

**QUINCY JONES & MEL BROOKS HONORED AT  
15<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL “BACKSTAGE AT THE GEFFEN” FUNDRAISER**

**GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE’S EXCLUSIVE STAR-STUDED EVENT RAISED MORE THAN \$1 MILLION TO BENEFIT  
NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**THE EVENING FEATURED APPEARANCES BY BARBRA STREISAND, ROB REINER, SARAH SILVERMAN,  
DAVE CHAPPELLE AND MORE**

LOS ANGELES (March 20, 2017) – Legendary Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony Award-winning artists Quincy Jones and Mel Brooks were honored Sunday, March 19 at the Geffen Playhouse’s 15<sup>th</sup> annual fundraiser, *Backstage at the Geffen*, which honors the accomplishments of leaders in the artistic community and supports the theater’s mission to produce original, quality works and engage the community in the live arts.

Barbra Streisand presented the Distinction in Service Award to Quincy Jones. Rob Reiner presented the Distinction in Theater Award to Mel Brooks. Actress and director Aisha Tyler served as the evening’s host.

The exclusive event raised more than \$1 million for the theater’s artistic endeavors, including new play development, playwright commissions, second productions and adventurous artistic programming, as well as its award-winning education and community engagement programs, which bring the excitement of live theater to more than 15,000 disadvantaged youth, seniors and veterans annually.

This year’s star-studded event featured surprise storytelling appearances by *Bridesmaids* director Paul Feig, comedians Sarah Silverman and Dave Chappelle, *Better Call Saul*’s Rhea Seehorn, and Aisha Tyler, with musical performances by celebrated *Phantom of the Opera* star Davis Gaines, spoken word performance artist Daniel Beaty, and Broadway star Merle Dandridge. Movement artist Jon Boogz and violinist Lee England, Jr. performed new versions of Jones’ hit songs “Human Nature” and “Thriller” accompanied by Sarah Reich and Melinda Sullivan of female tap dance band Syncopated Ladies.

“A big part of the ‘Backstage’ tradition is that the show and performers are kept secret until the event begins,” said Gil Cates, Jr., Geffen Playhouse Executive Director. “The atmosphere was filled with such anticipation and excitement, and the inspired, hilarious performances proved to be wonderful tributes to Mel and Quincy.”

David Geffen, Kate Capshaw and Steven Spielberg, Cindy and Alan Horn, Mellody Hobson and George Lucas, Lyn and Norman Lear, Stephanie Swedlove and Jeff Skoll, Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick served as the event’s honorary co-chairs.

Geffen Playhouse executive director Gil Cates, Jr., and Geffen Playhouse board member Kevin Bright produced the event. Geffen Playhouse artistic director Randall Arney directed.

Event highlights:

- Jon Boogz, Lee England, Jr., and the Syncopated Ladies opened the show with a fresh take on Jones' classics using strings, percussion, original movement and modern tap dance and received the first of the evening's many standing ovations.
- Aisha Tyler, as the show's host, paid tribute to the EGOT-winning honorees and their many accomplishments, and shared her own behind-the-scenes story of working on an overscheduled film by a hysterically unrealistic director, prompting the lead actor to announce his exit with a rap song.
- Rhea Seehorn regaled the audience with a story about her first television series and her confusion over quick costume changes, drawing on her theater experience to come up with creative but unnecessary ways to make it from one scene to the next in the correct costume.
- Sarah Silverman had the audience roaring with a series of short stories, from a childhood acting class in which the instructor taught that "acting is reacting" and mocking a pilot script of *Friends*, to a misunderstood connection with a Hollywood writer and lunch with one of the world's biggest rappers and record producers.
- Paul Feig told of directing an early episode of *30 Rock* while in "movie jail" after one of his films underperformed and his failure to impress the show's big stars.
- Dave Chappelle aired personal secrets about getting older and his gratitude for honoree Mel Brooks, who gave him his first movie role in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*.
- Barbra Streisand's appearance, a surprise to honoree Quincy Jones, drew a standing ovation. She spoke lovingly of her longtime friend Jones, a "trustworthy, loyal and reliable" confidant whom she met at the Grammy Awards the year they won their first awards.
- Quincy Jones, upon accepting his Distinction in Service Award, reiterated the importance of art in young people's lives and expressed a deep sorrow at the lack of it in today's education system, while recalling a moving story of the day he discovered music and its influence on his life.
- Rob Reiner jokingly read his presenter speech from the show's program before telling a story of the day he and his sister, as young children, met Mel Brooks, whom he then called "the man" and today credits as "the single funniest man on the planet."
- Mel Brooks, the event's Distinction in Theater Award honoree, commented on the evening's off-color humor and told a touching tale of meeting the Geffen Playhouse's founder Gil Cates, then a young assistant stage manager, who woke a furious Brooks from a backstage nap.

- Host Committee guests enjoyed a casual grazing dinner prior to the show catered by award winning chef Suzanne Goin and Lucques catering. Following the show, guests were treated to a dessert reception by DeLuscious Cookies & Milk, Richard Russell and Sugarfina.

City National Bank continued as Title Sponsor for the eighth consecutive year, with Audi of America returning as a Presenting Sponsor for the 12<sup>th</sup> year. Additional Presenting Sponsors were K Period Media and Find Your Grind Foundation.

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### **ABOUT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE**

Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays, provocative new works and second productions, the not-for-profit organization continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates, and is currently helmed by Artistic Director Randall Arney, Executive Director Gil Cates, Jr., and Co-Chairs of the Board Martha Henderson and Pamela Robinson. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains extensive education and community engagement programs, designed to involve underserved young people and the community at large in the arts. [www.geffenplayhouse.org](http://www.geffenplayhouse.org).

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