



Mayor Bloomberg opens new 70,000 s/f Pershing Sq. Signature Center; Designed by Gehry; Architect of record was H3 Hardy

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Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Signature Theatre founding artistic director Signature James Houghton opened The Pershing Sq. Signature Center, the new, permanent home for Signature Theatre designed by Frank Gehry. Spanning a city block at 42nd St. between Dyer and 10th Aves., the center features three theatres, a studio theatre, rehearsal studio, and a public café, bar and bookstore. The center serves as both a theatre community hub and a neighborhood destination, and has been designed to foster interaction among playwrights, collaborators and the public. The project is being funded through a public-private partnership and will be staffed by more than 400 people annually. Bloomberg was joined by first deputy mayor Patricia Harris, cultural affairs commissioner Kate Levin, council speaker Christine Quinn, representative Jerrold Nadler, council member Jimmy Van Bramer, Signature board member and actor Edward Norton, Pershing Sq. Foundation chairman William Ackman and Related Cos. chairman and CEO Stephen Ross.

Designed by Gehry, working hand-in-hand with Signature Theatre leadership and architect of record H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture, the 70,000 s/f Pershing Sq. Signature Center features three theatres of different character and configurations, providing playwrights a number of dynamic performance areas in which to set their work. The theatres include:

- * The Alice Griffin Jewel Box Theatre, a 199-seat proscenium theatre modeled after a traditional opera house
- * The Romulus Linney Courtyard Theatre, a 199-seat flexible theatre
- * A 299-seat End stage Theatre

"Cultural institutions are the lifeblood of our city, and the new Pershing Square Signature Center is the latest addition to the thriving new neighborhood on Manhattan's west side," said Bloomberg. "It's a big, bold, transformative project - and it's going to bring more people, more growth, and more vitality to this community. And thanks to the generosity of the Pershing Sq. Foundation, it will be a destination accessible to all New Yorkers."

Tickets to all productions of Signature's inaugural season at The Pershing Sq. Signature Center are \$25, part of the groundbreaking Signature Ticket Initiative: A Generation of Access, a program that guarantees affordable and accessible tickets to every Signature production for the next 20 years. Serving as a model for theatres and performing arts organizations across the country, the Initiative was founded in 2005 and is made possible by a lead gift from The Pershing Sq. Foundation with supplemental support from the Ford Foundation, Margot Adams, Time Warner Inc., the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

"Since its founding in 1991, Signature Theatre has nurtured the careers of hundreds of playwrights

and introduced new audiences to the dynamism of theater through affordable ticket prices," said Cultural Affairs Commissioner Kate D. Levin. "Thanks to an outstanding public-private partnership and cutting-edge design, the Pershing Square Signature Center will become a new destination on Manhattan's west side, and an essential resource for New York City's extraordinary creative community."

"This is a wonderful cultural moment not only for the playwrights that will be using this amazing space but for each and every person that will walk through these doors and be transformed to a new world," said Speaker Christine C. Quinn. "I especially want to thank the Pershing Square Foundation for assuring affordable tickets for years to come."

"I am thrilled that The Pershing Square Signature Center opens today," said Congressman Jerry Nadler. "The Pershing Square Signature Center will serve as a cultural anchor for the neighborhood, allow for the production of both celebrated and new works by a wonderful theater company, and ensure that exceptional theater is accessible to all New Yorkers. I congratulate Signature Theatre and wish them great success in their new space."

"It's hard to believe this day is finally here, and it would never have happened had it not been for the dozens of people who believed in our vision and worked hand-in-hand with us to make the Pershing Square Signature Center a reality," noted James Houghton, Founding Artistic Director of Signature. "The Center has been conceived to create orchestrated collisions between playwrights, artists and our audiences, creating a dynamic new culture for theatregoing that goes far beyond the work on stage. We are very happy to open our doors and welcome all New Yorkers to our new home."

"There is something magical that happens when one attends a live performance, an interaction between actors and audience that is palpable," noted architect Frank Gehry. "I wanted to create a space that celebrates and enhances the intimacy between the performer and the audience, while encouraging the innovation that Signature is known for. We have worked very hard to foster this in the three theatres, while allowing each to have its own identity."

"I started with this company in 1994 when I was 24 and we were in a 99-seat black box theater down on Bond Street. To work with Jim Houghton, who I think is one of the authentic theater visionaries of my generation, to establish a new 'legacy institution' for New York is one of the most exciting experiences I've had in 20 years living in this city," noted Signature board member and actor Edward Norton, who serves as the Theatre's capital campaign chair. "I look at Signature's mission as part of a broader mission to institutionalize big parts of our cultural cannon. Playwriting needs that platform as much as classical music or jazz or fine arts and there needs to be a place where we can examine what's happened in the American theatre in big chunks."

Paul Bernstein, Chief Executive Officer of The Pershing Square Foundation, said, "The Signature Ticket Initiative is an extraordinary way to enable a whole generation to access the best theater New York has to offer. The Pershing Square Foundation is committed to innovative solutions that create an opportunity like this at the Signature Theatre for audiences who could not otherwise afford off-Broadway shows. This grant is an investment in our city and the theater community that will enable current and future generations to access New York's cultural life."

Related Companies Chairman and CEO Stephen M. Ross said, "New York's arts and cultural institutions enrich our City and fuel its creative spirit. The Signature Theatre under the tenacious leadership of Jim Houghton, Erika Mallin and their focused board of directors fought for a decade to build a world-class home to expand and continue their renowned programming and we are thrilled to have been able to partner with them and the City of New York to help bring their vision to reality."

The Pershing Square Signature Center is housed within MiMA, Related Companies' newest high-rise mixed use development. The 63-story glass tower is also home to rentals and condo units and YOTEL, the innovative European pod hotel. The City of New York allocated \$27.5 million to the \$66 million Center, through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York City Council and the Office of the Manhattan Borough President. Related provided seed funding for the project. Additional support was provided by private sources including the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Barry Diller and Diane von Furstenburg, the Pershing Square Foundation, Time Warner, M&T Bank, and the Goldman Sachs Urban Investment Group, among others.

The Pershing Square Signature Center enables the 20-year-old theatre company, critically acclaimed for its programs that celebrate the playwright's body of work, to expand and enhance its programming, introduce new initiatives, and build audiences. The Center serves as the artistic home for as many as 11 playwrights at any one time, fostering a dynamic creative community where playwrights will engage directly with audiences and one another. Each season, the Company will present up to nine plays at The Pershing Square Signature Center, encompassing both new work and new productions of existing work mounted in close collaboration with each playwright. Signature's expanded programming includes:

- * Residency One: The continuation of Signature's core program, Residency One provides audiences with an immersive exploration of the work of a singular playwright, with the playwright involved in every step of the process.

- * Residency Five: A new artistic initiative that provides five-year residencies for multiple playwrights to support the creation and staging of new work by providing three full-scale productions to each playwright.

- * Legacy Program: Honors the lifetime achievement of artists who have previously been in residence at Signature with stagings of world premieres and signature works.

Recent Tony Award winner for Lifetime Achievement Athol Fugard is the Residency One playwright for the inaugural Pershing Square Signature Center season and is in residence to collaborate with the actors, directors, and artistic staff in bringing his work to life. A native of South Africa, Fugard is best known for his highly political plays opposing racial apartheid.

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