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## THE PUBLIC THEATER RENAMES THEATER IN HONOR OF DR. BARBARALEE DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL

January 13, 2026 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director, Oskar Eustis; Executive Director, Patrick Willingham) proudly announces that the **Anspacher Theater**, one of five theaters located at its flagship on Astor Place, will be renamed the **Barbaralee Theater** in recognition of generous support from the **Diamonstein-Spielvogel Foundation**. This transformative gift will support significant renovation of the historic theater space and reflects Dr. Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel's legacy as a visionary public servant, a defender of New York's cultural sector and historic architecture, and a lifelong champion of America's artistic institutions.

Renovation plans are currently underway with the goal of ensuring the new Barbaralee Theater remains a space for extraordinary theater best able to serve all of our artists and audiences. The first production in the newly renamed Barbaralee Theater will be the world premiere production of **Anna Ziegler's ANTIGONE (THIS PLAY I READ IN HIGH SCHOOL)**, a riveting take on Sophocles' classic with direction by **Tyne Rafaeli**.

"The Diamonstein-Spielvogel Foundation admires the commitment, professionalism, and inclusive outreach of The Public Theater," said **Dr. Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel**. "This historic building has always served the community—first as a library, then a resettlement house for immigrants and refugees, and now as a home for innovative and engaging theater. This new project brings together several ideas that are important to both the Diamonstein-Spielvogel Foundation and The Public—preserving the multiple histories of New York City while enhancing its cultural life. The rich and multiple pasts of The Public Theater add resonance to our shared goals to preserve and improve it, and to ensure that The Public continues to play its groundbreaking role in New York City theater."

The Public Theater was founded on the belief that culture belongs to everyone. Throughout her lifetime of public service, Dr. Diamonstein-Spielvogel has embodied that belief through her extraordinary leadership across public life advancing cultural policy, advocating for landmark preservation, and supporting generations of artists, institutions, and civic projects that define our national identity. Her dedication to public service is a testament to the idea that the arts are not a luxury; they are a necessity of democratic life.

"It is impossible to look at New York's cultural landscape without seeing Barbaralee's fingerprints all over it," said **Patrick Willingham, Executive Director of The Public Theater**. "She has dedicated her life to preserving the beauty, history, and humanity of this city. Her generosity to The Public strengthens not just our stages, but our mission to build a theater that truly belongs to everyone."

The Public Theater's headquarters, located at 425 Lafayette St, was originally the Astor Library which opened in 1854 as the first free reference library in the United States. The building exists as both a New York City Landmark (designated 1965) and on the National Register of Historic Places (designated 1970).

In addition to funding from the naming gift, the renovation of the Barbaralee Theater will be made possible through a generous allocation of \$11,150,000 from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, New York City Council and Manhattan Borough president. The Public Theater will also receive a \$500,000 grant from the

Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior to stabilize and restore the original skylight and historic plaster adorning the theater.

"Theater is part of our city's DNA and The Public Theater is a cornerstone of our performing arts community, creating inclusive, equitable programs that engage all New Yorkers with the extraordinary power of live theater," said **Cultural Affairs Commissioner Laurie Cumbo**. "Our city's theater artists and audiences need and deserve to experience theater in spaces that match their ambitions, and we applaud this generous donation to The Public Theater to advance this much-needed renovation project - a project we're proud to be providing with major city support."

Over 100 productions and celebrated artists have graced the Anspacher stage, starting with The Public Theater's iconic world premiere of *HAIR* in 1967, the first show produced at The Public's Astor Place home. Additional productions include the original 1976 production of Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, Larry Kramer's groundbreaking play *The Normal Heart*, the original production of Suzan-Lori Parks' Pulitzer Prize-winning *Topdog/Underdog* and Pulitzer finalist *Father Comes Home from the Wars*, Elizabeth Swados' *Alice in Concert* featuring Meryl Streep, Richard Greenberg's Pulitzer Prize finalist *Take Me Out*, Richard Nelson's *Apple Family Plays*, Stew's musical *Passing Strange*, John Leguizamo's solo show *Latin History For Morons*, Jane Anderson's *The Mother of the Maid* featuring Glenn Close, James Ijames' *Fat Ham*, and notable productions of *Hamlet* featuring Martin Sheen (1967), Kevin Kline (1990), and Oscar Isaac (2017). Most recently, the Anspacher has been home to Itamar Moses's Pulitzer Prize finalist *The Ally* featuring Josh Radnor, Lisa Sanaye Dring's *SUMO 相撲*, and John Leguizamo's *The Other Americans*.

#### **ABOUT DR. BARBARALEE DIAMONSTEIN-SPIELVOGEL**

**Dr. Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel** is one of the nation's most influential cultural leaders, with a distinguished career spanning the arts, civic engagement, historic preservation, public policy, and philanthropy. Her unparalleled commitment brought her from the writer's desk to The White House, where as a White House Assistant she created the first and only White House Festival of the Arts in 1965, and helped create the White House Fellows and the Presidential Scholars Program. Appointed by Mayor John V. Lindsay as the first Director of New York City's newly-formed Cultural Affairs Department in 1966, she brought, the following year, the first public art exhibit to public parks (an installation of sculptures by Tony Smith in Bryant Park), the first public performance of the Metropolitan Opera to Central Park (with the assistance of maestro Rudolf Bing), the first city-wide Poetry Festival, and the first week-long festival of films about New York at the Regency Theatre (with a talk after each film by a notable film critic or scholar, such as Pauline Kael, Vincent Canby, Andrew Sarris, or Brendan Gill). Since 1995 she has also served as Chair of the Historic Landmarks Preservation Center, where, inspired by international signage programs such as the London Blue Plaques, she created the Cultural Medallions program. For more than 30 years, this program has addressed the question of whose history is important enough to preserve, by recognizing more than 141 artists, dancers, businessmen, scientists, architects, and others from all walks of life, in a variety of neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs.

She has organized commemorative celebrations for the 15th, 25th, 30th, 35th, 40th, 45th, 50th, 55th, and in 2025—as Chair and Founder of the more than 100-member consortium, the NYC Landmarks60 Alliance—the 60th Anniversary of the Passage of the NYC Landmarks Law. She created the idea and the solution of identifying each of the 159 historic districts by creating terracotta black and white historic district street signs, now at each corner of every street, together with plaques briefly describing their history. She asked her good friend, the renowned designer Massimo Vignelli, to design the signs; the project—now adapted internationally—took three years to achieve. Her creative outreach and output for these efforts has included provocative discussions, scholarly panels, luncheon talks, musical and theatrical performances, gala benefits, exhibitions, auctions of artist re-imaginings of the New York City flag, lighting the Empire State Building, marking all of the historic districts on the Queens Museum panorama, NASDAQ bell-ringing and signage, and lively installations of bus shelter signage, subway cards, Times Square signage, and highway billboards, all created to share the message "Honor our Past, Imagine our Future." For the 60th Anniversary, in partnership with OutFront Media, she created a year-long commemorative

trivia contest, to engage and divert subway riders young and old with fresh and interesting facts about New York City, its history, its culture, and its architecture.

As part of these commemorative efforts, she is, as well, the editor for, and a contributor to, *Beyond Architecture: the NEW New York*, published December 2024. The book includes essays from well-known critics, writers, architects, landscape architects, preservationists, and engineers, all of whom were asked to assess the meaning, significance, and impact of the upcoming 60th Anniversary of the passage of the NYC landmarks law, in a changing New York.

In addition to her important preservation work, outreach, and advocacy, Diamonstein-Spielvogel has continued her involvement with national, state-wide, and local cultural affairs. Her book *Handmade in America: Conversations with Fourteen Craftmasters* (1983), was a carefully vetted series of interviews with crafts masters; discussions that defined crafts as art forms, rather than as simply products of technical expertise. As part of this project, she was the curator of an exhibition at the Renwick, and created the 1993 exhibition in the Clinton White House, the "White House Collection of American Crafts," which traveled to 10 other museums through 1999.

She was appointed by President Reagan to the Board of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (1987-1999), where she was elected Chair of the USHMM Subcommittee that commissioned Art for the museum's new Public Spaces. In addition to her prior service with the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, in 1991, she was appointed by Mayor David N. Dinkins to the New York City Art Commission of New York City, now the Public Design Commission, where she served until 1994. In 1996, she was appointed by President Clinton to the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, which advises on all matters of public design affecting the appearance of Washington, D.C., in particular, the architecture of public buildings, parks, and memorials. In 2002, she was the first woman to be elected as Vice Chair of the CFA in its more than 115-year history. And from 2009 to 2018, as President Obama's appointee, she served on the American Battle Monuments Commission, where she chaired the ABMC New Memorials Committee, and represented the U.S.A. at Armistice commemorations and memorial dedications in the Netherlands, France, Italy, Belgium, England, Guam, and Iceland. In 2013, she led the U.S. delegation at the Busan anniversary events, where she was the keynote speaker and laid a wreath in honor of the memory of American, Korean, and U.N. Troops.

In 2007, she was appointed to the New York State Council on the Arts, where, from 2012 to 2016 she served as Vice Chair. In 2016, Diamonstein-Spielvogel was appointed as Chair and CEO, and served in that capacity until 2018. In 2023, Governor Hochul appointed her to the City University of New York (CUNY) Board of Trustees, and in 2025, appointed her to the New York State 250th Commemoration Commission, established to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in 2026.

As Chair of the Diamonstein-Spielvogel Foundation, in 2021, she worked with the Council on Foreign Relations to establish the Diamonstein-Spielvogel Project on the Future of Democracy, a multi-year global project created to examine the state of democratic institutions around the world. She has also worked with numerous cultural organizations and institutions, such as The High Line, New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Chamber Music Society, and Brooklyn Youth Chorus, to provide cultural and educational opportunities and experiences to young scholars, emerging artists, and under-served communities.

Dr. Diamonstein-Spielvogel earned her masters and doctorate with high honors from New York University, and has continued to share her scholarship through teaching and writing. She has authored 25 books, numerous articles for national magazines and newspapers, produced and hosted a wide array of television series on the arts and culture, and curated exhibitions that have traveled widely across the country and overseas. Her awards and honors are many and diverse; her impact on the cultural life of the United States is immeasurable.

Her lifetime of civic leadership reflects a profound and unwavering conviction: that the arts are central to a healthy and vibrant democracy.

#### **ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER**

**THE PUBLIC** continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public's wide breadth of programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New York City's five boroughs, Public Works, and Joe's Pub. Since premiering *HAIR* in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musicals *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Hell's Kitchen* by Alicia Keys and Kristoffer Diaz. Their programs and productions can also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 64 Tony Awards, 195 Obie Awards, 62 Drama Desk Awards, 64 Lortel Awards, 36 Outer Critic Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 72 AUDELCO Awards, 6 Antionyo Awards, and 6 Pulitzer Prizes. [publictheater.org](http://publictheater.org)

The Public Theater stands in honor of the first inhabitants and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards and we pay our respects to the many diverse indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

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