For Immediate Release

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Coterie Theatre Leader Joette Pelster Has Died,
After Distinguished Arts Admin Career

Kansas City, MO – Coterie Theatre Executive Director Joette Pelster, 71, has passed away peacefully at home in her sleep. Earlier this month, she had announced her intent to retire this coming January. She had joined the professional non-profit organization 28 years ago, and led the theatre to impressive heights. Under her leadership, The Coterie grew from an annual budget of $600,000 to $1.6 million.

With Producing Artistic Director Jeff Church, Pelster managed hundreds of productions. Highlights include multiple production transfers to The Kennedy Center and an Off-Broadway transfer to New York City's New Victory Theater. She was most proud of securing National Endowment for the Arts funding in the mid-90s for The Coterie’s Great Books/Banned Books Season. According to Church, “her favorite review was when Travel+Leisure magazine said, ‘this is a theatre that resolutely refuses to talk down to children.’ She made things possible; she was a visionary. The loss we all feel cannot be described.”
Pelster’s achievements were immense, even before her time at The Coterie. In 1993, she was the marketing director for the Folly Theater and then became the first executive director of the Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey (KCFAA), where she later served as an advisory board member. During her tenure at KCFAA, she created AileyCamp with Alvin Ailey, the model for AileyCamps around the country.

Another achievement involved Pelster briefly leaving The Coterie for a time to assist Pat Jordan in the restoration and reopening in 1997 of the Gem Theater. When Pelster returned to The Coterie, there was an exceptional period of growth, securing The Shubert Foundation, Menorah Legacy Foundation and Muriel McBrien Kauffman Family Foundation support, joining what she had established previously - Theater League, National Endowment for the Arts, and Missouri Arts Council annual support.

Coterie Board President Andrew Van Der Laan noted, “The Coterie was prepared for Joette’s retirement with detailed plans already in action, but this news comes as a shock not only to The Coterie family, but to the entire performing arts community where Joette was loved and respected in a way that very few people achieve. The board and staff of The Coterie extend our deepest sympathies to her husband, adopted daughter, sisters, and extended family.”

**CELEBRATION OF LIFE**

A celebration of life will be held on **Monday, December 19, 4:00 p.m.,** at The Coterie Theatre in Crown Center, Level 1, Grand Blvd., Kansas City, MO. In order to protect individuals who are required to test regularly for their professional livelihood, including the vast community of theatre professionals in attendance, we request that you bring a photo of an at-home covid test taken the day of the event.

**IN MEMORIAM**

In memoriam, the family requests donations go to **The Joette Pelster Visionary Fund at The Coterie Theatre** to commemorate her legacy as a Kansas City arts visionary. This fund will help ensure that Pelster’s vision of sustainable Coterie programming and performance space
improvements that benefit area families will be realized. Her inspiration helped drive The Coterie for nearly 30 years, and gifts in her honor will impact for many more. Checks may be made payable to The Coterie Theatre, and addressed to The Coterie Theatre, ATTN: Joette Pelster Visionary Fund, 2450 Grand Blvd. Suite 144, Kansas City MO, 64108, or donate online at thecoterie.org/joette-pelster.

THE COTERIE

Founded in 1979, The Coterie Theatre was designated by TIME magazine in the top three theaters for young audiences in Nov. 2004, calling it “groundbreaking... one of the nation’s most respected.” The Coterie, located in Kansas City, Missouri, has been at the forefront of commissioning new works or adaptations that contribute to the field of theatre for young audiences. More than 50 world or American premieres for all ages have been produced by The Coterie over the last 30 years, during Artistic Director Jeff Church’s tenure, including hosting multiple major Broadway composers and lyricists to shape quality musicals for youth and families. The Coterie is interested in intergenerational conversation, and consistently includes teen programming in its season and outreach efforts. The Coterie’s community programming redefines traditional notions of work for young audiences with its unique dramatic writing programs (Young Playwrights' Roundtable), teen LGBTQ work (Project Pride), and mental health workshops in a dramatic format (Project Daylight), all free of charge, as overseen by Executive Director Joette Pelster and a dedicated staff. All these components serve an average of 97,000 per year through over 350 performances. The Coterie Theatre School has locations throughout greater Kansas City. Donate at www.thecoterie.org.

OUR FUNDERS


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