's leadership."

Using a multifaceted information-gathering strategy, researchers conducted 97 interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including artistic and executive directors, and people on the pathway to leadership, from a randomly selected sample of 24 LORT theaters. The selected theaters represented three types of theaters, as classified by total budget: \$2–5 million; \$5–10 million; and \$10+ million.

998 surveys pertaining to the artistic side of the theater were collected from members of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), the theatrical union that unites professional stage Directors and Choreographers throughout the United States. In addition, 333 surveys pertaining to management and operations were collected from top managers and their immediate staff members at theaters who are members of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national service organization for American theaters, with budgets above \$1,000,000, including the previously mentioned LORT theaters.

Information from the interviews and surveys was augmented by public information from service organization sources, including TCG and LORT archival websites, theater websites, and resumes and bio-sketches of 300 LORT theater leaders and those in the positions just below them.

Furthermore, researchers held extensive conversations with 30 leaders in the theater field, including board and trustee members from a variety of LORT theaters who had been involved in the leader selection process, search firm professionals who manage searches for top leadership positions, and key theater professionals who were referred by their colleagues.

The main findings include:

- There is a glass ceiling operating for women and people of color; they can achieve “Next-In Line” positions, but cannot reach Artistic and Executive Director positions as frequently as white men.
- Hidden behind a gender- and race-neutral job description is an expectation, grounded in a stereotype, of what a theater leader needs to look like: white and male, because white and male leaders have been the long-standing majority of those in top positions.
- The reason there are so few women heading LORT theaters is not a question of merit; rather it is a question of trust: board search committees are less frequently willing to trust that women have what it takes to run arts organizations.
- Theaters with large budgets trust the *potential* of men and select them to oversee a larger budget than they have done before, but not women with similar small-budget experiences.
- Women become leaders if they found their own theaters, but women are not often selected to a leadership position by a committee. The experience of having founded a theater, however, is currently only an asset for men who are hired in LORT theaters and not for women.
- The only advantage women have in being hired over male candidates is when a woman is already employed in the theater with a leadership opening because the woman’s work is familiar to the members of the selection committee, and therefore has become a more trusted leadership candidate.
- Extensive travel and long, irregular hours can be barriers against caregivers (who are mostly women) which can, in turn, lead to biases affecting the hiring or promotion process.
- Career progression in theater typically comes from an apprenticeship model. However, mentors are in short supply, especially for women and people of color.
- There are very few opportunities for leadership and the few positions that do exist have a very slow turnover.

Says Perloff: “Collaborating with the Wellesley Centers for Women on this landmark study about gender equity has been incredibly eye-opening, and while the results are depressing in terms of gender disparity at this moment, I feel confident that the findings are going to help our field immeasurably as we try to help women and people of color move into leadership positions in the American theater.”

The complete report will be available for the public at the end of December 2016. The executive summary can be found here: wcwonline.org/theaterleadership.

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