

50  
YEARS

A.C.T.  
AMERICAN  
CONSERVATORY  
THEATER

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## American Conservatory Theater Announces Retirement of Craig Slaight, Young Conservatory Director of 29 Years

SAN FRANCISCO (December 8, 2016) – **Craig Slaight**, Director of **American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.)'s Young Conservatory (Y.C.)**, announced today that he will be retiring after 29 years at the Bay Area's premier nonprofit theater organization. Slaight's final day is scheduled for May 25, 2017.

"I came to American Conservatory Theater in 1988 to embrace the leadership and deep responsibility of managing a very serious program offering young people in the Bay Area the finest acting training possible and with the expectations to grow the program over time," says **Slaight**. "The 29 years that have followed have surpassed my highest dreams for what is possible when professional artists embrace the journey of the young. When I look at the long reach of these 29 years, I am most humbled by former students who stay in touch and who still hold the Young Conservatory in their hearts. They include professionals from the top ranks of Broadway, television, and film, to responsible and contributing citizens in all walks of life. This journey at A.C.T. has been the fulfillment of a serious desire and longing to give to the young people of this area light, belief, compassionate instruction and abundant respect."

Says A.C.T. Artistic Director **Carey Perloff**: "Craig Slaight was one of the first artists I met when I arrived at A.C.T. in 1992, and his passion and vision have sustained me in all the subsequent years! There's really no one in the American theater quite like Craig: he combines fierce rigor and love of craft with incredible compassion and sense of play, and the result is a unique ability to unlock the creative potential of young people in magical and moving ways. The Young Conservatory under Craig's leadership has been a beacon for emerging artists from across the country, both for kids who want to explore theater for the first time and kids who are going to make it their life's work. His play commissioning program has yielded major new literature for young actors, and his international work has brought a global perspective to so many children. Throughout it all, Craig has championed the belief that seeing the world through the eyes of the young is a crucial and valuable endeavor that changes us all. We are forever in his debt, and will strive to sustain and build upon his legacy in the years to come."

Adds actress **Beth Behrs** (CBS's "2 Broke Girls"): "Craig has been an incredible mentor in my life, both personally and professionally. I learned so much from him that has served me tremendously in my career. He's also been incredibly supportive of my theater work now, traveling all the way to New York City to see my New York stage debut. I am forever grateful to him and know he will be greatly missed, but his heart and soul will remain in those hallways"



“Craig Slight’s groundbreaking work commissioning and producing a remarkable number of new plays, has re-shaped the landscape of theater education,” says playwright **Timothy Mason**. “The value of his contribution to the lives of young people, throughout the U.S. and the U.K., is incalculable. I will miss going to San Francisco to create with him yet another new play that views the world through the eyes of the young, but Craig’s vision will live on and on.”

Says actor **Bobby Conte Thornton** (*A Bronx Tale: The Musical* on Broadway): “I was a theater nerd who had aspirations of making a living as an actor and being a part of the New York City theater community, but lacked the tools in which to begin that process as an artist and more importantly as a human being. Craig Slight helped make my dream a reality. He is a fierce intellect, uproarious humorist, and above all else a kind, supportive and unconditionally loving soul that saw potential in me and guided me to the right path. Any young person would be lucky to have someone like Craig and the environment that the Young Conservatory offers to trust fully, fail fully, and discover fully.”

“Craig has been one of our leading lights in the theater community for decades,” adds actress **Hallie Foote**, daughter of writer and director Horton Foote. “He co-commissioned the last play my father, Horton Foote, wrote for the A.C.T. Young Conservatory and The National Theatre and it was one of the highlights of my father’s life. Craig understood the importance of the writer and encouraged them to contribute plays and participate with his students. His program is a unique one. I am sad that he is retiring.”

In 1988, Slight assumed the leadership of the Young Conservatory. During his time at A.C.T., Slight has taught in all of the Conservatory programs, served as a resident director on the mainstage and is a member of the senior team of the company. Slight began the Young Conservatory’s New Plays Program (now the Grace Magill New Plays Program) in 1989 with the mission to develop plays by outstanding professional playwrights that view the world through the eyes of the young. To date, over 40 new plays have been developed and produced, 20 of which are collected in publications by Smith and Kraus publishers, *New Plays from the A.C.T. Young Conservatory, Volumes I, II, III, IV and V*.

Slight is also the author of the book for five musicals (*Across the Universe, I’m Still Standing, Fields of Gold, Beautiful Child* and *Homefront*), each of which had its premiere in the Grace Magill New Plays Program. In 1999, Slight forged a collaboration with the prestigious Royal National Theatre in London, working on developing new plays for young people (UK writers have included Bryony Lavery, Sarah Daniels, Sharman Macdonald, DC Jackson, Ursula Rani Sarma and Jodie Marshall). In 2000, Slight’s Young Conservatory production of *Time on Fire* by Timothy Mason was the first production by a young American company to ever play the Royal National Theatre. Subsequent collaborations have been done with The Hochschule of Musik and Drama in Zurich, Switzerland and His Majesty’s Theatre in Aberdeen, Scotland. With A.C.T.’s Jack Sharrar, Slight has published numerous acting and play anthologies for young actors (Smith and Kraus Publishers).

Prior to coming to A.C.T. Slight was an award-winning professional director in Los Angeles, directing such notables as Julie Harris, Linda Purl, Betty Garrett, Harold Gould, and Robert Foxworth. Slight is a consultant to the Educational Theater Association, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, the O’Neill Playwrights Conference, the National Theatre of London, Theatre Royal Bath, Ten Chimneys Foundation and is a frequent guest artist throughout the country. In August of 1994, Slight received the President’s Award from The Educational Theater Association for Outstanding Contributions to Youth Theater. In January of 1998, he was chosen to receive the first annual A.C.T. Artistic Director’s Award. In 2008, in recognition of his contributions to American Conservatory Theater, *The Craig Slight Young Conservatory New Play Fund* was established to endow the continued development and production of new theater writing for young people. In 2015, Slight was nominated for a Tony Award for Excellence in Theatre Education.

The Young Conservatory's distinguished alumni include **Aaron Albano, Beth Behrs, Rozzi Crane, Darren Criss, Adam Jacobs, Brie Larson, Chelsea Peretti, Winona Ryder, Bobby Conte Thorton, Alysha Umphress, Milo Ventimiglia, and Zendaya.**

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