



People's
Light

Contact: Carrie Gorn, PR Representative
cgornpr@gmail.com

Rosemary Devine, Dir. of Marketing & Communications
devine@peopleslight.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

People's Light Announces Next Evolution of Leadership

Zak Berkman to succeed Abigail Adams as Artistic Director and Chief Executive in 2022

(Malvern, PA) In March 2022, after many years of service and immense artistic contributions, Abigail Adams will step down as Executive Artistic Director of People's Light. Adams will remain involved with the Theatre through her new role as Director of Special Projects, and continue to collaborate on theatre productions and serve on the Board of Trustees. People's Light is thrilled to announce that Zak Berkman, currently serving as Producing Director, will succeed Adams as Producing Artistic Director, heading an expanded leadership team.

Adams was named People's Light Executive Artistic Director in 2013, having previously served as Artistic Director since 1997. An award-winning theatre maker, Adams has directed many memorable productions, including *In the Blood* (2003), *Dividing the Estate* (2011), and 2018's [*Morning's at Seven*](#), which was hailed by the *Wall Street Journal's* Terry Teachout as "one of the finest productions of an American play" he had ever reviewed. In 1990, she established what would become the [*New Voices Ensemble*](#), which continues to serve students from the city of Chester thirty years later.

"I have the great privilege to recognize and thank Abbey for her years of superlative leadership," says People's Light Board President Ken Mumma. "Not only has she overseen one of the most creatively vibrant and expansive periods in the 45-year history of People's Light, she has laid the foundation for the next 45 years. One of Abbey's greatest strengths is a disciplined approach to long-term strategic thinking. The securement of this next phase for People's Light is the direct result of her foresight, intentionality, and comprehensive succession planning."

Zak Berkman, who will assume leadership of the Theatre in March 2022, joined People's Light as Associate Artistic Director in 2011 after a successful artistic leadership career off-Broadway. He was promoted to People's Light Producing Director in 2013. Since then, Berkman has been

integral to the Theatre's season planning and new work development, establishing [New Play Frontiers](#) (NPF), a Residency and Commission Program in which nationally renowned playwrights create new works inspired by the Greater Philadelphia region, and the [Harmony Lab](#) initiative for music theatre collaborations. Through these programs, Berkman spearheaded the development of acclaimed original works like Dominique Morisseau's [Mud Row](#), Colman Domingo and Patricia McGregor's Broadway-bound [Lights Out: Nat "King" Cole](#) starring Dulé Hill, and Karen Hartman's [Project Dawn](#), to name only a few.

"Zak has brought People's Light to new levels of artistry and relevancy," Adams says. "He has led the diversification of our programming and artists, developed deep and long-standing relationships with theatre makers of national stature, and secured the trust and confidence of our resident company. A wonderfully talented artist in his own right, he believes deeply in theatre's ability to heal and transform, and will ensure that People's Light is responsive, equitable, and artistically vital in the years ahead."

Mumma adds, "People's Light has always been artist-centered; we believe it is key to our enduring success that People's Light be led by an artist. Over the past ten years, Zak has distinguished himself as an invaluable creator, thinker, and innovator who possesses a full understanding of our theatre's human and financial resources. We are confident he will maintain vital continuity while advancing critical change, and greatly look forward to this next chapter."

"I am honored to step into Abbey's shoes," says Berkman, "which are actually some impressive hiking boots that have trekked many a mountainside and tough terrain. She has certainly had to navigate major obstacles close to home as well. From 9/11 to a financial crisis, and now a pandemic—the first two decades of this century have been marked by economic and cultural upheaval. Despite this, People's Light has thrived under Abbey's stewardship and artistic vision. We have expanded beyond a regional theatre to become a cultural and civic center with theatre at its core."

Berkman's appointment as Producing Artistic Director is part of an expansion of People's Light artistic leadership that will include [recently announced](#) Resident Director Steve H. Broadnax III, who officially joins People's Light in March of 2021, and another senior artistic position, for which a national search will begin this month. Berkman will report to the People's Light Board of Trustees and continue to partner with fellow executive leaders Director of Finance and Operations Erica Ezold and General Manager Erin Sheffield.

"This is an immensely talented group of people," Berkman shares. "We inherit a legacy of rigorous and recurring collaboration, of deep listening and constant curiosity. I greatly look

forward to working together to pursue our ongoing mission: to invite and create opportunities for diverse communities to discover and celebrate our shared humanity.

“We are so privileged to be the stewards of this beloved Artistic Home in the heart of Chester County. It is such a distinctive place to create, to gather, and to experience a kind of collective joy that is incredibly difficult to find in our challenging world.”

ABOUT ABIGAIL ADAMS

Executive Artistic Director Abigail Adams has been associated with People’s Light for over 40 years, serving as artistic leader for over two decades and chief executive for the past 10 years. Adams has directed more than sixty plays at People’s Light, including *The Children, Our Town, Morning’s at Seven* (Barrymore Award for Outstanding Direction of a Play), *Project Dawn, The Matchmaker, Auctioning the Ainsleys, How to Write a New Book for the Bible, The Cherry Orchard, The Rainmaker, The Trip to Bountiful, Dividing the Estate, Nathan the Wise, and In the Blood* (Barrymore Award for Outstanding Direction of a Play). She established the New Voices Ensemble at People’s Light in 1990, which received the White House Coming up Taller Award in 2000. She has directed readings and workshops of new plays for Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, Circle Rep, New York Stage and Film, and the Public Theatre. Abbey served for ten years on the faculty of Swarthmore College and has also taught at New York University, Bryn Mawr College, Carnegie Mellon University, and The Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario. She holds an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Ursinus College. She is married to Lee Devin.

ABOUT ZAK BERKMAN

Zak Berkman is a multifaceted, award-winning artist—a director, dramaturg, writer, composer—with over 25 years of experience producing theatre and developing new American plays. Prior to joining People’s Light in 2011, Berkman was the Founding Executive Director of Artistic Programming with Epic Theatre Ensemble, an OBIE, Amnesty International, and Drama Desk Award-winning Off-Broadway company that premiered nationally and internationally acclaimed plays such as Nilaja Sun’s *No Child...*, Judith Thompson’s *Palace of The End*, and Jeanne Sakata’s *Hold These Truths*. Epic Theatre Ensemble was also heralded for its extensive arts-in-education programming, receiving the 2010 Coming Up Taller Award. Berkman served as Associate to the late Broadway producer Margo Lion (*Angels In America, Seven Guitars*), and held posts at New York Stage & Film and Manhattan Theatre Club. As a playwright, works include a forthcoming adaptation of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* (with original music also by Berkman), *Such Things as Vampires* (co-writer/composer, Barrymore Award for Original Music), *The Harassment of Iris Malloy, Beauty on the Vine* starring Olivia Wilde, and *A Breath Short of Breathing*. He has written for daytime television, including NBC’s *Days of Our Lives*, and

was a directing intern with *As The World Turns*. He has been a contributing writer for Howlround.com, including a series about the New Play Frontiers Commissioning & Residency program at People's Light, and has spoken at numerous Theatre Communications Group (TCG) national conference panels. Zak is married to People's Light company member Teri Lamm. They have two sons, Eliot and Theo.

ABOUT PEOPLE'S LIGHT

Founded in 1974, People's Light serves as one of Pennsylvania's largest professional non-profit theatres, known for our resident company of artists, eclectic mix of productions, and innovative work with young people. Throughout our year-round season, we produce contemporary plays, classics, new forms of music-theatre, and original work. Beyond the stage, we host a wide array of cultural experiences and education programs that inspire meaningful engagement with, and sustained investment in and from our surrounding communities.