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February 17, 2021 (Becket, MA) — The origin and cause of the fire at Jacob's Pillow's Doris Duke Theatre on November 17, 2020 was ruled undetermined by the Massachusetts State Police Fire Investigation led by Officer Daniel B. Quigley. Catastrophic damage of the site resulted in limited scene examination. The report, delivered to Jacob's Pillow on February 12, indicated that the fire is believed to have originated in the southeast corner of the building where a vast amount of the building's theatrical electrical equipment was located, including professional lighting and audio systems.

"We are tremendously grateful to the firefighters and state officials for their work on this investigation," says Jacob's Pillow Executive & Artistic Director Pamela Tatge. "We take stewardship of this landmark very seriously; in light of this tragedy, we are undertaking an organization-wide risk assessment, interrogating our internal emergency procedures, and redoubling our efforts to ensure the safety of our entire campus. We continually reflect on how fortunate we are that no one was injured and the fire did not spread."

The Doris Duke Theatre, built in 1990 as one of three primary performance spaces on Jacob's Pillow's 220-acre campus in Western Massachusetts, was lost to a structure fire the morning of November 17, 2020 beginning around 5am EST. The fire was contained to the building; no one was injured and no other buildings suffered damage. Firefighters from Becket Fire Department and surrounding towns responded to the call from an eyewitness just before 7am and arrived on the scene shortly thereafter.

The Massachusetts State Police Fire Investigation concluded that the theater's sprinkler suppression system was inoperable or limited in its capabilities at the time of the fire and that a malfunction in the pump system failed to properly supply water to the sprinkler system and nearby hydrant. These issues slowed fire suppression efforts. There was no evidence of an incendiary act. Pending any new information, the case is considered closed.

Immediately following the incident, Jacob's Pillow initiated an internal site-wide safety audit, confirming reliability of all alarm and fire suppression systems and to better understand any further weakness to the safety and security of every building on its campus. In addition, the Pillow has engaged an outside risk management professional to further identify potential problems and has released a request for proposal (RFP) for an upgrade to its current fire-pump system.

In the aftermath of the fire, Jacob's Pillow received a tremendous outpouring of support from artists and audiences around the world. The Pillow was able to commit to move several of its on-site, COVID-compliant residences for dance companies that had been scheduled in the theater between December through May into The Perles Family Studio, the other year-round rehearsal space on campus. Jacob's Pillow is at the early stages of planning to rebuild the Doris Duke Theatre and has hired an

external consultant to conduct interviews with artists, technicians, and audiences members as initial research.

“Our hope is to build a theater that has all of the warmth and character of the Doris Duke Theatre while providing for the needs of artists and audiences in the 21st century,” says Tatge.

#### **ABOUT JACOB’S PILLOW:**

Jacob’s Pillow, founded by Ted Shawn in 1933 on the traditional lands of the Agawam, the Nipmuc, the Pocumtuc, and the Mohican, is a National Historic Landmark, recipient of the National Medal of Arts, and home to America’s longest-running international dance festival, currently in the midst of its transition to becoming a year-round center for dance through a five-year strategic plan titled Vision ‘22. Each Festival includes more than 50 national and international dance companies and over 500 free and ticketed performances, talks, tours, classes, exhibits, events, and community programs. The School at Jacob’s Pillow, one of the field’s most prestigious professional dance training centers, encompasses the diverse disciplines of Contemporary Ballet, Contemporary, Tap, Musical Theatre Dance, Photography, Choreography, and an annual rotating program (Street & Club Dances in 2020). The Pillow also provides professional advancement opportunities across disciplines of arts administration, design, video, and production through seasonal internships and a year-round Administrative Fellows program. With growing community engagement programs, the Pillow serves as a partner and active citizen in its local community. The Pillow’s extensive Archives, open year-round to the public and online at [danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org](https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org), chronicle more than a century of dance in photographs, programs, books, costumes, audiotapes, and videos. Notable artists who have created or premiered dances at the Pillow include choreographers Antony Tudor, Agnes de Mille, Alvin Ailey, Donald McKayle, Kevin McKenzie, Twyla Tharp, Ralph Lemon, Susan Marshall, Trisha Brown, Ronald K. Brown, Wally Cardona, Andrea Miller, and Trey McIntyre; performed by artists such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Carmen de Lavallade, Mark Morris, Dame Margot Fonteyn, Edward Villella, Rasta Thomas, and hundreds of others. On March 2, 2011, President Barack Obama honored Jacob’s Pillow with a National Medal of Arts, the highest arts award given by the United States Government, making the Pillow the first dance presenting organization to receive this prestigious award. The Pillow’s Director since 2016 is Pamela Tatge. For more information, visit [www.jacobspillow.org](https://www.jacobspillow.org).

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