



Anthony Runfola Named New Artistic Director of Arizona's Childsplay

Nationally acclaimed artistic leader committed to equity, accessibility, and sustainability in theatre brings a new vision to Arizona

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Childsplay has named Anthony Runfola as its new artistic director, after a nationwide search. Runfola will be the company's third artistic director, succeeding Dwayne Hartford and founder David Saar, and will begin his tenure on June 1, 2026.

"I am deeply grateful and excited to serve as Childsplay's next Artistic Director," Runfola said. "This organization shaped who I am as an artist and a leader, and the opportunity to help guide it into its next chapter is both humbling and exhilarating. As we approach Childsplay's 50th anniversary, I see incredible opportunity ahead of us. My vision centers on three priorities: continuing its legacy of bold, original work by commissioning new plays that speak to this moment; deepening its commitment to equity and access so every young person in Arizona feels theatre is for them; and strengthening the ensemble culture that has always been Childsplay's heart and ensuring that everyone feels empowered to do their best work."

Runfola began his career at Childsplay, where he spent two decades as the Director of Production, among other positions. During his tenure, he oversaw more than 150 productions, contributed to new play development, including *Tomás and the Library Lady* and *The Sun Serpent*, directed national tours of *Rock the Presidents* and *Schoolhouse Rock Live!*, and helped shape Childsplay's ensemble culture through significant periods of organizational growth.

"Anthony Runfola's career has been shaped by the values Childsplay holds dear," Childsplay's Managing Director Steve Martin said. "He believes children are not second-class audience members. They deserve the best directors, designers, actors, arts educators, and storytellers from inside and outside our community. It will be a true honor and adventure helping to bring his artistic vision to life."

"As a national leader in the Theatre for Young Audiences field, the appointment of Anthony positions Childsplay to continue leading the field of TYA," Childsplay Board President Tasha Cycholl said. "We are thrilled to have him back in the desert!"

He previously served as Artistic Director of Magik Theatre in San Antonio, Texas, from 2019 to 2025, leading the company toward inclusive, socially relevant storytelling through new play development and community partnerships. He commissioned and directed the world premieres of *Lyric and the Keys* and *Eddie & Vinnie*, and directed productions including *Lotería: Game On!*, *The Lightning Thief*, and *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*. Under his leadership, Magik Theatre was named "Best Theatre" by the *San Antonio Current* from 2022 to 2024.

Runfolo will oversee Childsplay's artistic programming in partnership with Managing Director Steve Martin and the board of trustees. His responsibilities include developing new productions, strengthening relationships with artists and the community, and advancing the company's commitment to education, access, and equity.

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About Childsplay Theatre

Childsplay, Inc. is a nonprofit theatre company of professional, adult artists who perform for and teach young audiences and their families. The mission of Childsplay is to ignite imagination, wonder, and joy by creating strikingly original theatre and learning experiences that inspire young minds to explore and soar.

For more information, visit www.childsplayaz.org or call **(480) 921-5774**.