



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 4, 2017 – Calgary, AB: It is with fondness and gratitude that we announce that in April, 2017, **Simon Mallett**, Founder and Artistic Director of Downstage, will be moving on from the company after 13 seasons to pursue an exceptional opportunity to be announced in the coming months. Stepping into the role of Artistic Director will be **Ellen Close**, who joined Downstage in 2007 and has been Artistic Producer since 2013.

Simon has directed many of the company's award-winning productions including *Bashir Lazhar*, *In the Wake*, *Good Fences*, *Sia*, *My Family and Other Endangered Species* and *Benefit*. He has also worked as a director for Vertigo Theatre, Lunchbox Theatre, New West Theatre and Theatre Calgary, where he is the Associate Director on *A Christmas Carol* and will be directing the World Premiere of Sharon Pollock's *Blow Wind, High Water* this fall. Simon is the recipient of The Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Emerging Artist Award, the 2014 Calgary Critics Award for Best Director and has been nominated for several Betty Mitchell Awards, including three nominations for Outstanding Direction, winning the award in 2014.

Says Board President Brenda Lang, "Downstage is at a truly exciting time in our history. Simon's inspired artistic leadership and passion for our unique mandate of creating conversation around social issues through theatre has built a foundation that we are well-placed to build on in the years to come. I speak for the entire Board of Directors when I say that we are delighted to have Ellen Close in the position of Artistic Director to carry forth this vision."

Says Simon, "Ellen and I have worked in close partnership during the last decade to craft Downstage's artistic vision and devise innovative ways to remove barriers to attendance. While it was a difficult decision to step away from a company that remains very dear to me, I cannot wait to see how Downstage will undoubtedly flourish and grow under Ellen's leadership."

Ellen is well known by Downstage's audiences for her work as a producer, performer and member of the Downstage Creation Ensemble. With Braden Griffiths, she co-wrote and performed in *My Family and Other Endangered Species*, which premiered at Downstage, enjoyed an encore run at Vertigo Theatre's YStage Series and was recently published by Playwrights' Canada Press. Adds Ellen, "After ten seasons with Downstage, I am thrilled to take on this new challenge of leading the company through this time of transition and growth."