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**Theatre Communications Group Announces National Conference Awards:
deBessonet, Houghton and Jones to be Honored
Full Conference Programming Announced**

New York, NY – Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for theatre, proudly announces that at the 25th TCG National Conference: *Game Change* in Cleveland from June 18-20, the following awards will be presented:

- Peter Zeisler Memorial Award: **Lear deBessonet**, Director of Public Works, The Public Theater
- Theatre Practitioner Award: **Rhodesa Jones**, Co-Artistic Director Cultural Odyssey
- Visionary Game-Changer Award: **James Houghton**, Founding Artistic Director, Signature Theatre

“For our 25th National Conference, we’re particularly excited to honor both the next generation of theatre leaders and the game-changing leaders who paved the way,” said Teresa Eyring, executive director of TCG. “There’s no better place to do so than Cleveland, a city experiencing a theatre-driven renaissance with two theatres, Karamu House and the Cleveland Play House, celebrating centennials—not to mention the Play House bringing home the 2015 Regional Theatre Tony Award!”

TCG’s 2015 National Conference in Cleveland from June 18-20 is called *Game Change*, inspired by the opportunity of this 25th anniversary gathering to honor the game-changing theatre people, past and present, who’ve led the field to its current nation-wide diversity and vitality. *Game Change* will explore opportunities for collective action to address field-wide challenges, and provide deep-dive professional development for the more than 750 attendees to “level-up” their work. Conference programming includes over 100 events, including plenary sessions featuring thought-leaders from within and without the theatre field, such as Tony Award-winning playwright **Lisa Kron**, StoryCorps’ founder **Dave Isay** and *Fast Company*’s **Baratunde Thurston**. For more information the Conference, visit <http://www.tcg.org/events/conference/2015/about.cfm>.

The Peter Zeisler Memorial Award recognizes an individual or organization whose work reflects and promotes the ingenuity and artistic integrity that Peter Zeisler, late executive director of TCG, prized. The honorees exemplify pioneering practices in theatre, are dedicated to the freedom of expression and are unafraid of taking risks for the advancement of the art form. In honor of Peter’s uncanny ability to introduce talent to the rest of the field, the nominees have not been recognized nationally for their work.

Lear deBessonet develops new works for theatre with a focus on interdisciplinary and community-based music theatre projects. She is the founder/director of Public Works at the Public Theater, for which she has directed pageant-style musical adaptations of *The Tempest* and *The Winter’s Tale* at the Delacorte, each featuring over two hundred New Yorkers from all five boroughs with appearances from diverse groups including gospel choirs, marching bands, park rangers, and taxi drivers. Her previous large-scale community projects include *The Odyssey* at the Old Globe (2011) and her site-specific *Don Quixote*, a collaboration with homeless shelter Broad Street Ministry and the punk-gypsy ensemble The Psalters (2009). She received Obie and Lilly Awards and a Drama Desk nomination for her direction of *Good Person of Szechwan* featuring Taylor Mac (Foundry Theatre at LaMaMa; Public Theater). She recently directed *Pump Boys and Dinettes* for Encores! Off-Center, and has directed shows for LCT3, the Old Globe, the Intiman, the Guthrie, Joe’s Pub, Women’s Project, Performance Space 122, 13p, and Clubbed Thumb. For Ten Thousand Things in Minneapolis, she has directed productions of *My Fair Lady*, *As You Like It*, and *The Music Man* that toured to prisons, community centers, and homeless shelters. She was part of NEA/TCG Career Development Program for Directors (2009-11). Recipient of LMCC’s Presidential Award for Artistic Excellence and the Meadow’s Prize, she has also acted as a visiting professor at NYU-Tisch School of the Arts.

The Theatre Practitioner Award recognizes a living individual—artist or administrator, institutionally affiliated or unaffiliated—whose work in the American theatre has evidenced exemplary achievement over time and who has contributed significantly to the development of the larger field.

Rhodessa Jones is Co-Artistic Director of the San Francisco acclaimed performance company Cultural Odyssey. She is an actress, teacher, singer, and writer. Ms. Jones is also the Director of the award winning Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women, which is a performance workshop that is designed to achieve personal and social transformation with incarcerated women. Ms. Jones was just recently the Spring 2014 Interdisciplinary Artist in Residence for the College of Letters and Science and the School of Human Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Beginning in 2015 Rhodessa will be a Visiting Professor at St. Mary's College in Moraga, California. During January 2014 Rhodessa traveled to New York City to The Public Theater to direct *Blessing the Boats: The Remix*, Sekou Sundiata's acclaimed solo theater work. To begin 2013 The Office of Mayor Edwin M. Lee and the San Francisco Art Commission presented the 2013 Mayor's Art Award to Rhodessa Jones, for her "lifetime of artistic achievement and enduring commitment to the role of the arts in civic life". The SF Weekly Magazine recently proclaimed Rhodessa as "San Francisco's Best Artist-Activist Working with Prisoners." In June 2012 the U.S. Department of State, Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau selected Rhodessa as an "ARTS ENVOY"! As one of San Francisco's most revered artists she received grant support to journey to South Africa to continue her work inside the Naturena Women's Prison in Johannesburg, South Africa. In 2007 Rhodessa conducted her first U.S. Department of State Speakers Tour of Russia where she conducted performances and workshops at University of Moscow, the American Center and University of Rayzen. In December of 2007 Ms. Jones received a United States Artist Fellowship to support her work. In 2004 she was honored with an Honorary Doctorate from California College of the Arts. Rhodessa's work has been published in a new book entitled, *Solo/Black/Woman: Performing Global Traditions and Local Intervention* featuring a chapter devoted to Rhodessa's landmark play, *Big Butt Girls, Hard-Headed Women*. Other publications include *A Beginner's Guide to Community - Based Arts*; and *Colored Contradictions An Anthology of Contemporary African – American Plays*.

The TCG Visionary Game-Changer Award, also known as the "Visionary Leadership Award," is given to an individual who has gone above and beyond the call of duty to advance the theatre field as a whole, nationally and/or internationally. Recipients of this award are individuals who regularly think beyond their day-to-day work in order to implement practices, new models, advocacy efforts, etc. on behalf of the field.

James Houghton is the founding artistic director of Signature Theatre in New York, founded in 1991 to honor and celebrate the playwright. Signature makes an extended commitment to a playwright's body of work, and during this journey the writer is engaged in every aspect of the creative process. Signature was the recipient of the 2014 Regional Theatre Tony Award®, the first off-Broadway theatre to receive this honor. Signature serves its mission through its permanent home at The Pershing Square Signature Center, a three-theatre facility on West 42nd Street designed by Frank Gehry Architects to host Signature's three distinct playwrights' residencies and foster a cultural community.

Upon opening in 2012, the Center was the largest new theatre center built in New York in nearly 50 years, and has quickly emerged as New York's newest cultural destination, providing a venue that supports and encourages collaboration among artists throughout the space. In addition to its three intimate theatres, the Center features a studio theatre, a rehearsal studio and a public café, bar and bookstore.

At the Center, Signature continues its founding Playwright-in-Residence model as Residency One, a first-of-its-kind, intensive exploration of a single writer's body of work. Residency Five, the only program of its kind, was launched at the Center to support multiple playwrights as they build bodies of work by guaranteeing each writer three productions over a five-year period. The Legacy Program, launched during Signature's 10th Anniversary, invites writers from both residencies back for productions of premiere or earlier plays.

Signature launched its groundbreaking Ticket Initiative in 2006, providing affordable, subsidized tickets for every seat to every show. With the opening of the Center, through the Signature Ticket Initiative: A Generation of Access, Signature has made an unprecedented commitment to making its productions accessible by underwriting the cost of the initial run tickets, currently priced at \$25, though 2031. Signature has presented entire seasons of the work of Edward Albee, Lee Blessing, Horton Foote, Maria Irene Fornes, Athol Fugard, John Guare, David Henry Hwang, Bill Irwin, Adrienne Kennedy, Tony Kushner, Romulus Linney, Charles Mee,

Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard, Paula Vogel, August Wilson, Lanford Wilson and a season celebrating the historic Negro Ensemble Company. Signature's current Residency One playwrights are A.R. Gurney and Naomi Wallace; current Residency Five playwrights are Annie Baker, Martha Clarke, Will Eno, Katori Hall, Quiara Alegria Hudes, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Kenneth Lonergan, Lisa Kron, and Regina Taylor. Signature, its productions and resident writers have been recognized with the Pulitzer Prize, Lucille Lortel Awards, Obie Awards, Drama Desk Awards, and AUDELCO Awards, among many other distinctions.

Since 2006, Mr. Houghton has also served as the Richard Rodgers Director of the Drama Division at The Juilliard School. To enhance the program, Mr. Houghton and the Drama Division initiated significant new programming and opportunities for students. Among these opportunities are a new Master of Fine Arts Program, which offers free tuition and a living stipend during the fourth and final year of training; the introduction of a Playwrights Festival featuring performances of plays written by students of the renowned Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program; and a bridge to the profession through the creation of the Professional Studio hosted by Signature Theatre, allowing Juilliard's actors and writers to collaborate closely and build lasting artistic relationships.

Mr. Houghton was recently honored with the 2015 Obie Award for Sustained Achievement. He has been honored by The Acting Company with the 2012 John Houseman Award for his profound commitment to developing American actors and building a diverse audience for the theatre, as well as the William Inge Festival's 1998 Margo Jones Medal for an outstanding contribution to the American theatre. In 2013, he was inducted into the College of the Fellows of the American Theatre and presented with an honorary Doctorate of Performing Arts by his alma mater, Santa Clara University. Mr. Houghton has also served as the Artistic Director of the O'Neill Playwrights Conference (1999-2003), Artistic Director of the New Harmony Project (1996-1999), and the Artistic Advisor to the Guthrie Theater (1998-2012).

For over 50 years, **Theatre Communications Group** (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre, has existed to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional not-for-profit American theatre. TCG's constituency has grown from a handful of groundbreaking theatres to nearly 700 member theatres and affiliate organizations and more than 12,000 individuals nationwide. TCG offers its members networking and knowledge-building opportunities through conferences, events, research and communications; awards grants, approximately \$2 million per year, to theatre companies and individual artists; advocates on the federal level; and serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute, connecting its constituents to the global theatre community. TCG is North America's largest independent publisher of dramatic literature, with 14 Pulitzer Prizes for Best Play on the TCG booklist. It also publishes the award-winning *American Theatre* magazine and ARTSEARCH®, the essential source for a career in the arts. In all of its endeavors, TCG seeks to increase the organizational efficiency of its member theatres, cultivate and celebrate the artistic talent and achievements of the field and promote a larger public understanding of, and appreciation for, the theatre. www.tcg.org.

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