

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 new 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 non-profit, 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 a hit production of 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 the theater's artistic director, while Cates assumed the role of producing director. With a new artistic team at the helm, Cates directed his first production for the Geffen Playhouse – 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 theater. 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 was being completed, the Geffen Playhouse temporarily presented works at the Brentwood and Wadsworth theaters.

In September 2005 the entirely renovated main stage re-opened in Westwood, along with the newly added Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater. Now entering its 14th season, the Geffen Playhouse continues to present ground-breaking theatrical productions ranging from world premiere musicals to award-winning commissioned works and reinterpretations of timeless classics.

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