



# Press Release

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## **Dragon Productions Theatre Company Announces Upcoming Departure of Founding Artistic Director Meredith Hagedorn**

Dragon Productions Theatre Company Artistic Director Meredith Hagedorn and Board President Jenny Hollingworth announced today that the 2018 theatre season marks the final season for Ms. Hagedorn, the company's executive artistic director and founder.

Of the upcoming change, Ms. Hagedorn said, "How many people get to achieve a life-long dream? I feel amazingly blessed to be able to say that I've done that. As the Dragon's artistic director, I've had eighteen years of telling amazing stories and creating opportunities for so many people throughout the Bay Area. There have been years of joy, tears, laughter and struggle, but I wouldn't change a thing. I'm so proud of what we've accomplished, and looking forward to passing the torch to others who will continue Dragon's mission of providing quality intimate live theatre. I can't wait to see Dragon flourish for years to come."

"This is a bittersweet day for me and for Dragon," said Managing Director Kimberly Wadycki. "I'm indebted to Meredith for the opportunity to use my theatre and business background at the Dragon when I moved to the area and I know I'm not the only person in the theatre community who can point to Meredith as the person who gave them their first chance in a new hometown. One of the many reasons why I've stayed with the Dragon for seven years is its ongoing commitment to giving opportunities and mentoring to emerging local artists. I'm incredibly proud of the legacy that Meredith has built. She's leaving some big shoes to fill, but it's also going to be an exciting period of change as Dragon continues to grow in its role as an emerging community center for the Peninsula. Meredith's departure, while sad, is going to spark some exciting discussions in the Redwood City community. On a personal note, I'm also thrilled that my friend Meredith can finally take a day or two off and follow her bliss into her next adventure."

Board President Jenny Hollingworth said that "the departure of Meredith will be a very hard act to follow. She has been the life blood of Dragon since day one, and her artistic vision and tireless efforts have created a company with an important ongoing role to play in the Bay Area. The Board wishes her well in her next endeavor, and will continue to fund raise and support the company under its new leadership so that Dragon can continue to provide high quality, affordable and inclusive theatre in the heart of downtown Redwood City."



## Theatre that's uncommon, intimate, and accessible.

An equity actress, director and acting teacher, Ms. Hagedorn moved from Kentucky to the Bay Area, and in 1999, she founded the Dragon Theatre Company with the goal of producing rarely-seen plays and creating more opportunities for local actors, artists and designers, as well as more juicy roles for women on the stage. Dragon's first play, *Bloodmoon* by Nicholas Kazan, was produced in 2001 at NOHSpace in San Francisco and featured a cast of three, one of whom was Ms. Hagedorn. In the following years, Dragon shows were hosted by, amongst others, MACLA San Jose, the Palo Alto Art Center, the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts and The Pear Avenue Theatre, also in Mountain View.

The success of the Dragon's early shows soon led to the need for a permanent home. After considerable scouting of the area, Ms. Hagedorn found a suitable space at 535 Alma Street in downtown Palo Alto. She and now husband James Kasyan then had to figure out how to get permits and contractors and financing to turn an empty space into a black-box theater complete with seating, stage space, a lighting grid and rehearsal studio. Ms. Hagedorn financed the operation by balance transfers between eight different credit cards (a route that in retrospect she does NOT recommend), tenacity and defying norms and naysayers. In February of 2006, the Dragon Theatre opened its doors with the *Heidi Chronicles* by Wendy Wasserstein. This was followed by Ms. Hagedorn's first directorial gig at Dragon with an all-teen cast for *North Shore Fish* by Israel Horovitz. Dragon went on to present forty plays in eight years at the Alma Street playhouse.

As the Dragon grew its reputation and extended its programming, the search began for a new, bigger space, leading to the discovery of a long-empty travel agency in Redwood City, fittingly in the heart of the city's theatre district. In 2012, Meredith and her team took over the new space and began a one-year build-out to convert it into the new Dragon Theatre. The Dragon Theatre at 2120 Broadway Street opened in January, 2013.

In 2014, to run concurrently with the Dragon's main stage "off-Broadway"-style theatrical programming, the company introduced its unique Second Stages series. This program offers emerging theatre-makers the opportunity to produce plays at the Dragon while being mentored, supported and part-funded by the company. Second Stages was conceived by Ms. Hagedorn as a way to pay it forward to other emerging artists in the Bay Area. Aspiring theatre producers have benefited from her wealth of knowledge as they produce a passion project with a safety net provided by Dragon's core team.

In 2016, Dragon added the Monday Night Play Space series, as an integral part of the theatre's mission to give local artists additional theatrical opportunities. On



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select Monday nights, artists can workshop a new work in front of a live audience, who have the chance to be a part of the work's development. This highly successful, ongoing program has so far included staged readings of new plays, readings of short stories, music performances, experimental theatre performances and one-person shows.

In 2017 Dragon also added its Late Night Series, which offers a platform specifically for musicians and comedians looking to workshop a new act, broadening the scope of Dragon's programming and introducing the peninsula community to new types of acts. To date, comedians, clowns and musicians have performed on the Dragon stage in the late night series.

Although Dragon's primary focus is on producing plays for adults, it has also invested in children's theatre education in an effort to fill the gap in arts education currently provided by the local school district. In 2016, Dragon hired an education director, Bora "Max" Koknar, specifically to develop programming for children. Mr Koknar has since expanded his role to offer more classes for adults, such as workshop and coaching skills for public speaking.

Under the artistic leadership of Ms. Hagedorn, Dragon Productions has grown from a one-woman shop in 1999 to a team of two full-time managers and eight part-time contractors, as well as regularly hiring new actors, directors and design teams for each production. Programming for the 2019 Dragon Theatre season will be selected under Ms. Hagedorn's direction and the line-up will be announced at the annual sneak peek event in late summer of 2018.

The search for a new Artistic Director will commence under the guidance of Jenny Hollingworth and the board of directors early in the New Year.