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GENERATION NOW PARTNERSHIP ANNOUNCES ITS FIRST ROUND OF COMMISSIONS

Minneapolis-Saint Paul, MN/Los Angeles, CA/New York, NY— As part of their landmark partnership, the five **Generation Now** theatres (Latino Theater Company, Ma-Yi Theater Company, Native Voices at the Autry, Penumbra, and Children's Theatre Company) have awarded their first round of commissions to four incredible projects. Funded by the Mellon Foundation, Generation Now brings together five nationally ranked theaters to commission and develop new works for multigenerational audiences by both established and emerging BIPOC artists. The commissions include Ifa Bayeza's *One Small Alice*, Michi Barall's *Drawing Lessons*, Dustin Tahmahkera's *Comanche Girl on the Moon*, and a work exploring the world of folklórico dance created by Latino Theater Company. All commissions will receive at least two developmental workshops at the co-commissioning theatres.

About Generation Now

The goal of the **Generation Now** partnership is to expand the canon of work produced for multigenerational audiences and create a model of transformative partnership for the theatre field. With funding received from the Mellon Foundation in 2021, the consortium is committed to co-commission and co-develop 16 new plays by both established and emerging BIPOC artists for multigenerational audiences over five years. The partners strongly believe that if we are to have an extraordinary theatre culture in this country, we must start young, and it must be intergenerational, inclusive, inspiring, transformative, and lifelong.

Artistic Director of Children's Theatre Company Peter Brosius states, "We are thrilled to partner with these leaders and their extraordinary organizations in developing new ways of creating work for multigenerational audiences. We are eager to work together to support these remarkable

artists in their journey to bring new stories, new perspectives and new aesthetics to the field of theatre for young people. The theatre field needs to be a welcoming and inclusive place for all audiences. This work draws on the decades of expertise and insights of these theatres and the ways they engage and bring together artists and communities. We are excited to be a partner in bringing 16 new plays to life over the next 5 years by BIPOC artists for this important audience.”

About the Commissions

DRAWING LESSONS

Written by Michi Barall

Co-Commissioned by Ma-Yi Theater Company and Children’s Theatre Company

Meet Kate — she’s just turned 12, just started middle school and just can’t quite seem to talk to *anyone*. When Kate meets Paul — a local daily-newspaper-comic strip-artist — the two develop a friendship that helps them both figure out how to speak their truths. Through live-drawing, digital projection and a frame-by-frame view of what it’s like to develop comic strip art, the play delves into the ways in which graphic art can help us not only to capture what our lives are like, but who we are meant to be.

“Ma-Yi Theater has a long history working with Michi Barall, both as performer and writer, so we are thrilled to have her as the first commissioned playwright of Generation Now,” states Ma-Yi Theater Artistic Director Ralph Peña. “Peter and I are very excited by Michi’s script *Drawing Lessons*, which uses a mix of offbeat characters, great humor, and graphic illustrations to bring us into the fertile mind of a young girl.”

Michi Barall is a New York City-based actor, playwright and academic. As an actor Michi has worked extensively in theatres in New York and across the country. Michi's dance-theatre piece, *Rescue Me*, was produced at the Ohio Theatre by Ma-Yi in 2010. Her music-theatre adaptation of Peer Gynt, *Peer Gynt and The Norwegian Hapa Band*, premiered in 2107 at the ART/NY Theatre. Michi holds degrees from Stanford University, NYU (MFA, Grad Acting) and Columbia (PhD, Theatre/English & Comparative Literature). She has taught at Columbia, NYU, and MIT and is currently on the faculty at Purchase College.

DRAWING LESSONS will be available for licensing with Plays for New Audiences post-production.

ONE SMALL ALICE

Written by Ifa Bayeza

Co-Commissioned by Penumbra and Children’s Theatre Company

One Small Alice transposes Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass* into an Underground Railroad journey of a 9-year-old girl. Separated from her

group, the child named Small Alice has to make her way through the wilderness alone. Through her voice and eyes, the world outside of bondage seems a wonderland, a world of great beauty and terror, at once quixotic and curious. *One Small Alice* is a metaphorical story, exploring the discovery of freedom, identity, independence, community.

“At Penumbra, we have heard over and over again that representation matters” states President Sarah Bellamy. “When young people see themselves reflected in the art we create, they feel empowered, valued, loved. It counters dangerous stereotypes that limit potential and diminish self-esteem. Our partnership with Children's Theatre Company allows us to reach more youth at critical stages of their identity development, helping them understand that their racial identity, cultural practices, and family histories are not just valuable, but worthy of beautiful productions that celebrate who they are.”

Ifa Bayeza is an award-winning playwright, director, novelist and educator. Plays include THE TILL TRILOGY (*The Ballad of Emmett Till, That Summer in Sumner, and Benevolence*); *String Theory*; *Welcome to Wandaland* and *Infants of the Spring*; musicals, *Charleston Olio, Bunk Johnson, a Blues Poem* and *KID ZERO*; and the novel, *Some Sing, Some Cry*, co-authored with Ntozake Shange. A finalist for the 2020 Herb Alpert Award in Theatre and for the 2020 Francesca Primus Prize, Bayeza in 2018 was the inaugural Humanist-in-Residence at the National Endowment for the Humanities and is the recipient of two concurrent commissions from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. A 2022 MacDowell fellow, Bayeza is a graduate of Harvard University with an MFA in Theater from University of Massachusetts Amherst.

UNTITLED FOLKLÓRICO PLAY

Created by Latino Theater Company

Co-Commissioned by Latino Theater Company and Children's Theatre Company

A journey into the world of Mexican Folklórico dance through the lens of young people in the U.S. who while exploring this tradition are confronted by their roots, their identity and their truth.

“With this play, the Latino Theater Company gets the exciting opportunity to journey into the minds of young people and investigate why, in this particular socio-historical context, it is important for them to be a part of the specific cultural expression that is folklórico, and to discover what that means to them, their families, and their communities,” states Latino Theater Company Artistic Director José Luis Valenzuela.

The **Latino Theater Company** was founded in 1985 with the goal to establish a theater company dedicated to contributing new stories and novel methods of expression for the American theater repertoire and to increase artistic opportunities for underserved communities. As the company has evolved, our role as the lease-holder of the Los Angeles Theatre Center has become critical to our mission. As we continue to explore the Latina/o/x, we program our seasons with work by local playwrights that speaks to important issues within the Latina/o/x, First Nation, Black, Asian American, Jewish American and LGBTQ+ communities.

COMANCHE GIRL ON THE MOON

Written by Dustin Tahmahkera

Co-Commissioned by Native Voices at the Autry and Children's Theatre Company

Comanche Girl on the Moon stars an imaginative but insecure Comanche girl named Petu who discovers her late grandmother Kaku's secret rocket ship on her family's allotment in Oklahoma. Tired of being bullied at school and missing Kaku and her stories about the Comanche moon, talking animals, and astronaut aspirations, Petu works with her humorous twin rabbits and other animal relatives, along with eccentric interplanetary creatures, to fly to the moon in search of a new start, but at what cultural cost to herself and her tribal community in Oklahoma? Honoring the creative work of the playwright's late auntie Juanita Pahdopony and other Comanche artists and storytellers, *Comanche Girl on the Moon* explores themes of home, identity, and futurity by asking, "How can one realize and actualize an individual and collective future through the past?"

DeLanna Studi, Artistic Director of Native Voices at the Autry, states, "Dustin Tahmahkera's *Comanche Girl on the Moon* is a beautiful and exciting coming-of-age story of an Indigenous girl finding strength and pride through the stories of her grandmother. What we love about Dustin's proposal is that he has created an entire world that is wholly real and ethereal, weaving the struggle of identity and bullying in a Comanche girl's day-to-day life with the connection to her grandmother who has passed on. What begins as a journey to escape the trials of not being enough becomes a quest for greater connection and a sense of pride."

Dustin Tahmahkera (Comanche) is a parent of four beautiful children, playwright of Comanche-centric theatre, and professor of Native media and sound studies at the University of Oklahoma. Tahmahkera's recent short play *9-1-1 Comanchería*, received both the best play and audience favorite awards at Native Voices at the Autry's play festival in Los Angeles. *9-1-1 Comanchería* is part of a series of original short plays in Tahmahkera's book project "Comanche vs. the World." His previous books include *Tribal Television: Viewing Native Peoples in Sitcoms* (University of North Carolina Press) and *Cinematic Comanches: The Lone Ranger in the Media Borderlands* (University of Nebraska Press).

COMANCHE GIRL ON THE MOON will be available for licensing with Plays for New Audiences post-production.

About the Partners

Native Voices at the Autry

Founded in 1993 and in residence at the Autry Museum in Los Angeles since 1999, Native Voices provides an artistic home for Native American theatre artists, supporting the development and production of new works for the stage written by American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and First Nations playwrights. Native Voices is the only professional theatre company

– deemed such for its affiliation with the Actors’ Equity Association, the union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers – dedicated exclusively to Native storytelling.

From the beginning, Native Voices has put Native narratives at the center of the American story in order to facilitate a more inclusive dialogue on what it means to be American. The company fills a tremendous need for more diverse representation among playwrights, actors, and theatre professionals and for the exploration of a broader range of themes and issues on the American stage. In the long-term, Native Voices remains committed to developing Native playwrights and theatre artists, to telling Native stories by and about Native people, and to providing the public access to these plays and playwrights – all with the goals of fostering greater understanding and respect and of showcasing artistic voices that might otherwise not be heard. With this project, Native Voices looks forward to having their playwrights seen by audiences in theatres that have historically produced little to no Native work.

Latino Theater Company’s mission is to provide a world-class arts center for those pursuing artistic excellence; a laboratory where both tradition and innovation are honored and honed; and a place where the convergence of people, cultures, and ideas contribute to a more vibrant future. LTC was founded in 1985 with the goal to establish a theater company dedicated to contributing new stories and novel methods of expression for the American theater repertoire and to increase artistic opportunities for underserved communities. As the company has evolved, its role as the lease-holder of the Los Angeles Theatre Center (LATC) has become critical to their mission. With a continuing exploration of the U.S. Latina/o/x experience in bold and contemporary terms, LTC programs its seasons with work by local playwrights that speaks to important issues and highlights new voices within the Latina/o/x, First Nation, Black, Asian American, Jewish American, and LGBTQ+ communities. This project will allow writers to create Latina/o/x stories specifically for multigenerational audiences, solidifying LTC’s outreach efforts and strengthening their relationship with the thousands of students they serve every year.

Ma-Yi Theater Company is an award-winning professional theater based in New York City, renowned as the premier incubator for new works by Asian American playwrights. They encourage their artists to engage communities in vigorous dialogues that challenge popular prescriptions for culturally specific theater, and that reexamine the immigrant histories that shaped our country. Ma-Yi Theater Company is one of the very few BIPOC-led theaters in the country whose original works have transferred to major regional theaters around the country. Ma-Yi’s Writers Lab has 34 professional writers, including Michael Lew and Rehana Lew Mirza who are on their fifth year of residency at Ma-Yi Theater, through the Mellon’s NPRP initiative. Many of the most produced Asian American playwrights today are members of the Lab, including Lauren Yee, Kimber Lee, Jiehae Park, Lloyd Suh, Qui Nguyen, Sam Chanse, and Madhuri Shakar to name a few. These playwrights are changing the landscape of American Theater to redraw the boundaries for what it considers part of the American canon. While there has been progress in creating a body of new plays by Asian American writers, many of them

cater to mature audiences; very few are for multigenerational consumption. This opportunity to co-develop new works for multigenerational audiences will allow Ma-Yi to offer communities a new genre of theater that is more inclusive.

Penumbra is recognized nationally and internationally for its artistically excellent and socially responsible art that illuminates the human condition through prisms of the Black experience. Founded in 1976 by celebrated scholar Lou Bellamy in Saint Paul, Minnesota, this legacy institution has earned national accolades, producing nearly 200 plays, over 30 premieres, and cultivated generations of artists of color now working across the nation.

Since 2011, President Sarah Bellamy has been testing multigenerational programs that spark empathy and drive engagement with public conversations, screenings, and community meals that engage patrons across Minnesota. Through her leadership, Penumbra brings vibrant communities together to shift the ground under some of the most deeply entrenched issues of equity and justice. Today, Penumbra is embarking upon its next life cycle: a performing arts campus and center for racial healing that nurtures black artists, advances equity, and facilitates wellness for individuals and community.

Children's Theatre Company is the nation's largest and most acclaimed theatre for young people and serves a multigenerational audience. It creates theatre experiences that educate, challenge, and inspire for more than 250,000 people annually. CTC is the only theatre focused on multigenerational audiences to win the coveted Tony Award® for outstanding regional theatre. Its vision is to unleash the power of curiosity, empathy, and imagination. CTC serves its community through professional productions on its stages, high-quality arts education programs at the theatre and in schools, and access opportunities that ensure its theatre is a home for all families.

CTC's ACT One is a platform for justice, equity diversity, and inclusion that strives to ensure the theatre is a home for all people, all families, reflective of its community. These values extend to CTC's commissioning and development activities, which are a mix of wholly original stories and adaptations of classic and contemporary stories. In the last 25 years alone, CTC's commitment to new work has yielded 50 commissions and world premiere productions. CTC is now serving its most diverse audience in its 55- year history; as such, CTC recognizes the needs to deepen its cultural competencies while it expands the canon of new work.

CTC's script licensing division, Plays for New Audiences, licenses 300+ quality scripts for multigenerational audiences and actors written by some of the most extraordinary playwrights.

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