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New York City Center names Lear deBessonnet as Encores! Resident Director

January 17, 2019/NEW YORK, NY—New York City Center President & CEO **Arlene Shuler** and Encores! Artistic Director **Jack Viertel** today announced that **Lear deBessonnet** would join the artistic team at City Center as Encores! Resident Director.

In this new role, deBessonnet will join Viertel and Music Director **Rob Berman** as an active member of the Encores! team. She will take part in all discussions surrounding repertoire, production artists, and casting—cultivating relationships with artists new to the series. She will also foster an open dialogue with today’s expanding audience around the social and political themes associated with the genre. In addition, deBessonnet will occasionally direct a production for the series.

“I can’t think of a better time than our 75th Anniversary Season to welcome Lear as the newest member of our artistic team,” said Arlene Shuler, President & CEO. “City Center has been a home to numerous artists over its history and it is essential that we continue to promote new voices and infuse the art form with fresh ideas. Lear’s perspective, along with Jack and Rob, Off-Center Artistic Director Anne Kauffman, and Artistic Advisor Jeanine Tesori, will lead us into the next chapter of our history.”

“I’m simply thrilled that Lear has agreed to join the Encores! family,” said Jack Viertel, Encores! Artistic Director. “To have someone with her broad understanding of where musical theater has been and where it is going—along with Rob Berman and myself—is going to help us take the program into its next phase armed with wider horizons, full of unexplored possibilities and delights yet undiscovered. And, of course, she’s a director of unique personal vision, which will again find its way to the City Center stage.”

“I’m so proud to be part of the great cultural tradition of Encores! at City Center, particularly to be working alongside one of my heroes, Jack Viertel,” said Lear deBessonnet. “Encores! celebrates American musical theater like no place else, and it offers the chance to both revere the form and push it, with world-class talent and the

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support of visionary leader Arlene Shuler. I have loved City Center from the moment I walked through the door and am invested in ensuring that as many New Yorkers as possible get to enjoy the splendor of dance, music, and theater it has to offer.”

Support for this initiative is generously provided by the Stacey and Eric Mindich Fund for Musical Theater.

Lear deBessonnet is an Obie Award-winning director based in New York. At City Center, she has directed *Big River* (Encores!) and *Pump Boys and Dinettes* (Encores! Off-Center). She is the Founder of Public Works and Resident Director at The Public Theatre, for which she has directed large-scale, critically-acclaimed musical adaptations of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Shakespeare in the Park), *The Tempest*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Odyssey*. Her production of The Foundry Theater’s *Good Person of Szechwan*, starring Taylor Mac and Lisa Kron, played an extended, sold-out run at The Public, and earned her an Obie Award for Direction, a Lortel Award for Best Revival, a Drama Desk Nomination, and a Lilly Award. Additional credits include Suzan-Lori Park’s *Venus* at Signature Theatre; Quiara Alegria Hudes’ *Miss You Like Hell* at La Jolla Playhouse and The Public; and *Romeo and Juliet* at The Public. Now in its seventh year, the Public Works model of community engagement and participatory theater has spread nationally and internationally to Dallas, Seattle, and most recently the National Theater in London.

NEW YORK CITY CENTER (Arlene Shuler, President & CEO) has played a defining role in the cultural life of the city since 1943. The landmark 75th Anniversary Season (2018 – 2019) pays tribute to this rich history and celebrates the institution’s singular role in the arts today. For 25 years, City Center’s Tony-honored Encores! series has been “an essential New York institution” (*The New York Times*). In 2013, City Center launched the Encores! Off-Center series, which features seminal Off-Broadway musicals filtered through the lens of today’s innovative artists. Dance has also been integral to the theater’s mission from the start and programs like the annual Fall for Dance Festival remain central to City Center’s identity. Home to a roster of renowned national and international companies including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (City Center’s Principal Dance Company) and Manhattan Theatre Club, New York City Center was Manhattan’s first performing arts center, founded by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia with the mission of making the best in music, theater, and dance accessible to all audiences. That mission continues today through robust education and community engagement programs which bring the performing arts to over 9,000 New York City students each year and the expansion of the theatrical experience to include art exhibitions, pre-show talks, and master classes that offer an up-close look at the work of the great theater and dance artists of our time. NYCityCenter.org

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