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ARTS

TheatreWorks' new artistic director eyes bright future

By Randy McMullen

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TheatreWorks Silicon Valley has done something for the first time in its 50-year history by hiring a new artistic director.

Robert Kelley, who has led the Palo Alto company since founding TheatreWorks in 1970, has announced he is stepping down after the current performance season ends next spring.

On Tuesday, TheatreWorks named Tim Bond, a theater administrator and director who, like Kelley, is known for championing new plays and musicals and presenting theater that reflects the faces and themes of its community, to the post.

In other words, though he will be “veering in my own aesthetic direction,” Bond plans to largely stay the course for TheatreWorks,

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which this year received the Regional Theatre Tony Award.

“I am thrilled to have the opportunity to continue Robert Kelley’s great work, and to lead this spirited company into its next exciting phase,” said Bond, who will come on board with TheatreWorks in March.



Bond

In his more than three decades, Bond has been involved in almost every aspect of theater. He was artistic director at Syracuse Stage Company and the Syracuse University Drama Department in New York (2007-16), and assistant director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland (1996-2007), where he created the FAIR Program to foster greater diversity in theater production.

Early in his career, Bond worked extensively with the adventuresome, diversity-oriented Seattle Group Theatre, eventually becoming its artistic director from 1991-96 and curating the company’s Multicultural Playwrights Festival. He had most recently served as professor of acting and directing in the drama department at the University of Washington, from which he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree.

Along the way, Bond has directed dozens of plays and musicals, ranging from “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner,” “The Diary of Anne Frank” and Tarell Alvin McCraney’s “The Brothers Size” to Lynn Nottage’s Pulitzer Prize-winning drama “Sweat” and Antoinette Nwandu’s Black Lives Matter-themed “Pass Over.” He is considered one

of theater’s top interpreters of the legendary late African American playwright August Wilson, having directed seven of the 10 plays included in Wilson’s famed “Pittsburgh Cycle” depicting African American life through the 20th century.

The two were good friends, having met at a black theater festival. Bond says Wilson would regularly visit the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and seek him out.

“He’d ask if I had a few minutes. And for the next hour and a half he would proceed to tell me the storyline of his next play,” Bond says.

What’s bringing him back into theater administration, Bond says, is a chance to lead a company that shares his theatrical passions: presenting new works, promoting diversity onstage and off, and forging close bonds with the community.

The company, which performs in Palo Alto and Mountain View, is credited with staging 69 world premieres and will host its 70th next month with Paul Gordon’s musical adaptation of Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice.”

“I fell in love with the theater when I was down there,” he said. “Particularly its good vibes and deep connection to the community.”

“I don’t think the company could have made a better choice,” said Kelley of his successor. “A highly respected, nationally known director, Tim also has the personal qualities and values we have always treasured at TheatreWorks.”

Bond’s arrival comes during a time of change in the Bay Area theater scene, as the directors of several key Bay Area companies have recently stepped down: Berkeley Rep’s Tony Taccone, American Conservatory Theater’s Carey Perloff and Aurora Theatre’s Tom Ross.

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