

## The Court Theatre

### Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director

***The University of Chicago and Court Theatre seek a visionary Artistic Director of classic theatre***

Court Theatre is a Tony Award-winning professional theatre company located in the Hyde Park neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. Founded in 1955 and in its 69<sup>th</sup> season, Court benefits from the University of Chicago's financial support and from its community of scholars and artists, while retaining artistic independence.

In 1975 the Court Theatre's professional company affiliated itself with the Actors' Equity Association; in 1981 the company moved into the 251-seat Abelson Auditorium; in 1983 Court Theatre incorporated as an independent nonprofit organization; and in 2013 The Center for Classic Theatre at the University of Chicago was established to help Court fully access the resources of the university to advance the art and its engagement with contemporary and classic themes. In 1994 and for almost 30 years since, Court has benefitted from the artistic leadership of [Charles Newell](#), who was named by the *Chicago Tribune* as "...one of the city's most significant artistic assets...". Mr. Newell will retire and this search is for his successor.

Court Theatre [interprets](#) classic theatre to illuminate our current times, and defines classic theatre as texts from any culture, tradition, or era that resonate throughout time and speak to our present moment. Court Theatre seeks to present an array of theatrical styles and periods, and develops new work on classic themes with different forms of classic staging. In remaining fresh and fostering excellence, Court explores a broad range of topics. What defines identity? What is the nature of existence and truth? What divides us? Is justice important? What is family? Whether through works composed several millennia in the past, or works that have been adapted from contemporary graphic novels, Court remains relevant, exciting, engaging, and ready to cross boundaries.

Court Theatre produced four plays in its 2023 season attended by over 35,000 people, who also participate in readings, theatre discussion groups, educational programming, and various smaller performance events. Court is supported by a 34-member [Board of Directors](#), and business operations are led by Executive Director [Angel Ysaguirre](#). The [staff](#) includes 30 full-time and 7 part-time staff. Additionally, Court employs over 200 artists and seasonal workers each year. In the fiscal year ending June 2023, the Court Theatre reported annual revenues of \$5 million, with \$2.3 million from contributions and grants and \$1.6 million in earned revenue.

The University of Chicago was founded in 1890 and is one of the world's leading research universities, celebrated for its faculty, students, graduate programs, and role in advancing Chicago communities. Home to over 3,100 faculty and with more than 18,000 students, the University is a center for educating, inspiring, and supporting academic and artistic operating units. A variety of museums, professional performance spaces, institutes, and academic departments support the artistic endeavors of students and faculty, while fostering UChicago's cultural and artistic life on campus. Among the arts organizations hosted by the university are the Court Theatre, Logan Center for the Arts, University of Chicago Presents, Smart Museum of Art, Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, Renaissance Society, Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry, six galleries, and the nation's largest academic press, which promulgates scholarship on the arts.

The new Artistic Director will enter a financially healthy and ambitious Court Theatre Family eager to build on its strong relationship with the University of Chicago and the Chicago community, and with the ambition to extend its influence nationally and internationally.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director will shape all Court artistic and arts-related programming, and will collaborate with the Executive Director to provide overall leadership to the organization as it grows its artistic and educational vision and continues to expand its footprint in Chicago, nationally, and internationally. Reporting to the University's Provost and collaborating with the Board and staff, the Artistic Director is accountable for managing all aspects of the theatre's productions and programs, and for fundraising for arts programming in collaboration with the Executive Director.

The Artistic Director is expected to work closely with the staff to ensure that the theatre:

- Builds on its reputation as a distinctive, exciting, thought-provoking theatre which explores classic themes and classic staging in ways that contemporary audiences find relevant and exciting;
- Extends its commitment to contemporary work, with diversity as a value that guides artistic expression and decision-making;
- Grows audiences and builds constituents among a new generation of supporters, including theatregoers from throughout the Chicago area and beyond; the diverse communities of the South Side; and UChicago faculty, students and alumni.

## **IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES**

Upon assuming leadership, the Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director will be able to:

- **Artistic Leadership:** Understand all facets of Court Theatre, including the theatre's history, culture, staff, finances, play schedule and new play development; education and public programs; facility and infrastructure; operations; and annual, endowment and capital campaign initiatives. Understand Chicago and the University of Chicago, and their resources, other arts organizations, constituents, and diverse audiences. Bring to Court Theatre insights into the current state of theatre and theatre artists nationally and internationally;
- **Visionary Programming:** Manage the artistic affairs of Court Theatre, including selection of: works; directors, cast members, theatre tech, and programs that engage different audience cohorts; and function as an ambassador for the Court and for University of Chicago, its artists, arts faculty, and programs;
- **Connecting to and Broadening Audiences:** Understand the audience drawn from the University of Chicago and the Greater Chicago; cultivate a reputation of being a place for all sorts of theatre audiences, with topics, staging, language, audience experiences, and a vibe that is exciting to a very diverse community;
- **Developing the Pipeline of Classic Drama** Build a robust and well supported new play development process which includes commissioning of new work, expanding collaboration with University faculty, and more intensively involving University students and community residents in these processes; engage a range of guest artists who bring new vision to the stage; facilitate opportunities for Court's dramaturgy and work to be more broadly shared with other theatres;
- **Theatre Education and Outreach:** Review the present status of the theatre's mainstage and education programming, and take charge of in-process work related to current and planned productions, events, and performances;

- **Financial Health:** In conjunction with the artistic team, develop an artistic vision of plays and programs that can be administered within appropriate budgetary constraints, and that will inform, attract, and engage the interest of a diverse Chicago and UChicago public while also securing recognition nationally and internationally;
- **Community Partnerships:** Build on Court's strong reputation by continuing to cultivate relationships with existing and new key stakeholders in the theatre, South Side, and University communities in order to enhance and develop support for programs, including partnership opportunities with other arts, educational, and cultural institutions locally, nationally, and internationally; and with local artists, community, and business leaders;
- **Mission Building:** Work to build strong relationships among Board, staff, volunteers, donors, and subscribers; work with the Executive Director and the Board to update long-range strategic planning and implement Court's shared values, mission, and vision; suggest new Board members whose talents, interests, and commitment will help to further Court Theatre's mission, and to expand funding opportunities;
- **Workplace Synergy:** In collaboration with the Executive Director, hire, supervise, motivate, develop, and evaluate artistic staff, ensuring that staffing is appropriate to meet the organization's goals; work with the staff to understand their contributions, strengths, and concerns; instill a strong sense of partnership and cohesion across the organization; use open channels of communication to reinforce a culture of excellence toward achieving the highest standards of theatre practice;
- **National Arts Profile** Join other arts leaders in the region, nationally, and internationally to advocate for the arts at Court, the University, and beyond.

## **IDEAL EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS**

- The ideal candidate is an experienced and recognized theatre director and arts leader.
- Has a history of creating work that attracts the positive attention of other artists and diverse audiences.
- Is a generous and active collaborator with playwrights, theatre directors, actors, designers, educators, and others; has a demonstrated ability to forge mutually respectful and effective relationships with a diverse group of personalities to deliver exceptional theatre experiences to the public; has a passion for connecting the public with theatre, who will enjoy connecting members of Chicago and surrounding communities, as well as visitors to the region, to the Court Theatre;
- Has management experience in a theatre or performing arts organization known for innovative programming, artistic excellence, and strong ties with the community; an extensive background or passion for theatre and educational & public programming would be an advantage; knowledge of current trends and developments in the performing arts;
- Demonstrates an ability to work successfully with donors, community leaders, performing artists, educators, and the theatre's Board to strengthen the theatre;
- Possesses a strong commitment to building a community from a diversity of backgrounds and with diverse viewpoints, and to cultivating an inclusive community that values freedom of expression;

- Exhibits outstanding oral and written communication skills, including the means to address issues in non-confrontational and non-polarizing ways, but nevertheless with determination; a track record as an effective advocate for his or her organization;
- Is adept at planning, prioritizing, organizing, and following through; a hard worker with a high energy level who welcomes accountability; a good listener and strategist; comfortable receiving input from many sources;
- Imparts trust, integrity, and stability and guides others in a similar vein; an ability to disagree without being disagreeable; a team player and team builder; someone who enjoys working in close collaboration with staff, Board, and community members and is able to connect with a broad spectrum of community members and partners; a person with a sense of humor and perspective.
- Minimum of seven years of experience in a progressively responsible role in a theatre or related educational/research organization, including 5 years of senior management and leadership experience.
- Experience working in higher education.
- Familiarity with the City of Chicago and the University of Chicago.

## **EDUCATION**

- Bachelor's degree or advanced degree preferred.

## **APPLICATION DOCUMENTS**

- Resume/CV (required)
- Reference Contact Information (3) (required)
- Cover Letter (required)

For more information, please contact:

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**m/Oppenheim Executive Search**

Court Theater  
February, 2024