



# NEW VILLAGE ARTS

## MEDIA ALERT

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### **NEW VILLAGE ARTS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE STAGE AT THE DEA HURSTON NEW VILLAGE ARTS CENTER WILL BE NAMED IN HONOR OF MUSIC LEGEND RAY CHARLES**

**Carlsbad, CA. (November 20, 2023):** New Village Arts (NVA), North County's cultural hub, is proud to announce that with the support of Dr. Valerie Ervin and The Ray Charles Foundation, as of December 2, 2023 the stage at NVA will be named the Ray Charles Stage.

Ray Charles was one of the most important and influential musicians in the world, and his legacy continues through the work of the foundation in his name. The vision of The Ray Charles Foundation is to instill in the youth of America that "there is no challenge too great one cannot overcome." The programs of New Village Arts, including the Dea Hurston Fellowship and The Mainstage Players, which work to make adventurous artistic experiences available to all members of our community, align with the vision of The Ray Charles Foundation.

New Village Arts' Founder and Executive Artistic Director Kristianne Kurner was thrilled with the news and said, "All of us at New Village Arts are absolutely honored and so very proud to feature the Ray Charles Stage. We literally held a dance party with the staff when we received the news." She went on to say, "The business of non-profit arts is so challenging right now, and this gift from The Ray Charles Foundation has been a shining light for NVA. We promise the work we do on the Ray Charles Stage will be worthy of this great honor, and we are delighted to start that work with our original holiday musical by Dea Hurston 1222 OCEANFRONT: A BLACK FAMILY CHRISTMAS."

From NVA's new Managing Director Dave Eassa: "The immense support from the Ray Charles Foundation affirms the necessity of our work and the current moment here at New Village Arts. Over the last 22 years NVA has built platforms for artistic excellence and exploration, spurring connection, building community, and fostering individual and collective growth in Southern California. We are privileged to now house the Ray Charles Stage, honoring the legacy of Ray

Charles while supporting future generations of performers to grace the Ray Charles Stage for decades to come.”

The official naming event will be held from 6-7:30pm on Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, immediately followed by the opening night of NVA’s original holiday musical 1222 OCEANFRONT: A BLACK FAMILY CHRISTMAS, written by Dea Hurston.

Going forward, all the professional theatrical productions at New Village Arts will take place in the:

**RAY CHARLES STAGE  
in the  
CONRAD PREBYS THEATER  
at the  
DEA HURSTON NEW VILLAGE ARTS CENTER**

NVA still actively fundraising and other naming opportunities are available. For more information, please reach out to Managing Director Dave Eassa at [dave@newvillagearts.org](mailto:dave@newvillagearts.org).

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#### **ABOUT RAY CHARLES**

Ray Charles was a legendary musician often called the “Genius,” who pioneered the genre of soul music during the 1950s.

Charles combined blues, gospel, R&B, rock, country music and jazz to create groundbreaking hits such as “Unchain My Heart,” “I’ve Got A Woman” and “What I’d Say.” His impressive multi-award winning 50-year career left an indelible mark on contemporary music all over the world.

Born Ray Charles Robinson on September 23, 1930, in Albany, Georgia, he was raised in Greenville, Florida, and started playing the piano before he was five. At age six, he contracted glaucoma that eventually left him blind. He studied composition (writing music in Braille) and learned to play the alto saxophone, clarinet, trumpet, and organ while attending the St. Augustine School for the Deaf and the Blind from 1937 to 1945. His father died when he was 10, his mother five years later, and he left school to work in dance bands around Florida, dropping his last name to avoid confusion with boxer Sugar Ray Robinson. In 1947, with \$600 he moved to Seattle and worked as a Nat “King” Cole-style crooner.

In the decades after Seattle, Ray Charles continued his contributions to the many facets of music in which he excelled. His numerous awards include 8 honorary doctoral degrees, 17 GRAMMYS, the GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award, President’s Merit Award, Kennedy Center Honors, National Medal of the Arts and his Playboy Awards. Heads of State, Presidents,

Political Dignitaries and members of Royal families have recognized him repeatedly. The King and Queen of Sweden chose him to receive the Polar Music Award, which is that country's most prestigious award. Rolling Stone Magazine ranked him #10 on their list of the "100 Greatest Artists of All Time" and #2 on their list of the "100 Greatest Singers of All Time." And in 2013 Ray Charles even received a United States Postal Stamp.

One of his warmest compliments came from the "Chairman of the Board" Frank Sinatra, who gave him the name "Genius", calling him "the only true Genius in show business."

## **ABOUT THE RAY CHARLES FOUNDATION**

Throughout his career, Charles was active in a range of political and humanitarian causes.

In 1986, Ray Charles formed The Robinson Foundation for Hearing Disorders, Inc., with a \$1 million personal endowment. The Robinson Foundation for Hearing Disorders, Inc. later changed its name to The Ray Charles Foundation. The Foundation is dedicated to providing support in the area of hearing disorders and the empowerment of young people through education by offering support to educational institutions and non-profit education programs. Ray Charles said: ***"The inability to hear is a handicap; not the inability to see."*** The vision of The Ray Charles Foundation is to instill in the youth of America that "there is no challenge too great one cannot overcome."

## **ABOUT DR. VALERIE ERVIN, RAY CHARLES FOUNDATION PRESIDENT**

As guardian of the Ray Charles legacy, Valerie Ervin is committed to carrying forward the vision and philanthropic mission set forth by Ray Charles.

Prior to being named President of The Ray Charles Foundation, Valerie Ervin established her tenure with the organization by working closely alongside Ray Charles and his long-time manager/business partner Joe Adams, as Executive Assistant and Vice President of Operations. Dr. Ervin's approach to business and the daily management of The Ray Charles Foundation remains consistent with the principles, tenets and integrity with which Ray Charles and Joe Adams conducted business for more than five decades.

In addition to leading The Foundation in its grant-making initiatives, Dr. Ervin also oversees the negotiation of music licensing contracts and manages all the commercial, business, marketing and financial interests from revenues generated by The Ray Charles Foundation.

She has been Executive Producer on multiple music and media projects, including the *In Performance at the White House*, a PBS special honoring Ray Charles, hosted by President Barack Obama and Mrs. Obama. Dr. Ervin also led the design and installation of The Ray Charles Memorial Library. In every project, Dr. Ervin endeavors to add value to the Ray Charles brand

including the Academy Award Winning biopic, *Ray*. Dr. Ervin has positioned The Foundation as a significant player in the world of American philanthropy.

Dr. Ervin has received dozens of awards, plaques of recognition and appreciation from the City and County of Los Angeles and others. Numerous business organizations, entertainers, record companies, secondary and higher learning educational institutions including an Honorary Doctorate degree from Dillard University and other foundations, have all recognized Dr. Ervin for her unrelenting efforts in spearheading the agenda of The Ray Charles Foundation.

Under her leadership, The Ray Charles Foundation has donated millions of dollars in grants, making Valerie Ervin one of the most influential legacy estate guardians.

## **ABOUT NEW VILLAGE ARTS**

*The mission of New Village Arts is to create adventurous artistic experiences to awaken the human spirit. We provide:*

- a collaborative and inspiring home for performing and visual artists
- a forum for laughter, discussion, and deeper thinking within our community
- a training ground for future generations of art-makers and art-lovers

Celebrating 22 years of award-winning professional theatre and thriving education and outreach programs, New Village Arts (NVA) has truly become the cultural hub of North County San Diego.

NVA attracts more than 30,000 patrons each year to experience professional theatre, musical and art events in the heart of Carlsbad Village. In addition to full seasons of plays and musicals featuring some of the best artistic talent in Southern California, NVA hosts talkback discussions and other supplementary events designed to create conversation and cultivate community. New this year, the White Family Next Stage in the Dea Hurston New Village Arts Center presents a series of music and spoken word events throughout the year. NVA offers robust theatre programs in partnership with local schools and strongly believes that theatre and arts experiences should be accessible to all people, becoming a recognized leader in equity, diversity, and inclusion in San Diego. NVA has been fortunate to receive support from the City of Carlsbad and other local businesses, who recognize the importance of a resident professional theatre company as a crucial component of an inclusive and creative community. In turn NVA prioritizes serving its community by presenting works that respect its diversity, engaging every citizen with relevant and inspiring stories.

### **NVA INFORMATION:**

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