Tony Kushner & Sarah Vowell: In Conversation

The Lincoln Legacy: The Man and His Presidency

Thu, Feb 22, 2018 | Royce Hall
Welcome to the Center for the Art of Performance

The Center for the Art of Performance is not a place. It’s more of a state of mind that embraces experimentation, encourages a culture of the curious, champions disruptors and dreamers and supports the commitment and courage of artists. We promote rigor, craft and excellence in all facets of the performing arts.

2017–18 SEASON VENUES

Royce Hall, UCLA  Freud Playhouse, UCLA
The Theatre at Ace Hotel  Little Theater, UCLA
Will Rogers State Historic Park

UCLA’s Center for the Art of Performance (CAP UCLA) is dedicated to the advancement of the contemporary performing arts in all disciplines—dance, music, spoken word and theater—as well as emerging digital, collaborative and cross-platforms utilized by today’s leading artists. Part of UCLA’s School of the Arts and Architecture, CAP UCLA curates and facilitates direct exposure to contemporary performance from around the globe, supporting artists who are creating extraordinary works of art and fostering a vibrant learning community both on and off the UCLA campus. The organization invests in the creative process by providing artists with financial backing and time to experiment and expand their practices through strategic partnerships, residencies and collaborations. As an influential voice within the local, national, and global arts community, CAP UCLA serves to connect audiences across generations in order to galvanize a living archive of our culture.

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Center for the Art of Performance presents

Tony Kushner and Sarah Vowell: In Conversation

The Lincoln Legacy: The Man and His Presidency

Moderated by Joan Waugh

Thu, Feb 22 at 8pm | Royce Hall
Running Time: Approx. 60 mins. | No intermission
An audience Q&A follows their talk.

No photography or recording (audio or video), at the request of the artists.

Funds provided by the George C. Perkins Fund.
MESSAGE FROM THE CENTER

Last year, when we were deep in the throes of putting together this year’s season, we heard that the writers Sarah Vowell and Tony Kushner were about to have a conversation about Abraham Lincoln. At the time, just weeks before the election, we thought such a conversation would have deep relevance—little did we know only a few weeks later, how much relevance. As we try to make sense of this turgid and tumultuous year, it somehow seems that the only way to see our way forward is to look back, to let history reveal a road to the future. Tonight’s conversation, between two extraordinary writers and an esteemed historian, will undoubtedly do just that.

This summer I attended a concert of Beethoven’s 9th at the Hollywood Bowl, and as a preface, the Los Angeles Philharmonic played Aaron Copland’s Lincoln Portrait. Copland wrote the piece in 1942, just after the devastation of Pearl Harbor. It is one of a few orchestral pieces that feature spoken text, which Copland pulled from a number of Lincoln’s speeches. At the Bowl, the text was spoken by none other than the ‘voice of Los Angeles,’ Vin Scully. He had just retired after 67 seasons, he had every word memorized and never faltered. All 17,000 of us were mesmerized and moved to tears. I remember thinking that it would be fitting to include the text of Lincoln Portrait in tonight’s program. So here it is. If you’ve never seen it or heard it, Google it. You can see Vin at the Bowl, or Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic, with Copland himself reading, or many other versions. History speaks and speaks again, and the words have much to say if we only listen.

—Meryl Friedman, Director of Education & Special Initiatives

From Aaron Copland’s Lincoln Portrait

“Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history.”

That is what he said. That is what Abraham Lincoln said.

“Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation. We, even we here, hold the power and bear the responsibility.”

He was born in Kentucky, raised in Indiana, and lived in Illinois. And this is what he said. This is what Abe Lincoln said.

“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves and then we will save our country.”

When standing erect he was six feet four inches tall, and this is what he said. He said: “It is the eternal struggle between two principles, right and wrong, throughout the world. It is the same spirit that says ‘you toil and work and earn bread, and I’ll eat it.’ No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation, and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle.”

Lincoln was a quiet man. Abe Lincoln was a quiet and a melancholy man. But when he spoke of democracy, this is what he said.

He said: “As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy.”

Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth president of these United States, is everlasting in the memory of his countrymen. For on the battleground at Gettysburg, this is what he said:

He said: “That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. That this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.”
ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Award-winning playwright and screenwriter Tony Kushner and bestselling author Sarah Vowell will examine the life’s work and legacy of Abraham Lincoln, the nation’s 16th president.

Kushner penned the 1993 Tony Award-winning play (and later Emmy Award-winning TV miniseries) *Angels in America*, which followed a group of people battling the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980s. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama that year. He later wrote the screenplay for director Steven Spielberg’s *Lincoln*. Kushner also was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 2013.

Vowell, a best-selling author, journalist, essayist, social commentator and actress, has written seven nonfiction books about American history and culture. Her most recent book, *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States* (2015), follows the American Revolution and the role played by General Lafayette. She was also a contributing editor to the NPR show *This American Life* and voiced the character of Violet in Pixar’s *The Incredibles*.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

TONY KUSHNER

Born in New York City in 1956, and raised in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Kushner is best known for his two-part epic, *Angels In America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. His other plays include *A Bright Room Called Day, Slavs!, Hydriotaphia, Homebody/Kabul*, and *Caroline, or Change*, the musical for which he wrote book and lyrics, with music by composer Jeanine Tesori. Kushner has translated and adapted Pierre Corneille’s *The Illusion*, S.Y. Ansky’s *The Dybbuk*, Bertolt Brecht’s *The Good Person of Sezuan* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and the English-language libretto for the children’s opera *Brundibár* by Hans Krasa. He wrote the screenplays for Mike Nichols’ film of *Angels In America*, and Steven Spielberg’s *Munich*. In 2012 he wrote the screenplay for Spielberg’s movie *Lincoln*. His screenplay was nominated for an Academy Award, and won the New York Film Critics Circle Award, Boston Society of Film Critics Award, Chicago Film Critics Award, Chicago Film Critics Award, and several others. His books include *But the Giraffe: A Curtain Raising* and *Brundibar: the Libretto*, with illustrations by Maurice Sendak; *The Art of Maurice Sendak: 1980 to the Present*; and *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict*, co-edited with Alisa Solomon. His recent work includes a collection of one-act plays entitled *Tiny Kushner*, and *The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*. In addition, a revival of *Angels in America* ran off-Broadway at the Signature Theater and won the Lucille Lortel Award in 2011 for Outstanding Revival.

Kushner is the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, an Emmy Award, two Tony Awards, three Obie Awards, an Arts Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a PEN/Laura Pels Award, a Spirit of Justice Award from the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, a Cultural Achievement Award from The National Foundation for Jewish Culture, a Chicago Tribune Literary Prize for lifetime achievement, the 2012 National Medal of Arts, and the 2015 Lifetime Achievement in the American Theater Award, among many others. *Caroline, or Change*, produced at the National Theatre of Great Britain, received the Evening Standard Award, the London Drama Critics’ Circle Award and the Olivier Award for Best Musical. In September 2008, Tony Kushner became the first recipient of the Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award, the largest theater award in the US. He is the subject of a documentary film, *Wrestling with Angels: Playwright Tony Kushner*, made by the Oscar-winning filmmaker Freida Lee Mock. He lives in Manhattan with his husband, Mark Harris.

In *After Angels*, a profile of Tony Kushner published in *The New Yorker*, John Lahr wrote: “[Kushner] is fond of quoting Melville’s heroic prayer from *Mardi* and *a Voyage Thither* ("Better to sink in boundless deeps than float on vulgar shoals"), and takes an almost carnal glee in tackling the most difficult subjects in contemporary history – among them, AIDS and the conservative counter-revolution (*Angels In America*), Afghanistan and the West (*Homebody/Kabul*), German Fascism and Reaganism (*A Bright Room Called Day*), the rise of capitalism (*Hydriotaphia, or the Death of Dr. Browne*), and racism and the civil rights movement in the South (*Caroline, or Change*). But his plays, which are invariably political, are rarely polemical. Instead Kushner rejects ideology in favor of what he calls “a dialectically shaped truth,” which must be “outrageously
funny” and “absolutely agonizing,” and must “move us forward.” He gives voice to characters who have been rendered powerless by the forces of circumstances – a drag queen dying of AIDS, an uneducated Southern maid, contemporary Afghans – and his attempt to see all sides of their predicament has a sly subversiveness. He forces the audience to identify with the marginalized – a humanizing act of the imagination.”

SARAH VOWELL
Sarah Vowell is the New York Times’ bestselling author of seven nonfiction books on American history and culture. By examining the connections between the American past and present, she offers personal, often humorous accounts of everything from presidents and their assassins to colonial religious fanatics, as well as thoughts on American Indians, utopian dreamers, pop music and the odd cranky cartographer. Her most recent book is entitled Lafayette in the Somewhat United States.

Vowell’s book, Unfamiliar Fishes is the intriguing history of our 50th state, Hawaii, annexed in 1898. Replete with a cast of beguiling and often tragic characters, including an overthrown Hawaiian queen, whalers, missionaries, sugar barons, Teddy Roosevelt and assorted con men, Unfamiliar Fishes is another history lesson in Americana as only Vowell can tell it – with brainy wit and droll humor.

The Wordy Shipmates examines the New England Puritans and their journey to and impact on America. She studies John Winthrop’s 1630 sermon A Model of Christian Charity and the bloody story that resulted from American exceptionalism. And she also traces the relationship of Winthrop, Massachusetts’ first governor, and Roger Williams, the Calvinist minister who founded Rhode Island – an unlikely friendship that was emblematic of the polar extremes of the American foundation. Throughout she reveals how American history can show up in the most unexpected places in our modern culture, often in poignant ways.

Her book Assassination Vacation is a haunting and surprisingly hilarious road trip to tourist sites devoted to the murders of presidents Lincoln, Garfield and McKinley. Vowell examines what these acts of political violence reveal about our national character and our contemporary society.

She is also the author of two essay collections, The Partly Cloudy Patriot and Take the Cannoli. Her first book Radio On, is her year-long diary of listening to the radio in 1995. She was guest editor for The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2017.

Vowell was a contributing editor for the public radio show This American Life from 1996-2008, where she produced numerous commentaries and documentaries and toured the country in many of the program’s live shows. She was one of the original contributors to McSweeney’s, also participating in many of the quarterly’s readings and shows. She has been a columnist for Salon.com, Time, San Francisco Weekly, and is a contributing op-ed writer for the New York Times.

Vowell has made numerous appearances on the Late Show with David Letterman, Late Night with Conan O’Brien and the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. She is the voice of teen superhero Violet Parr in Brad Bird’s Academy Award-winning The Incredibles, a Pixar Animation Studios film.

Vowell was the president of the board of 826NYC, a nonprofit tutoring and writing center for students aged 6-18 in Brooklyn, from its founding in 2004 until 2014. She is still a member of its advisory board, along with its sister organization in Los Angeles, 826LA.

JOAN WAUGH (Moderator)
Professor Joan Waugh of the UCLA History Department researches and writes about nineteenth-century America, specializing in the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Gilded Age eras. Waugh has published many essays and books on Civil War topics, including U. S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth (2009), and The American War: A History of the Civil War Era (2015), co-authored with Gary W. Gallagher. Professor Waugh is often invited to give public lectures about the Civil War. She has been interviewed for many documentaries, including the PBS series, American Experience on Ulysses S. Grant and the History Channel’s production of Lee and Grant. Dr. Waugh teaches the Civil War and Reconstruction and Gilded Age America, 1865-1900 lecture courses, and has been honored with three teaching prizes, including UCLA’s prestigious Distinguished Teaching Award.
Art in Action

“Art in Action is somewhere between an academic symposium and the vibrancy of an eagerly awaiting coloring book. This is where we explore in public to release the energetic potential of sharing ideas together.”
—Kristy Edmunds

Art in Action, our free public engagement program, offers a wide range of experiential art activities around the ideas emanating from the work of artists on our season. Through workshops, lectures, master classes, films, salons and art-making forums, Art in Action provides a platform for our UCLA and Los Angeles communities to exchange ideas and participate in shared cultural experiences.

This season, we’re continuing two ongoing initiatives and introducing a third. Writing the Landscape returns with new takes on the Poetry Bureau and special activities with our library partners, exploring how the impulse to make something results in an altered landscape, or new view. Hearing Beyond Listening devises ways to “listen better,” with artist-curated playlists, personalized music maps, intimate salons, and the now popular, CAP Listening Lab. A new series of programs, Facing the Blank Page, takes direct inspiration from this season’s the theater is a blank page. Activities throughout the season will investigate how we transmit traces of ourselves through the written word, movement, sound and imagery. cap.ucla.edu/ArtInAction

Colson Whitehead is a New York Times bestselling writer, a MacArthur Fellow and the author of the highly acclaimed novel The Underground Railroad, a tour de force chronicling a young slave’s desperate bid for freedom in the antebellum South, which won the National Book Award for Fiction in 2016 and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2017.

Colson will read from the novel and discuss his writing process.
the line between right and wrong is not always clear ...

MEYER AND RENEE LUSKIN LECTURE SERIES
luskin.ucla.edu
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Meyer and Renee Luskin Lecture Series
luskin.ucla.edu
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Design for Sharing
"Design for Sharing enriches and supports learning, social awareness and responsible cultural arts citizenship creating a new generation of artists and audiences." — Kristy Edmunds

Design for Sharing (DFS) is our free K-12 arts education program that provides public school students from across the Los Angeles metro area access to the performing arts, both at UCLA and in their own classrooms. The arts provide a gateway for students to explore shared ideas across communities and culture—sparking their curiosity and imagination. Since 1969, Design for Sharing has provided performances, workshops and school residencies to almost a million public school students, offering a diverse array of music, contemporary dance, and innovative theater. cap.ucla.edu/dfs

This season, the following CAP artists will participate in Design for Sharing programs:

Dancenorth/Lucy Guerin Inc
AteNine
ONIX Ensamble
Kronos Quartet
Gabriel Kahane
João Donato
Antonio Sanchez & Migration
Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion

As an intelligence analyst for the U.S. Department of Defense, Chelsea Manning disclosed classified documents to WikiLeaks connected to military misconduct during the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Convicted and sentenced to 35 years in military prison, Manning’s sentence was commuted in 2017. In prison, Manning publicly identified as a transgender woman and now advocates for government transparency, and queer and transgender rights. She will speak on ethics in public service, artificial intelligence, activism, gender issues, and the intersection of technology and people’s lives.

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**House Rules**

**PHOTOGRAPHY**
Photography, video and the use of any recording equipment is strictly prohibited at all times during performances at all UCLA campus performance venues and at The Theatre at Ace Hotel. Any/all press photography must be approved in writing in advance by the Center for the Art of Performance representative. For press inquiries and to make a request to cover an event, visit [cap.ucla.edu/press](http://cap.ucla.edu/press)

**CAMERAS & SMART PHONES**
The use of cameras, smart phones, cell phones and recording equipment of any kind is strictly prohibited at all times during performances at all UCLA campus performance venues and at The Theatre at Ace Hotel. All devices must be silenced before the start of the performance. Please be considerate to those around you and refrain from texting, emailing or surfing the web during performances.

**LATE SEATING**
Late seating will be subject to company approval and will occur only at a suitable time at the discretion of the house staff. Latecomers may not be able to be seated in their assigned seats to avoid disruption or distractions during the performance. Some events have no late seating by request of the artist, and refunds on parking and tickets for latecomers will not be accommodated.

Please check the event detail page of our website for late seating policies for specific performances or opt in to our email data-base by signing up for our newsletter and pre-show emails with helpful information about pre-show activities, parking, late seating, running time, nearby dining opportunities and more at [cap.ucla.edu/enews](http://cap.ucla.edu/enews)

**CHILDREN**
Children over age 5 are welcome to most events and, regardless of age, must have a ticket. Infants on laps are not permitted. Inquire when purchasing tickets of age appropriateness for specific events and check out website for specific performance information.

**ACCESSIBILITY**
The Theatre at Ace Hotel offers ADA accessible seats and restrooms. You can buy ADA seating on our ticketing site or by calling AXS at 888-9-AXS-TIX (888-929-7849). When buying tickets over the phone, please let the ticket agent know if you require accessible seating, and s/he will issue you an ADA seat.

In addition to wheelchair spaces, The Theatre at Ace Hotel is equipped with select aisle seats that have folding armrests on the aisle side to make transfer easier for those with mobility limitations. For such seating, please request a "transfer seat."

If you need accessible seating the night of the event and don’t have a special ticket, we’ll do our best to accommodate you once you arrive at the theater.

Assisted listening devices are available. If desired please ask our house staff.

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We want to hear from you – share thoughts about the arts and performances you experience with #CAPUCLA

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