

San Jose Rep's artistic director to leave in 2009

NEAR GUIDED LOCAL INSTITUTION AS IT GREW TO REGIONAL THEATER

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After 20 years at the helm of San Jose's flagship theater company, Timothy Near is stepping down as artistic director of San Jose Repertory Theatre.

Near, 62, says she has been thinking about resigning for some time, and she began discussing her plans with the Rep's leadership in 2004. She won't take her final bow until September 2009, to give the troupe time to develop a succession plan.

"You can't replace Timi," said Rep Managing Director Nick Nichols. "She has been the face of the Rep for the last 20 years. She has built this organization up from its DNA. But we've got her for another two years, and she will be a strong guiding hand going forward."

During Near's tenure, the Rep has grown from a local arts institution to a powerhouse regional theater that launched significant new plays and showcased the talents of stars from Holly Hunter and Lynn Redgrave to Lucy Liu.

Near cited the building of the Rep's downtown showcase theater in 1997 as among her proudest moments and notes that she will miss the company greatly. But she said she is looking forward to passing on the administrative burden.

"Every artistic director longs to just be an artist again. That's where I'm at right now. It's been 20 years. I'm itching to be 100 percent an artist," Near said. "I want to be still and quiet in my spirit, to open the door and see what comes in."

There have been challenges during Near's reign as well, including a financial meltdown in

2006 from which the company has just begun to recover. The city of San Jose bailed the Rep out last year with a \$2 million line of credit.

Near said she wouldn't be willing to leave the company unless she thought it was on solid financial footing. The 2007-08 budget is projected at \$4.9 million, down from \$5.2 million in 2006-07.

"I wouldn't even dream of leaving unless the theater was stable and the company was going strong. I feel positive about where the company is headed," Near said.

Near came to the Rep in 1987, just as the high-tech economy was starting to change the face of the valley. From the start, she saw the Rep as a keystone in the city's development, envisioning a theater that helped build a city.

"It's important that San Jose be a cultural center," Near said. "Arts organizations can do that, they can enrich the city. SJ Rep has been a leader in exemplifying that trend. The Rep has put the city on the map."

Near's love of theater can be traced back to her childhood. She was raised to see the arts as a vital part of every day living, the pulse of the community. That's the vision she wanted to communicate with the audience.

"My goal has never been to win prizes, to win the Tony, that's not important to me," she said. "My goal has been to produce work that resonates with the community."

Near cut her teeth in New York as an actress and director. She won an Obie Award in 1981 for her performance in Emily Mann's "Still Life." When she was tapped to take the reins at the Rep, she had been serving as interim artistic director of the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta.

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