

view



Nancy O'Dell
AT HOME

THE ULTIMATE *L.A.*
Staycation

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LOS ANGELES, SANTA BARBARA & VENTURA COUNTIES

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in the
spotlight
BY ABIGAIL STONE

PHOTO BY JOHN LINDEN



PAUL CREWES
PHOTO BY BEN GIBBS

THE WALLIS ANNENBERG CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS IS POISED TO BRING THE EYES OF THE WORLD TO LOS ANGELES.

"I came here about five years ago and met the people who were running The Wallis then, when the theater was still a hole in the ground."

Paul Crewes, the newly appointed artistic director of the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, is talking about the first time he saw the complex, which pivots around the historic Beverly Hills post office building at the corner of Canon Drive and Santa Monica Boulevard. "Even just seeing the building site, I could see the potential, and so I was really keen to bring a piece of work here." Crewes, who was at the time the head of the Cornwall, England-based Kneehigh Theatre, one of Great Britain's acclaimed touring companies (and who is still juggling his duties

with that organization until his appointment at The Wallis officially starts in April), brought Kneehigh's production of "Brief Encounter" to The Wallis in its first season. "I loved the space and the audience, and the stage is fantastic," he enthuses. Though that experience took place nearly 18 months ago, the flame that was ignited shows little sign of dimming. "At my time in life — I've been 30 years in the theater business — to get the opportunity to start with a new organization is a gift."

The Wallis began its search for an artistic director in March with over 60 candidates from around the world in the running. Crewes' combination of enthusiasm for the space and his track record at Kneehigh proved him the ideal candidate to lead the center into its future.

While at Kneehigh, Crewes established strong relationships with other companies and launched projects that reached into the community to engage audiences who might not normally turn to theater. And his goal with The Wallis is similar: to create a space that is not only integral to the fabric of life in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles, but also that attracts the eyes of the world. "The thing about The Wallis is that it's a performing arts center. It's not a theater, it's not a museum or an opera house. It can do everything, and we can bring a range of work in and through this building, which I think is a fantastic opportunity. We can make work, we can produce our own work, we can present work, we can bring music, film, dance...the opportunities are fantastic from a creative point of view."

Partnering with Crewes in his goals is Managing Director Rachel Fine, former executive director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. Fine shares Crewes' enthusiasm for positioning The Wallis as a driving force in the performing arts in Los Angeles. "That is absolutely the end goal, to be a national and international destination," she says, adding, "I found that audiences have gone from wanting great art to wanting a full-fledged community experience."

Philanthropist and technological entrepreneur David C. Bohnett took the helm as the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts' chairman of the board on Nov. 18. "As board chair, it is my goal to build on the success of the organization to date and continue to develop a strong presence of The Wallis in our local community and beyond," he says. "We will accomplish this through presenting the highest-quality multidisciplinary performances across a variety of formats and genres as best suits the unique strengths of the facility and the diversity of our local audience."

The Wallis has proven that it can present and sell out important imported productions from around the world and create original programming that appeals to a cross-section of people — to wit, the remainder of this year's slate, ranging from Oregon Shakespeare Festival's production of "Guys and Dolls" to Jesse Eisenberg's off-Broadway hit, "The Revisionist," to the intimate Cabaret series featuring such performers as Christine Ebersole and Ute Lemper to Theatreworks USA's "The Lightning Thief," aimed at young audiences. It has also been able to groom a new generation — 10,000 schoolchildren saw shows last year as part of its education program. The next phase will find The Wallis taking an active role in debuting new work. "We can make great work here, and that's one of the things we will be doing, as well as producing our own work," Crewes continues. The future he envisions is irresistible: "The dream we have is that this is somewhere people will come for a coffee or a beer or a meal. They may see a show, they may not, but it all starts connecting up." Get ready to make the jump to light speed.

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Los Angeles is sponsoring the Cabaret @ The Wallis series from Dec. 9, 2015 to Jan. 28, 2016. More information can be found at www.thewallis.org/cabaret.



RACHEL FINE

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