

PHYLLIS SCHURINGA

Casting Director

As casting director, Phyllis Schuringa is often the first point of contact for making a script come to life on stage. She's responsible for working with directors and playwrights to select the key group of actors to be considered for a role, and after more than twenty successful years in the business, it's difficult to believe that Schuringa started out as a high school teacher.

Having done theater in high school and college, Schuringa graduated from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan and got a job teaching English, speech and drama in her home town of Lansing, Illinois. When she realized her favorite part of teaching was directing the students in the school productions, Schuringa decided to pursue an MFA in directing from Illinois State University (ISU). As part of the final year of her program, Schuringa was required to be in-residence at a professional theater company. As an ISU student, she sought out an internship at a company that was run primarily by ISU alms: Steppenwolf Theatre.

By the time Schuringa had completed her internship and degree, she had decided that she wanted to continue to be surrounded by the art, momentum and energy of Steppenwolf, so she took the only job that was available at the time: box office manager. When a position later opened up in the artistic department, Schuringa took on the role, which included literary management and casting. Over the years, her job became more and more focused on casting until it made up the core of her daily responsibilities.

During her time at Steppenwolf, Schuringa cast more than 100 productions. Her favorites include Frank Galati's adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath* (also La Jolla Playhouse, National Theatre in London, and Broadway, where it received the Tony Award for Best Play), the original production of Steve Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* (and subsequent productions including Westwood Playhouse and The Briar Street in Chicago), Austin Pendleton's *Orson's Shadow* and Charles L. Mee's *Time to Burn*. Schuringa's Broadway transfers also include *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (tony for Best Revival) and *The Song of Jacob Zulu*.

After 17 years at Steppenwolf Theatre, Schuringa received a call from her former Steppenwolf colleague Randall Arney (who had since accepted the position of artistic director at the Geffen Playhouse), asking if she would be willing to transfer her duties to Los Angeles. In 2001, Schuringa officially became the casting director for the Geffen Playhouse, working on virtually every play the Geffen has produced since.

And Schuringa hasn't completely abandoned her teaching roots – she regularly teaches auditioning at Steppenwolf West in Hollywood.