



**News Release**  
**Virginia Repertory Theatre**

**Contact:** Liz Nance

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Director of Communications  
Virginia Repertory Theatre  
[lnance@virginiarep.org](mailto:lnance@virginiarep.org)  
804-389-3390

## **Virginia Repertory Theatre Names Desirée Roots First of Three Co-Artistic Directors**

Richmond, VA – Virginia Repertory Theatre has named Desirée Roots as Co-Artistic Director-Community. Roots is one of Virginia’s best known and most accomplished performing artists. She is the first of three Co-Artistic Directors to be announced in a new leadership model that will steer all artistic aspects of Central Virginia’s flagship professional theatre according to Phil Whiteway, Managing Director and co-founder of Virginia Rep.

“Roots began her association with Virginia Rep at age 16, when she served as a high school intern with Theatre IV, which merged with Barksdale Theatre to form Virginia Rep in 2012. Her first professional engagement was when she appeared in the cast of Theatre IV’s production of *Ain’t Misbehavin’* in 1988,” added Virginia Rep’s Founding Producer and co-founder Bruce Miller. Since then, she has starred in numerous Theatre IV, Barksdale Theatre and Virginia Rep productions, most recently *The Color Purple*, *Dreamgirls*, *Caroline or Change* and *Ella and Her Fella Frank*.

The unique mission of Theatre IV, established in 1975, was “to seek national caliber excellence equally in four areas: the arts, education, children’s health and community leadership.” This four-fold mission inspired Theatre IV’s name. These four equal commitments continue to serve as the pillars of Virginia Rep’s operations today.

“In 1975, we were decades ahead of our time,” Whiteway stated. “The pressure then was to be focused solely on the art. Today, we are proud to recommit to the entirety of our community. We believe it’s more important than ever to provide excellence in all four areas. Desirée’s artistic leadership will anchor our connection to children’s health and community leadership.”

“We are thrilled that Desirée is joining us in this important job that will help forge our future,” stated Laura Lee Chandler, current Chair of Virginia Rep’s Board. “We will hire two other Co-Artistic Directors with responsibilities to oversee Education and Adult Audience Programming.”

“These directors will lead the three co-equal, mission-mandated focus areas of our operation,” added Whiteway, “and enhance our wide-ranging impact on RVA to ensure a strong and stable business model.”

Virginia Rep expects to announce the other Co-Artistic Directors in 2022, after careful vetting by the selection committee, led by William Carter, Chair-Elect of the Virginia Rep Board. The committee is composed of staff and board leadership.

“Many people know Desirée for her performances in our shows, and for her independent jazz singing career,” Carter said. “Her depth of experience will be essential as she helps to shape all of our acclaimed programs. Her professional arts management experience and deep knowledge of the community will empower her efforts,” he added.

Roots has vast experience in the Richmond area working with schools and businesses to build community awareness and appreciation for the arts. Her professional background includes working as Program Coordinator for Richmond Jazz Society and as Booking Manager for Downtown Presents (now Venture Richmond). She studied Musicology at the University of Michigan and has a B.A. in Art Education/Performance from Virginia Union University. She was honored with the 2005 Theresa Pollak Award for Outstanding Vocalist in Virginia, is a member of Actors’ Equity Association, and is a panel judge for the Virginia Commission for the Arts.

“I am deeply honored to be appointed to this leadership position with Virginia Rep, which, along with the Richmond Jazz Society, has been my artistic home for thirty years. I know my work is cut out for me, and it will not be easy. The events of the past two years, and Virginia Rep’s powerful history since the founding of Barksdale Theatre in 1953, inspire, energize and challenge me. I greatly look forward to continuing the work that I love in the community I love.”

### **About Virginia Repertory Theatre**

Virginia Repertory Theatre is a regional professional theater headquartered in downtown Richmond, and one of the largest performing arts organizations in Central Virginia. Virginia Rep stages four seasons annually: the Signature Season at the Sara Belle and Neil November Theatre, Virginia Rep’s Children’s Season, the Hanover Tavern Season, and the Theatre Gym Season produced in partnership with Cadence Theatre Company. Virginia Rep also tours, both virtually and live, and provides educational programming to schools throughout Virginia and to major performing arts centers throughout 32 states.

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