

NOVEMBER 2013

# performances

## MAGAZINE

THE AUDREY SKIRBALL KENIS THEATER  
AT THE GEFLEN PLAYHOUSE



# PLAY DEAD

GEFFEN  
PLAYHOUSE



# CURTAIN UP

THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED WALLIS ANNEBERG CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS OPENS IN BEVERLY HILLS. BY LIBBY SLATE

FOR MONTHS, PASSERSBY SAW THE FANCIFUL murals adorning the barrier walls of the construction site at Santa Monica Boulevard and Cañon Drive in Beverly Hills: “Today construction, tomorrow concertos,” read one. “Today bulldozers, tomorrow ballet,” announced another.

The signs portended the creation of the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, which transforms a former U.S. post office, enhancing the site of that historic 1933 Italianate-style structure with the addition of a brand-new building.

The murals are down, and the building is up: The Annenberg Center opened its doors with a gala celebration chaired by Jamie Tisch and co-chaired by Robert Redford and Brad Pitt in October; its inaugural public performances begin with the Martha Graham Dance Company Nov. 8-9.

With two theaters—the 500-seat Goldsmith Theater and the 150-seat Lovelace Studio Theater—a children’s theater school and a diverse array of programming, the center is a welcome addition not just to Beverly Hills. “We’re a performing-arts center for all of Los Angeles,” says

executive director Lou Moore, formerly the founding managing director of the Geffen Playhouse. “Beverly Hills is very important and near and dear to us, but the programming is open to all.”



Above: The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts enhances the site of a former U.S. post office with a new building. Left: The panels on the Goldsmith Theater, designed by Pali Fekete Architects, reference the delivery and sorting of mail.

Some of the first-season programming pays homage to the post office, Moore says: Martha Graham’s *Chronicle* was created in Los Angeles during the time the structure was being built, and the Miklós László play *Parfumerie* (Nov. 26-Dec. 22) is about sparring employees who unknowingly are writing love letters to each other.

Other offerings include the /CONTINUED ON PAGE 58

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First-season programming includes Kneehigh Theatre's production of Noël Coward's *Brief Encounter* in the Goldsmith Theater and, opposite, the family-friendly *Jason and the Argonauts* in the Lovelace Theater.

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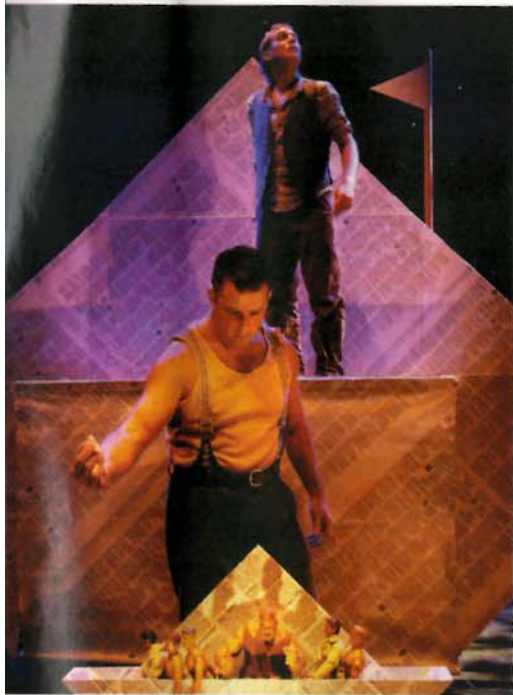
Kneehigh Theatre's production of Noël Coward's *Brief Encounter* (Feb. 15-March 23); *Baseball Swing*, a show with music, video and images produced with the National Baseball Hall of Fame (April 4-6); the West Coast premiere of the Ricky Ian Gordon-Leonard Foglia chamber opera *A Coffin in Egypt*, starring Frederica von Stade (April 23-27); and family programming such as E.B. White's *The Trumpet of the Swan* (May 2-4).

The performing arts center has been a long time coming. Moore left the Geffen in 2000 to become involved, and in 2004, the Annenberg Foundation made a \$15 million grant to establish what was then known as the Wallis Annenberg Cultural Center.

At the time, philanthropist Annenberg said of her father, late publisher and diplomat Walter Annenberg, that his "greatest legacy to me is a love for the arts and an appreciation for their impact and value in each of our lives." After various delays, the project broke ground in March 2010, and construction on the new theater space began in April 2011.

The chief architect is Zoltan E. Pali, a Los Angeles native who, with Renzo Piano, is also designing the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures; his previous projects include the renovations of the Pantages and Greek theaters.

Before he came onboard, Pali recalls, the vision was to use the post office as the main stage. "My feeling was, you have to absolutely do the exact

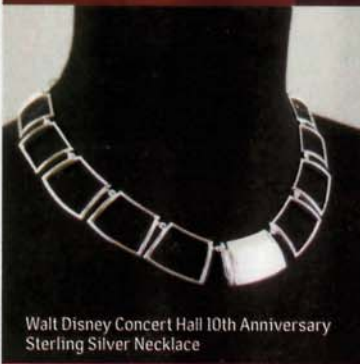


opposite—use the post office for small items, and build a state-of-the-art theater,” he says. “Connect the two underground, but do not touch the historic post office. You’d have to rip the building apart and compromise the architecture.”

With the assistance of design consultant Peyton Hall and his Historic Resources Group, the post office was renovated and restored. Some 24,000 terra-cotta roof tiles had to be removed and reinstalled for waterproofing; the area where customers once bought stamps now serves as the box office.

The building is also home to the Studio Theater, a gift shop and café, as well as children’s classrooms. The Studio Theater is used for smaller productions, cabaret, workshops, rehearsals, special events and rentals.

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