



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF CLEVELAND PLAY HOUSE

*Cleveland Play House is America's first permanently established professional theatre company. It was founded in 1915 midway through a decade of cultural renaissance in Cleveland.*

Many of Cleveland's major cultural organizations were formed between 1910 and 1920, including Cleveland Music School Settlement, Karamu House, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Museum of Natural History.

In the early 1900s, Cleveland theatre featured mostly vaudeville, melodrama, burlesque and light entertainment, but a select group of eight Clevelanders — among them Charles and Minerva Brooks — sought plays of substance on timely topics. Together they formed Cleveland Play House. They found a home at East 85<sup>th</sup> and Euclid Avenue, in a farmhouse donated by Cleveland industrialist Francis Drury. Their motto was "Art in Democracy," and they were committed to serving the needs of the community.

In 1927, CPH built a facility at 85<sup>th</sup> and Euclid that housed the Brooks Theatre and the Drury Theatre. In 1949, to accommodate its growth, CPH opened the 77<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre in a converted church, which featured America's first open stage — the forerunner of the thrust stage that was popularized in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1957, through a grant from the Ford Foundation, CPH formed an apprentice acting company. Continuing to 1960, the Ford Foundation Ensemble included Alan Alda, at the beginning of his long and successful career, and Jon Jory, who became Artistic Director at Actors Theatre of Louisville where he founded the Humana Festival of New American Plays.

In 2009, through a collaboration called The Power of Three, CPH partnered with Playhouse Square and Cleveland State University to create the new Allen Theatre Complex in downtown Cleveland. In September of 2011, CPH kicked off its 96<sup>th</sup> consecutive season in a reinvented Allen Theatre at Playhouse Square. Two new

venues, the Outcalt Theatre and the Helen Rosenfeld Lewis Bialosky Lab Theatre ("The Helen"), opened in early 2012. CPH's administrative offices and education center are on East 13<sup>th</sup> Street, adjacent to the theatres. Its production center is located a few miles away along Cleveland's lakeshore.

CPH has had nine Artistic Directors since 1915: Raymond O'Neil (1915-21), Frederic McConnell (1921-58), K. Elmo Lowe (1959-70), William Green (1970-71), Richard Oberlin (1971-85), Josephine Abady (1988-93), Peter Hackett (1994-2004), Michael Bloom (2004-2013), and Laura Kepley (2013-present).

Education is a high priority at CPH, with education programs covering every stage of life from kindergarten through graduate school to life-long learners. In addition to more than 20,000 students from 350 schools attending CPH productions, our Education Department serves students in CMSD schools with three full-time site-coordinators through the United Way WrapAround Strategy and four Compassionate Arts Remaking Education (CARE) teachers working full-time in schools. CPH and Case Western Reserve University offer a Master of Fine Arts in acting, and the three-year program is in residence at CPH.

The recipient of the 2015 Regional Theatre Tony Award®, CPH serves its community by bringing to life stories that are entertaining, socially relevant and thought provoking. It has produced more than 100 World and/or American Premieres, and more than 12 million people have attended CPH's 1,600+ productions. With dynamic leadership, exceptional programming and top-flight facilities in place, CPH stands on the threshold of an exciting new century of service to the people of Northeast Ohio.