

Steppenwolf Breaks Ground Today on New Campus Expansion

Plans Unveiled for Thrilling Next Phase of Growth for Iconic Chicago Theatre

New Building to Feature 400-seat In-the-Round Theatre, Dedicated Education Floor and New Social Spaces where Artists, Audiences and Students Converge



Rendering by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture

CHICAGO (March 5, 2019) – Steppenwolf Theatre Company, the nation’s premier ensemble theatre, proudly breaks ground today on the next phase of its multi-year campus expansion on Halsted Street in Chicago’s Lincoln Park. The company unveiled plans for its new state-of-the-art theater building, which will embody the distinct vision of Steppenwolf as a Chicago theatre that is home to America’s ensemble.

“This is a monumental moment for us that is more than two decades in the making—built on the shoulders of the former leaders, the ensemble, the board, and the staff who have touched this project and together have made this vision a reality. The heart of Steppenwolf is that while the work may soar, our foundation is decidedly human scale, an ongoing celebration of discovering the extraordinary in the every day. The promise of this is what has kept people invested in this company for so long and what inspires our next steps,” shares **Artistic Director Anna D. Shapiro**.

“Steppenwolf is first and foremost a Chicago theatre and that understanding has guided the design of every inch of the building. Our company’s role is to create experiences that are in conversation with the diverse life of our hometown and that motivate youth and

adults toward participating in a future that is aware, connected and inclusive. As the home for an ensemble of theatre artists who are widely talented and working throughout the world, we must be a place that cultivates the range of their voices and makes it exciting for them to come back to do their best, most important work. We must be able to provide that through not just the art that we make but the spaces we create: brave, beautiful, compassionate, inclusive,” adds **Shapiro**.

Designed by world-renowned architect Gordon Gill of **Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture**, and London-based theater design team **Charcoalblue** (led by John Owens with theatre designer Ben Hanson and acoustic designer Byron Harrison), and built by Chicago-based **Norcon Construction** (led by Jeff Jozwiak), Steppenwolf’s new facility will change the way Chicagoans experience the company’s cutting-edge theatre.

Slated to open in the summer of 2021, the new 50,000 sq. ft building will feature an intimate **400-seat In-the-Round Theatre** only six rows deep—the only one of its kind in Chicago—that puts the actor at the center and brings the audience closer than ever before; a **dedicated education floor**, tripling the reach and impact of Steppenwolf’s nationally recognized education work; a bright and open **two-story atrium lobby**, and a **wine bar** and a **sidewalk lounge**, increasing the social gathering spaces where artists and audiences converge. The new building will house Steppenwolf’s costume shop and other updated production amenities.

“The new theater is a bold, modern in-the-round space offering unparalleled levels of focus for the actors and audience. Chicago doesn’t have another space like it—in fact Steppenwolf is leading a renewed charge in defining rooms where dialogue and the immediacy of the performers is paramount,” shares **Gavin Green, Senior Partner at Charcoalblue**.

“What powers this project is an ambition to bring artists and audience together into a single space exemplifying the highest level of intimacy, density, flexibility and excitement. Our shared focus and enthusiasm for the project is matched by Steppenwolf’s relentless energy to get this right—to fine-tune the theatre for the company, their loyal audience and open themselves up to newcomers,” adds **Green**.

Designed with the highest accessibility standards, the new theater building will be located at 1646 N Halsted between the existing parking garage (which will remain) and the main theater building, seamlessly connecting the campus across the west side of Halsted Street. As part of this expansion phase, the lobbies of the Downstairs Theatre will also undergo major renovations to better serve audiences.

“The new building will be an open invitation to all—with performance, rehearsal and social places intentionally built to place artists, audiences and students in constant engagement with each other. The In-the-Round theatre design will highlight what makes our company unique—visceral, human and intimate experiences of incredible acting. Our first-ever purpose-built learning space, which is the crowning jewel of the building, will allow us to place education at the heart of our mission and increase the number of teens impacted by our programming from 15,000 to 40,000,” shares **Executive Director David Schmitz**. “In collaboration with the ensemble, the architects and designers and a community of supporters, today it is a true honor to break ground on our next phase, which will reshape the Steppenwolf experience and enable us to become the theater we aspire to be.”

The parking garage at 1624 N. Halsted will remain and undergo cosmetic changes to its façade to create symmetry across the campus. Increased valet service will be offered to continue to make parking easy, and accessible parking will be available next to Front Bar at 1700 N Halsted. During construction, the parking garage will continue to be available to patrons.

“The expansion of Steppenwolf will introduce new relationships with its patrons, neighborhood and Chicago as a whole. Architecturally the design fits within the character of the neighborhood, recognizing the significance of its presence along Halsted Street while respecting our neighbors,” shares **lead architect Gordon Gill**.

“Working with Steppenwolf on this project has been a special experience—their clear intention of accessibility for all has transformed the space. It’s rare to find a group of people who are so deeply involved in not just the program and function of the building, but the emotional life and equity of a building. One of my proudest moments in the design is that arguably, the most primary space of the project is given to the students, which speaks volumes to this company, its ideals and its future,” adds **Gill**.

Phases of the Expansion

The expansion project began in 2016 with Phase One: the completion of the 1700 Theatre and Front Bar: Coffee & Drinks. Following the completion of Phase Two—the new theater building and renovation of the existing Downstairs Theatre lobbies—Steppenwolf enters Phase Three of the expansion with accessibility-minded renovations to the current Downstairs Theatre that will greatly enhance the audience experience for the entire community.

The total cost of Steppenwolf’s multi-year expansion which consists of three phases is \$73 million. The new building at 1646 N Halsted makes up \$54 million of the total \$73.

To date, the company has raised \$46 million from the board and ensemble towards this goal including \$8 million from the sale of an asset. Campaign Co-Chairs are Nora Daley and Eric Lefkofsky.

“Steppenwolf is a Chicago story, unfolding over four decades. The next chapter promises to be the most exciting. This new theatre is a celebration of all Steppenwolf has meant to our city and our commitment to sustaining a thriving theater community in the years to come,” shares **Eric Lefkofsky, Board Chairman & Campaign Co-Chair**.

“This exciting expansion is sure to attract new visitors to Chicago, introduce new audiences to the arts and inspire countless young fans to expand their horizons and reach for new artistic heights,” said **Mayor Rahm Emanuel**. “In the Year of Chicago Theatre, Steppenwolf is one of many proud examples of the talented actors, actresses, producers and directors throughout the city and downtown that together strengthen Chicago's global reputation as worldwide leader in innovative, impactful and groundbreaking artistic performances.”

Components of the New Theatre Building at 1646 N Halsted St
Access High Resolution Renderings >> <https://bit.ly/2NzUjHn>

New In-the-Round Theatre



400 seats, only six rows deep, 20 integrated wheelchair-accessible and companion seats

The new theatre will ultimately replace the Upstairs Theatre and will be the only in-the-round theater space found in a major Chicago theatre. With 400 seats and only six rows deep, the ensemble is thrilled to have such an artistically different space that returns the company to its roots, where fearless acting is within arm's reach. As Steppenwolf **ensemble member Tracy Letts** explains, “I want the audience to see me sweat.”

“It is so exciting to have an additional artistic home that enables the ensemble to have a closer connection to the audience, something the ensemble has wanted to return to since our days playing in small venues. I think this theater will also be a great place for students to see our work in an up-close and personal way. A chance for them to feel a part of the whole experience,” shares **ensemble member Amy Morton**.

Key Elements of the In-the-Round Theatre include:

- State-of-the-art, 400-seat in-the-round theater with a two-story atrium view lobby and welcoming bar and concessions area.
- An intimate theatre experience with just six rows of seats (no audience member will be more than 20 ft from the stage).
- A modular staging system that allows for designers and directors to control the architecture, adjust the capacity and explore different stage footprints for a variety of audience relationships.
- 20 fully-integrated wheelchair accessible locations and companion seats (versus the six that are required by law with the ability to offer up to 36 accessible seats), as well as an induction hearing loop and improved sight lines for performances featuring ASL Interpretation and Open Captioning, which upholds Steppenwolf’s commitment to accessibility.
- The Upstairs Theatre, which was originally built as a rehearsal space, will return to its original purpose and house two rehearsal spaces, after the In-the-Round Theatre is complete.
- With 100 more seats than the Upstairs Theatre, the new theater will allow for the growth of general audiences from 180,000 to 225,000 annually, and welcome more than double the number of teens to SYA shows and served by Steppenwolf Education, growing the total each year from 15,000 to 40,000.
- Economically the addition of 100 extra seats allows Steppenwolf to capitalize on increased revenue from hit productions, while having the flexibility to adjust programming and run length in a more responsive manner to audience behavior.
- Once complete, the space will be the only in-the-round auditorium found in a major Chicago theatre.

“Similar to how you wouldn’t want to use the same frame for every painting in your house, we want Steppenwolf to offer three different exchanges with our audiences—the classic proscenium experience in the Downstairs Theatre, the cabaret experience in the 1700 Theatre, and now an intimate in-the-round experience with the new theater,” shares **Shapiro**.

First-Ever Dedicated Education Space



Pictured is one of the three learning spaces on the purpose-built education floor

For more than 30 years, Steppenwolf’s renowned teen education programming has been uniquely inspiring future artists, audience members and arts advocates. At the heart of the new facility will be Steppenwolf’s first-ever education suite on the fourth floor—an immersive learning space with stunning views of Chicago that will be the crowning jewel of the building. With the larger In-the-Round Theatre, more teens will be able to experience dynamic Steppenwolf for Young Adult (SYA) productions.

“At the core of Steppenwolf sits something mighty - nobler than many others have, or can claim—and that is family. That is an ensemble. In order to live out the true meaning of our creed, we must make room for young talent at the table, at the circular footlights. Now is the time to celebrate these new voices, many of whom are right at our doorstep,” shares **Academy Award-winning ensemble member Tarell Alvin McCraney**.

Elements of Education Space

- With the first-ever dedicated space on the fourth floor featuring three classroom, workshop and event spaces, Steppenwolf Education’s in-depth programming will triple in reach. The prestigious School at Steppenwolf for aspiring actors will also be housed in this space.
- Sharing the fourth floor with Steppenwolf’s new mainstage rehearsal spaces (where the Upstairs Theatre once was), Steppenwolf’s young adult partners and emerging career professionals will be in communion with Steppenwolf artists and leaders.
- With 100 additional seats in the In-the-Round Theatre and added space for Education work, the number of teens, teachers, and families who attend Steppenwolf for Young Adult performances can grow from 15,000 to 40,000 each year.

- Within 10 years on our expanded campus, 400,000 students will engage in Steppenwolf’s arts and education programming, sparking curiosity and achievement for generations to come.

“I joined the Steppenwolf Young Adult Council to learn about a career in the arts. But I’ve learned so much more. SYA made me a leader. It gave me a platform to speak. An artistic home where I can be heard,” shares **Melanie, a former member of Steppenwolf’s Young Adult Council (YAC) and graduate of Chicago Public Schools (CPS)** and **Angel, also a YAC and CPS alum** adds, “The Young Adult Council changed my life and empowered me to make a difference in my community.”

Campaign Co-Chair Nora Daley, shares, “Steppenwolf is a community anchor, combining world-class productions with dynamic in-school and after-school programs for Chicago’s teens. These programs represent one of the most innovative models for a performing arts center to offer nationwide.”

Steppenwolf is a national model for—and the only major Chicago theatre—commissioning renowned playwrights to create new works for Chicago’s teens. Program offerings are deepened through accompanying in-school arts residencies for students and professional development for teachers. Steppenwolf Education also boasts a strong out-of-school and community presence through unique community partnerships and year-round after-school leadership and mentorship programs for diverse teens and extensive teen alumni network.

New Social Spaces



Guests will enjoy a more welcoming environment with more social areas in which to gather, inviting the community to spend their entire evening at Steppenwolf.

Wine Bar

On the first floor of the new building, patrons and artists can visit a stylish wine bar before and after shows cradled by the windowed facade facing Halsted Street on the southernmost side of the building.

Sidewalk Lounge

Located outside the Wine Bar, patrons can further relax and socialize in an outdoor lounge setting backdropped by the building’s most striking architectural gesture.

Downstairs Theatre 2nd Floor Bar and Lounge

The 2nd floor lobby of the Downstairs Theatre will become a vibrant and attractive bar and lounge that serves patrons of both the Downstairs Theatre balcony and the main entrance to the new In-the-Round Theatre on the second floor.

Front Bar: Coffee and Drinks

Steppenwolf's very first public social space opened in June 2016 and immediately transformed the Steppenwolf experience into something more dynamic and complete. Front Bar, a bustling all-day and evening cafe and bar, comes to life with neighbors, artists, and audiences. It's difficult to remember Steppenwolf without it and easy to see the reason for more social spaces like it.

"Front Bar creates such a unique and welcoming experience for any artist at Steppenwolf. Even before I was an ensemble member, Front Bar was a space to nurture community amongst Chicago artists, before auditions or after a show. It gave a space to get to know my cast mates, other company members, our audiences, the staff. With more spaces for this relationship-building the Steppenwolf experience is only going to become richer for everyone and am I excited to be there," shares **ensemble member Karen Rodriguez**.

"With the opening of Front Bar we've seen an exciting and organic flow of people in that space, and with the expansion that invitation works its way across all buildings and activates the campus in a new way. Steppenwolf will transform into a wholly accessible space day and night," adds **Schmitz**.

"This new home for Steppenwolf is of particular importance to Norcon. Meaningful relationships have been forged with the Steppenwolf team and Norcon since the beginning of the project's journey. We are proud of our 10-year relationship with Steppenwolf and applaud them for the determination to make the dream of this new world-class facility a reality," shares **Jeff Jozwiak, Principal at Norcon**.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Warmly welcoming all Chicagoans is a priority for Steppenwolf and is only achieved through thoughtfully built spaces that accommodate a scope of needs and the most up-to-date technology. As a leader in removing accessibility barriers, Steppenwolf has taken enormous steps to improve its existing spaces and will continue to make it a priority in the new building.

- **Accessibility** - Steppenwolf's new and renovated campus **will feature five times the number of wheelchair accessible seats of the current theater** with extensive flexibility for companion seats and multi-wheelchair groups. Wheelchair

accessible seating will increase from six to 13+ in the Downstairs Theatre. The In-the-Round Theatre will include 20 accessible seats and 140 seats (or one third of the house) which will be “at grade,” requiring no stairs to access. Front Bar features a bar experience that is accessible to wheel chairs. Additionally one third of the 1700 Theatre is fully wheelchair accessible.

- **For people who are deaf or have hearing loss** - In recent years, Steppenwolf has added an induction hearing loop, a system that improves sound amplification for people who use personal hearing devices equipped with T-Coils, to the Downstairs and 1700 Theatres. Touch tours, audio-described and ASL-interpreted performances, open captioned performances and the availability of braille scripts have become integral part to all programming. These same technologies, in addition to others as they develop, will be built into the new In-the-Round Theatre.
- **Relaxed and Sensory-Friendly performances** were introduced at Steppenwolf in 2018 and feature a more relaxed environment and minor adjustments to sensory effects such as lighting and sound cues. These performances are open to all but designed to create a safe and welcoming experience for guests who may include, but are not limited to, individuals on the autism spectrum, as well as people with sensory processing and/or integration sensitivities.

Expanded Programming in 1700 Theatre

In June 2016, Steppenwolf opened the first phase of the expansion—the 1700 Theatre, an 80-seat, flexible, interdisciplinary performance space that houses a wide range of exciting productions and attracts young and diverse audiences through the multi-genre LookOut Series. In the 1700 Theatre, adventurous theatre-goers find an incredible range of offerings including:

- Limited runs from quintessential Chicago theatres such as Teatro Vista, Definition Theatre, The Gift Theatre Company, The Yard and Strawdog Theatre
- Unique engagements with Steppenwolf’s legendary ensemble members such as Molly Regan, Cliff Chamberlain, Jon Michael Hill and Jeff Perry
- Exciting acts drawn from Chicago’s rich comedy, storytelling, dance, music and performance art scenes
- A space for promising emerging artists to redefine Chicago’s arts landscape

“When Gary Sinise, Terry Kinney and I started this theater more than four decades ago we were just a bunch of kids with a dream. To stand here today—next to the spot where we first broke ground in 1989—about to once again dig shovels into Steppenwolf’s next chapter is a truly humbling experience. The new building profoundly expands our ability

to achieve what we have always been most passionate about—intimate performance spaces that magnify our artists connection with our audience, lobby spaces that truly invite our patrons, and perhaps most importantly, the classroom and audience space to dramatically increase our bond with the youth and student community that are the lifeblood of our future,” shares **co-founder Jeff Perry**.



Rendering by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture

Bios

Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture (AS+GG) is dedicated to the design of high-performance, energy efficient, and sustainable architecture at international scale. AS+GG approaches each project—regardless of size or scale—with an understanding that architecture has a unique power to influence civic life. The firm strives to create designs that aid society, sustain the environment, and inspire others to improve the world. AS+GG utilizes an integrated design approach that emphasizes a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment—a philosophy the firm terms “global environmental contextualism.” This approach, which builds upon a site and/or building’s fundamental response to topography, cardinal orientation, daylighting, and natural ventilation, combined with renewable energy capture and utilization technologies, represents a fundamental change in the design process in which “form follows performance.” AS+GG design is predicated on the understanding that everything within the built and natural environment is connected. All design should stem from, and be enriched by, the interrelationships of local, regional and global context.

AS+GG designers are celebrated global leaders in multiple disciplines, including architecture, urban design, interior design, and sustainability. Firm expertise includes large-scale regional and urban district planning, infrastructure design and construction, high-performance supertall towers, corporate office, hotel and residential complexes, high-end retail, museums, cultural and exhibition facilities, educational buildings, and

high-tech laboratories. AS+GG was founded in 2006 by Partners Adrian Smith, Gordon Gill, and Robert Forest. The firm has ranked among the top 10 global architecture firms since its founding, and, in 2015, was ranked the #1 firm by Architect magazine. AS+GG currently has 90 employees in offices in Chicago and Beijing with projects around the world.

Charcoalblue is the world's leading, multi-national theatre, acoustic, digital and turnkey design consultancy. Since our foundation in 2004, Charcoalblue has grown to a team of over 70 with studios in London, Bristol, Glasgow, New York, Chicago and Melbourne. Our passion for our work means we deliver the best possible spaces for performance, education, culture and workplaces. In partnership with clients, architects, and engineering teams we offer design services for a wide range of buildings and other projects: from historic theatres to contemporary offices, from concert halls to community centers, from permanent buildings to temporary structures, and in both physical and virtual environments. We provide strategic consultancy and project leadership for cultural projects, design of auditoria and technical systems, and acoustic and digital design. Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do, leading to theatrically innovative solutions that get the most out of architecture and technology. We collaborate with some of the world's leading architects and arts groups. Our portfolio ranges from world-famous companies like the Royal Shakespeare Company, the London Symphony Orchestra, the National Theatre and Royal Opera House in the UK, Steppenwolf, Chicago Shakespeare Theater and the World Trade Center in the US, as well as cutting-edge Sydney Theatre Company and St. Ann's Warehouse, whilst our work with educational institutions includes LAMDA and Brooklyn's Pratt Institute. Our digital design service includes research into the use of immersive technology for cinema, broadcast, events spaces and counts top tech and entertainment companies as clients, including Google, Facebook and BAFTA. Theatre, music, art and technology connects communities, inspires new ways of thinking, and enriches lives. As a socially conscious company, we contribute a portion of our time, skills and profit to support causes and organizations in all areas of the music and theatre industry that share our vision to promote culture and creativity. Our mission is to transform the cultural landscape and our passion is for creating spaces for storytelling and music-making. With that passion comes inspiration to add the final touches, the drive to go the extra mile, and the rigor to get the show on with you, no matter what.

Norcon is the general contractor for Steppenwolf's new home and will be managing and executing the physical construction of the project. They have constructed numerous projects for notable non-profits, including the MCA, Museum of Science and Industry, Northwestern University, the Alphawood Foundation and the Poetry Foundation. They understand the need to stretch every dollar, while at the same time understanding this

facility's importance to Chicago and the need for the architecture reflect the excitement and values of this world-class company. Many of Norcon's projects are architecturally-significant, complex, very high quality, and technically challenging. They have responded during seven years of pre-construction with diligence, flexibility, and ingenuity, and intend to bring those same qualities to the construction of the project.

Steppenwolf Education's unique approach combines play production with educational components to enhance arts education for young audiences, their teachers and families, as well as a professional leadership program for early-career professionals. Every season Steppenwolf for Young Adults (SYA) creates two full-scale professional productions specifically for teens. Working closely with the Chicago Public and metropolitan area schools and other community partners, Steppenwolf Education annually ensures access to the theater for more than 15,000 participants from Chicago's diverse communities. The initiative also includes post-show discussions with artists; classroom residencies led by Steppenwolf-trained teaching artists in almost 100 classrooms in public high schools; professional development workshops for educators; and the Young Adult Council, an innovative year-round after-school initiative that uniquely engages high school students in all areas of the theater's operations, and other teen and community based programs.

Steppenwolf ensemble members include: Joan Allen, Kevin Anderson, Alana Arenas, Randall Arney, Kate Arrington, Ian Barford, Robert Breuler, Cliff Chamberlain, Gary Cole, Carrie Coon, Celeste M. Cooper, Glenn Davis, Kathryn Erbe, Malcolm Ewen, Audrey Francis, K. Todd Freeman, Frank Galati, Francis Guinan, Moira Harris, Jon Michael Hill, Tim Hopper, Tom Irwin, Rajiv Joseph, Ora Jones, Terry Kinney, Tina Landau, Martha Lavey*, Tracy Letts, John Mahoney*, John Malkovich, Sandra Marquez, Mariann Mayberry*, Tarell Alvin McCraney, James Vincent Meredith, Laurie Metcalf, Amy Morton, Sally Murphy, Caroline Neff, Bruce Norris, Austin Pendleton, Jeff Perry, William Petersen, Yassen Peyankov, Rondi Reed, Molly Regan, Karen Rodriguez, Anna D. Shapiro, Eric Simonson, Gary Sinise, Namir Smallwood, Lois Smith, Rick Snyder, Jim True-Frost and Alan Wilder. **In Memoriam*

Steppenwolf Theatre Company is proud to be part of the **2019 Year of Chicago Theatre**, presented by the City of Chicago and the League of Chicago Theatres. To truly fall in love with Chicago, you must go to our theatres. This is where the city bares its fearless soul. Home to a community of creators, risk-takers, and big hearts, Chicago theatre is a hotbed for exciting new work and hundreds of world premieres every year. From Broadway musicals to storefront plays and improv, there's always a seat waiting for you at one of our 200+ theatres. Book your next show today at ChicagoPlays.com.

Steppenwolf Theatre Company is the nation’s premier ensemble theater. Formed by a collective of actors in 1976, the ensemble members represents a remarkable cross-section of actors, directors and playwrights. Thrilling and powerful productions from *Balm in Gilead* and *August: Osage County* to *Pass Over* and *Downstate*—and accolades that include the National Medal of Arts and 12 Tony Awards—have made the theater legendary. Steppenwolf produces hundreds of performances and events annually in its three spaces: the 515-seat Downstairs Theatre, the 299-seat Upstairs Theatre and the 80-seat 1700 Theatre. Artistic programing includes a seven-play season; a two-play Steppenwolf for Young Adults season; Visiting Company engagements; and LookOut, a multi-genre performances series. Education initiatives include the nationally recognized work of Steppenwolf for Young Adults, which engages 15,000 participants annually from Chicago’s diverse communities; the esteemed School at Steppenwolf; and Professional Leadership Programs for arts administration training. While firmly grounded in the Chicago community, nearly 40 original Steppenwolf productions have enjoyed success both nationally and internationally, including Broadway, Off-Broadway, London, Sydney, Galway and Dublin. Anna D. Shapiro is the Artistic Director and David Schmitz is the Executive Director. Eric Lefkofsky is Chair of Steppenwolf’s Board of Trustees. For additional information, visit steppenwolf.org, facebook.com/steppenwolftheatre, twitter.com/steppenwolfthtr and instagram.com/steppenwolfthtr.

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