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Generation Now Theatre Partnership
Announces Final Slate of Commissions

Minneapolis-Saint Paul, MN/Los Angeles, CA/New York, NY—November 16, 2026—The five theatres of the landmark Generation Now partnership (Latino Theater Company, Ma-Yi Theater Company, Native Voices, Penumbra, and Children's Theatre Company) are pleased to announce the final slate of commissions by BIPOC artists, of new works for multigeneration audiences.

The complete slate of commissions includes Michi Barall's *Drawing Lessons,* Dustin Tahmahkera's *Comanche Girl on the Moon*, Ifa Bayeza's *One Small Alice*, Gabriel Rivas Gómez's *Level Up*, Nambi E. Kelley's *The Voices in the Walls*, *Folklórico*, a work exploring the world of folklórico dance created by Latino Theater Company, Michael Lew and Sam Willmot's *Pinky, Taps, and Saxophone*, Maddox Pennington's *Picture Day*, Lisa Sanaye-Dring's *What a Feeling!*, Vera Starbard's Untitled Piece, Junauda Petrus and Terry Guest's *(Can We Please) Give the Police Department Back to the Grandmothers*, Dominique Morrisseau's Untitled Piece, and Vichet Cum's *The Tyrus Wong Project.*

"Great new plays don't happen in isolation. They are born from bold ideas, nurtured through collaboration, and strengthened by the time, trust, and resources we invest in artists," said Rick Dildine, Artistic Director of Children's Theatre Company. "Generation Now represents what is

possible when theatres come together with a shared commitment to developing new work and expanding the stories we tell. At Children's Theatre Company, we believe the future of the American theatre begins with young people, and we are proud to stand alongside these extraordinary partners and playwrights in creating a richer, more inclusive theatrical canon for generations to come."

Each of these 16 commissions are co-commissions in which both theatres were involved in the selection of the artists and the subject matter, and have worked together on the play's development through readings, workshops, and dramaturgical conversations. It is anticipated that each of the projects will go through multiple drafts and revisions before its premiere.

The aim of Generation Now is that each play or musical will be produced by each of the commissioning theatres. These may be co-productions or completely independent productions. The co-productions may involve sharing actors, creative teams, and designs, or simply sharing the physical production or some other way of collaborating. The co-commissioning theatres will determine how each of their projects will be produced.

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. All commissions will receive at least two developmental workshops at the co-commissioning theatres.

"Generation Now is a game changer for Ma-Yi because it asks AANHPI playwright to enter a field where their voices have been largely absent," said Ma-Yi Theater Artistic Director Ralph Peña. "That invitation — to imagine a play that children, parents, and grandparents can experience together — opens an entire new area of artistic possibility to these playwrights. It also gives us a chance to build a body of work that theaters have been missing."

"Having the opportunity to get to know the artistic leaders in the collaborative has been such a joy," said Penumbra President Sarah Bellamy. "I have learned from them, laughed with them, and felt fortified by their leadership and wisdom during difficult times from our intersecting communities. I am so grateful to each for their partnership and commitment to this work."

"For Native Voices, this collaboration represents a vital investment in Native storytelling, creating opportunities for Native playwrights to develop bold, intergenerational work and for Native audiences, particularly young people, to see their stories, cultures, and lived experiences reflected on stages across the country," said DeLanna Studi, artistic director of Native Voices. "These plays also invite audiences of all backgrounds to discover new perspectives and deepen

their understanding of one another. Generation Now is cause for celebration not only for the stories brought to life but also for the lifelong relationships forged among theatres of color,relationships that will continue to strengthen our collective voices and shape the future of American Theatre for generations."

Additional Information

- An intersectional partnership such as Generation Now is unprecedented in the American theatre.
- All of the artistic directors of the partner theatres are leaders in their field.
- There are monthly, open-ended convenings of the round table of all the leaders involved with Generation Now.
- Generation Now also provides an opportunity for the partner theatres to exchange best practices.
- Before any conversation happens with a playwright, both organizations meet together to discuss and synthesize their notes and then meet jointly with the playwright.

General Updates

- Generation Now's Annual Convening took place in Minneapolis, MN from December 8-10, 2025.
- Upcoming: There will be an additional eight commissions made over the next two years.

New Commissions

What a Feeling, created Lisa Sanaye-Dring and co-commissioned by Ma-Yi Theatre (New York, New York) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, Minnesota):

What a Feeling! is the story of a girl's first day of kindergarten— but things get a little weird! When Charlie feels big feelings, big stuff starts to happen, and nobody's quite sure how to handle it. Come join this interactive, educational adventure where we learn how to greet those big emotions and to accept ourselves no matter who (or what!) we are.

- *What a Feeling!* received a workshop at Children's Theatre Company from May 13-17, 2026.

Picture Day, created by Maddox Pennington and co-commissioned by Native Voices (Los Angeles, California) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, Minnesota):

It's Picture Day at Murray Middle School and students are waiting for their turn in front of the lens. Members of the school's first (and *secret*) Gay-Straight Alliance navigate the push and pull

of family expectations and their own self-expression, looking to each other for support as the end of the school year sends long-held secrets and frustrations fizzing to the surface.

- *Picture Day* will receive a workshop at Children's Theatre Company, from November 12-15, 2026.

(Can We Please) Give the Police Department to the Grandmothers, created by Junauda Petrus and co-commissioned by Penumbra (St. Paul, Minnesota) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, Minnesota).

Pinky, Taps, and Saxophone, created by Michael Lew (Book Writer) and Sam Willmot (Composer/Lyricist), co-commissioned by Ma-Yi Theatre (New York, New York) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, Minnesota):

A New Musical by Mike Lew and Sam Willmott

Pinky, Taps, and Saxophone are three hippo siblings with big dreams of becoming the greatest band in the jungle. Pinky, the ambitious older sister, plays trumpet and has grand plans for musical stardom. Taps, the mischievous middle brother, plays drums and thrives on chaos. And Saxophone, the shy youngest sibling, is a gifted saxophonist whose stage fright threatens to keep his talents hidden. Together, they embark on a series of hilarious musical adventures, from entering a Battle of the Bands to performing their first gig without their instruments, discovering along the way that making music together isn't always easy.

With a book and lyrics by Mike Lew and music by Sam Willmott, *Pinky, Taps, and Saxophone* is a lively musical comedy for children ages four to eight. Combining infectious songs, physical comedy, colorful jungle characters, and playful storytelling, the show celebrates sibling relationships, individuality, and the joy of collaboration. As the three hippos navigate competing ambitions, bruised egos, and unexpected disasters, they discover that finding their own sound means learning to listen to one another.

Untitled Vera Starbard Project, created by Vera Starbard and co-commissioned by Native Voices (Los Angeles, California) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, Minnesota).

Raven, THE greatest legend of Alaska ever, is just fine being alone and keeping all his awesome stuff for himself. But the creatures he meets seem to insist on trying to be friends - and show him how to be a friend. As Raven searches for his new duck buddy across the land, he may have to eventually admit getting - and giving - help make everything better.

Untitled Dominique Morisseau Project, created by Dominique Morisseau and co-commissioned by Penumbra (St. Paul, Minnesota) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, MN).

The Tyrus Wong Project, created by Vichet Chum and co-commissioned by Ma-Yi Theatre (New York, New York) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, MN):

A New Play by Vichet Chum

In 1919, nine-year-old Tyrus Wong leaves China with his father, arriving in America under the shadow of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Separated from his father and detained for weeks at Angel Island, he begins an extraordinary journey marked by poverty, displacement, and resilience. Settling in Los Angeles, Tyrus discovers his artistic gifts through his father's calligraphy lessons and eventually earns a scholarship to art school. His talent leads him to Hollywood, where his groundbreaking visual artistry helps shape iconic films, including Disney's *Bambi*, even as racism and discrimination deny him the recognition he deserves.

Spanning generations and a century of American history, Vichet Chum's new play celebrates the remarkable life of an immigrant artist whose work transformed American visual culture. Drawing on Wong's dreamlike paintings, the production imagines a theatrical landscape of projected artwork, Hollywood glamour, and the magnificent handmade kites of his later years. At its heart is a moving story about family, memory, artistic perseverance, and a lifelong search for belonging, as a boy separated from his homeland transforms the ache of that loss into an extraordinary artistic legacy.

Updates on Previously-Announced Commissions

- April 25-26, 2026: *Drawing Lessons* received a workshop in New York at Ma-Yi Theater Company

The Voices in the Walls by Nambi E. Kelley, co-commissioned by Penumbra (St. Paul, Minnesota) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, Minnesota):

- August 11-15, 2025: *The Voices in the Walls* received a workshop in St. Paul, Minnesota at Penumbra.

- June 2-5, 2026: *The Voices in the Walls* received a workshop in Minneapolis, MN at Children's Theatre Company.

Nambi E. Kelley's *The Voices in the Walls* is about a little girl who has a mentally ill parent and how mental illness helps to shape her identity about who she is and what she is capable of in the world. It's a healing balm for her, and for her parent to be able to recognize the illness and understand that the parent is not the illness.

Folklórico, created by Latino Theatre Company and co-commissioned by Latino Theater Company (Los Angeles, California) and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, Minnesota):

- *Folklorico* will receive an in-house workshop at Latino Theatre Company.

Folklórico is 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.

"I think the biggest impact that Generation Now has had on our organization, and I believe eventually on the field, is the incredible conversations and discoveries we have had as culturally specific organizations wrestling with the idea of creating multigenerational work," said José Luis Valenzuela, Artistic Director of Latino Theater Company. "This is not work that we usually do, and what we learned through these conversations is the importance of multigenerational plays. This is the future. These are the new generations of audiences and the new generations of artists."

About the Partners

Native Voices

Founded in 1993 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. nativevoices.co

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 (CTC) activates the creative lives of children and families—strengthening imagination, connection, and belonging to help young people thrive and communities grow stronger. Participating in year-round programming, theatre attendees and arts learners represent diverse racial, cultural, socioeconomic, neurocognitive, and geographic backgrounds. CTC is the only theatre focused on young audiences to win the Special Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre and is the only theatre in Minnesota to receive three Tony nominations (for its production of *A Year With Frog and Toad*). CTC is committed to

creating world-class productions at the highest level and to developing new works, more than 200 to date, dramatically changing the canon of work for young audiences.

For 200,000 people annually, CTC aims to be a destination where families create lasting memories and grow together through the power of story and play. We seek to build emotional connections and position CTC as essential to family life and childhood development Every year, thousands of children experience theatre for the first time at CTC. Our innovative education programs demonstrably benefit the community, from the resilience-based Creative Play program for early learners to the pre-professional skill-building in our Theatre Arts Training. ACT One is CTC's comprehensive platform for access, diversity, and inclusion in our audiences, programs, staff, and board that strives to ensure the theatre is a home for all people, all families, reflective of our community. childrenstheatre.org

Plays for New Audiences (PNA), CTC's script licensing division, licenses quality scripts for multigenerational audiences and actors. Written by some of the world's most extraordinary playwrights including 4 of the top 10 most-produced Theatre for Young Audiences playwrights, PNA's 300+ show catalog features plays and musicals for any programming need. A division of Children's Theatre Company, PNA offers contemporary stories and reimagined classics that are topical, relevant, and even fantastical. As a non-profit licensing company, all profits are invested back into supporting artists and creating new work.

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