

A BRIEF HISTORY

Originally constructed in 1929, the building that is now the Geffen Playhouse was one of the first 12 structures in Westwood. It was built as a Masonic clubhouse to serve UCLA students and alumni and remained as such for nearly four decades, until the Masons sold it in the early 1970s to local business owners Donald & Kristen Combs. The Combs family restored many of the building's original design elements, including the central courtyard and tile fountain and reopened the building to the public. The beautiful new space included a location of their furniture store, an Italian restaurant and a theater they dubbed the Westwood Playhouse.

In 1994 the Combs family donated the theater to UCLA under the premise that it would remain a theater in perpetuity and that Gilbert Cates (founder of the UCLA School of Theater, Film & Television) assumed development. Cates, who for years had been advocating that Westwood have its own world-class theater, took the project on wholeheartedly and began rallying the local arts and entertainment community for support.

After pooling resources, fundraising and putting together a board for the burgeoning nonprofit organization, Cates renamed the theater the Geffen Playhouse in honor of entertainment mogul David Geffen's generous founding gift. The new playhouse officially opened its doors in 1995 with John Patrick Shanley's *Four Dogs and a Bone* starring Brendan Fraser, Elizabeth Perkins, Parker Posey and Martin Short.

In 1999, Cates enlisted Steppenwolf Theatre alum Randall Arney to come on board as Geffen Playhouse's artistic director, while Cates assumed the role of producing director for the nonprofit. With a new artistic team at the helm, Cates directed his first Geffen Playhouse production – Donald Margulies' *Collected Stories* – in 1999; and Arney directed his first production – David Rambo's *God's Man in Texas* – shortly thereafter in 2001.

In 2001, the organization began a \$17 million capital campaign to upgrade the facility. The new state-of-the-art building would include enhanced technology and the capability to facilitate complex production designs, as well as restore the building's original craftsmanship and beauty. In addition, guided by the vision and funding of Mrs. Audrey Skirball Kenis, part of the capital campaign was dedicated to constructing an additional, more intimate space that could be used to create a stronger connection between the audience and the works on stage. From 2003 – 2005, while construction

The logo features the number '20' in a large, bold, red font. To its right, the word 'Geffen' is written in a black, sans-serif font. Below 'Geffen', the word 'PLAYHOUSE' is written in a larger, bold, black, sans-serif font. The '20' and 'PLAYHOUSE' are aligned to the left, while 'Geffen' is centered between them.

20 GEFFEN
PLAYHOUSE

was being completed, Geffen Playhouse productions were temporarily hosted at the nearby Brentwood and Wadsworth theaters.

In September 2005 the entirely renovated larger theater and newly built Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater opened alongside each other in Westwood. In the spring of 2010, Geffen Playhouse staff, board and other supporters surprised its founder and producing director by naming the larger stage the Gil Cates Theater, enabling the Geffen to honor Cates nearly a year and a half before his passing in October 2011. At that time the Geffen Playhouse Board Chairman, Frank Mancuso, gathered a team of executive leaders, including the newly appointed Gil Cates, Jr. as Vice-Chair, from staff and board to continue the founder's legacy. Programming expanded from five to eight season productions per year in addition to a variety of special music and theatrical events. The 2013-2014 season saw four Geffen Playhouse productions – including Donald Margulies' *The Country House* on Broadway – transfer to New York. The 2014-2015 season ushered in the appointment of Gil Cates, Jr. as executive director, the launch of the Geffen Playhouse Legacy Fund and saw five of its eight productions extend – breaking several prior box office records.

Under the artistic leadership of Randall Arney, the Geffen Playhouse continues to present groundbreaking theatrical productions in both the Gil Cates Theater and Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater ranging from world premieres to award-winning commissioned works and reinterpretations of timeless classics.

