

Whitney Family Studio Theater Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Monday, January 5, 2026

Welcome to the ribbon cutting for the Whitney Family Studio Theater. I am so moved by the performance of “Being Alive” by Matthew Smith—accompanied by Dan Belzer. Thank you for all the feelings.

We open for the first time, a theater, only once, and we do so today on January 5, 2026.

I stand here today as your Dean of Theater, Film and Television at UCLA, a pre-eminent institution in the world that produced Carol Burnett, Tim Robbins, Julie Dash, Francis Ford Coppola, Montecuma Esparza, Gregory Nava, Alexander Payne, Rob Reiner...beyond their names, imagine that the films and theater that help us understand our experiences, communicate with one another, would not exist if not for this place. I am talking about: *Once Upon A Mattress, The Carol Burnett Show, Apocalypse Now, The Godfathers, Daughters of the Dust, Shawshank Redemption, Mystic River, Selena, Election, Sideways, The Descendants, Holdovers. When Harry Met Sally, Stand By Me, Misery, A Few Good Men and Princess Bride*. So today, we open more than a theater, we open a space where dreams begin, voices actualize, perspectives captured and worldbuilding established.

Every theater is a vessel, a container like a glass, a cup, a bowl that is not just the stage, it's the seats that hold an audience, it is light and design shaped by designers who learn their craft here- All together they truly give life to the stories that will be told here and the people who will tell them. From this moment forward, this space is a birthplace for imagination, courage, collaboration, and creativity and a homeplace for belonging that brings together people who more than anything in the world wish to create stories that help us all achieve a better understanding of our humanity.

For our students especially, this is where learning comes alive. In this theater, they will study their craft, discover their voices, and take risks. They will rehearse lines late into the night, learn to dance the new vogue (I am being taught by our own student right now during our Dance with the Dean), learn how to listen to one another, how to support one another, and how to stand confidently under the lights. They will perform here - not just plays and musicals, but ideas, emotions, and moments that stay with us long after the curtain falls.

This is where a student steps onstage for the first time, where faculty stand alongside them with hearts pounding, unsure – nervous, confident and brave enough to try all the same time. And it's where their professors know that same student already stands taller, speaks louder, and

believes more deeply in what they are capable of becoming and the professors including Jen Chang, J Ed Arraiza, Lap Chi Chu and Deborah Landis here understand the why of it all, why write, why invest in the next generations who will continue in this life—beyond all of us—with their voice, their craft.

A theater teaches us how to tell our own stories and how to truly hear the stories of others. YOUR VOICE OUR STORY begins here, again and again, with every rehearsal and every performance.

This space exists thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Liz Whitney, Class of 1980, and Ken Whitney. In 2021, they made a transformational gift to UCLA Theater, Film and Television that supported both the Nimoy Theater and the renovation of Macgowan Hall. Their gift allowed for major upgrades to this building and the creation of what is now the Whitney Family Studio Theater.

In recognition of their deep connection to UCLA, this space bears the Whitney name, and the Nimoy Theater stage is recognized as the Whitney Family Stage. Beyond the renovation itself, their vision also ensures long-term support for this theater complex so it can continue to serve students and artists for years to come.

This space belongs to our students here and in the future. It is a place where they will explore boldly, fail safely, and

succeed joyfully. This will be the place where students discover what they can do - and who they can become.

After careful design and a phased construction process that kept learning at the center, we are proud to open this newly reimagined space today. What you see around you is the result of that commitment - to education, to artistry, and to the future of performance - made real.

This afternoon we open the doors to a stage filled with possibility and the greatness of what will certainly unfold here.

Welcome to the Whitney Family Studio Theater!

I now introduce Liz Whitney, the donor who makes this all possible. And here too is her 101-year old mom Lauren, and all her family including Ken Whitney and daughter Rachel! Thank you!