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For Immediate Release
January 20, 2015
Los Angeles, CA

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East West Players Calls on the American Theatre to Increase Diversity

East West Players (EWP), the nation's largest producing organization of Asian American artistic work and the longest-running professional theater of color in the country, is leading a "call to action" to the American Theatre demanding equity, diversity and inclusion affecting artistic and production personnel as well as programming for the communities they serve.

"The 51% Preparedness Plan for the American Theatre" is a vision statement authored by Tim Dang, EWP's Producing Artistic Director, in response to the lack of diversity in theater. This plan is part of a larger effort by East West Players entitled "2042: See Change" to build a coalition of theatres and allies in preparing the American Theatre for 2042 when people of color are projected to become the majority of the population, according to the US Census in reports by the New York Times and Council of Urban Professionals.

"2042: See Change" is East West Players' own diversity initiative, which recently concluded a submission process for a playwriting competition encouraging new work that reflects the dramatically changing American or transnational landscape. Other strategic efforts will be rolling out through the year, the 50th Anniversary of East West Players.

"The 51% Preparedness Plan for the American Theatre" was created as a platform for East West Players while attending the 2014 Theatre Communications Group National Conference in San Diego. This plan challenges American theatres to:

Commit to a goal, over the course of the next 5 years (to 2020), of reaching at least one of the following levels:

- *51% of your organization's artists and production personnel (combined) will be PEOPLE OF COLOR; or*
- *51% of your organization's artists and production personnel (combined) will be WOMEN; or*
- *51% of your organization's artists and production personnel (combined) will be UNDER 35 years of age.*

The entire "51% Preparedness Plan for the American Theatre" document is attached and can be found on the website www.2042seechange.org. The Plan notes that America's labor pools, audiences, and donors all are rapidly changing and if theaters don't act now to address these changes, they risk becoming irrelevant or worse. Dang encourages theatres that feel they may not succeed with

this aggressive call to action, to create their own diversity policy and to share it with other theatres. "Theatre is all about advancing the conversation with robust dialogue and different points of view," said Dang. "All theaters can and should wrestle with coming up with a plan to measurably move the needle toward greater equity, diversity and inclusion in all that they do. Strict quotas are unlawful and none are called for. But to have no aggressive and accountable plan in place is to plan for failure and obsolescence." The 51% Plan has already garnered support from various theatres and community organizations nationwide.

"I greatly applaud the efforts that are being made by my colleague Tim Dang and East West Players," said Sheldon Epps, Artistic Director of the Pasadena Playhouse. "I have long believed that it is necessary to turn talk and discussion into genuine action in order to address the issue of diversity in our field. Comprehensive and dynamic commitment to that will be the only way to truly achieve the necessary changes, both onstage and off, that will allow our theatre companies to truly reflect the diversity of the communities that we serve at this moment in time."

"As our state and nation rapidly diversify, we support initiatives that help reflect those demographic shifts in our key cultural, educational and political institutions," said Stewart Kwoh, President and Executive Director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles. "As champions of equal opportunity for marginalized communities, we applaud East West Players for its innovative campaign to encourage theaters to embrace youth, women and people of color who struggle for equitable access to opportunities in American theater."

"Inclusion is one of our core values at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and our efforts to create true equity in our organization for artists, artisans and administrators are at the heart of all our work" said Bill Rauch, Artistic Director of Oregon Shakespeare Festival. "I am so grateful for Tim Dang's and East West Players' leadership with this bold call for specific measurements of progress. It will no doubt help make a significant difference in our national dialogue as a field."

Alex Nogales, President and CEO of the National Hispanic Media Coalition, added, "This is another effort to diversify the entertainment industry by going directly to the source where many of our performers get their start, the theatrical stage. It is an action whose time has come, which has to be accelerated to reflect the diversity of our nation, of our stories and the outstanding talents of our performers."

Other theaters that have endorsed the initiative:

A Noise Within
African Continuum Theatre Company
Ensemble Studio Theatre – New York
LA Women's Shakespeare Company
Lark Play Development Center
Latino Theater Company operators of The Los Angeles Theatre Center
National Asian American Theatre Co.

Native Voices At The Autry
2g
National Black Theatre
Pasadena Playhouse
Playwrights' Arena
Shakespeare By The Sea/Little Fish Theatre
The Movement Theatre Company
Theater Of The Offensive
Two Pence Theatre Company

Supporting Community Organizations:
American Indians in Film + Television
Asian Americans Advancing Justice—Los Angeles
Los Angeles LGBT Center
National Hispanic Media Coalition
OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates

For the most updated list and more information on the initiative, visit
2042seechange.org or contact Leslie Ishii, Diversity Liaison at
lishii@eastwestplayers.org.

Individuals available for interview regarding the 51% Preparedness Plan:

Tim Dang, Producing Artistic Director, East West Players
Leslie Ishii, Diversity Liaison, East West Players
Daniel M. Mayeda, Legal Counsel, East West Players, Co-Chair of the Asian
Pacific American Media Coalition
Sheldon Epps, Artistic Director, Pasadena Playhouse
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