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Contacts:

Penumbra: Tiffany Johnson | tiffany.johnson@penumbratheatre.org | 651-288-6795

Children's Theatre Company: Melissa Ferlaak | mferlaak@childrenstheatre.org | 612-382-5571

Ma-Yi Theater Company: John Wyszniowski | john@everymanagency.com | 347-416-3881

Latino Theater Company: Lucy Pollak | lucy@lucypr.com

Native Voices at the Autry: Keisha Raines | kraines@theautry.org | 323-495-4370

Five-Theatre Partnership Receives \$1.5 Million Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Grant to Create "Generation Now"

Partners will Commission and Develop 16 New Plays for Multigenerational Audiences by Writers who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian American Pacific Islander

Minneapolis-Saint Paul, MN/Los Angeles, CA/New York, NY— Five nationally respected theatres announced today that their landmark partnership has received a generous \$1.5 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to create Generation Now. This partnership, Penumbra (Saint Paul, MN), Ma-Yi Theater Company (New York City, NY), Latino Theater Company (Los Angeles, CA), Native Voices at the Autry (Los Angeles, CA), and Children's Theatre Company (Minneapolis, MN), will commission and develop 16 new plays by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian American Pacific Islander writers for multigenerational audiences. The output of Generation Now promises to radically expand the inclusiveness of each theatre, expand the canon of work produced for multigenerational audiences, and create a model of transformative partnership for the theatre field.

"From its inception, Native Voices has been dedicated to supporting Indigenous playwrights and theatre artists and sharing Native stories with audiences of all ages," states Native Voices at the Autry Artistic Director DeLanna Studi. "We are excited to collaborate with these incredible cohort theatres on Generation Now to reach across generations and geography, bringing multi-generational, diverse audiences together to appreciate the universal human experience and collectively shape an inclusive, shared future."

These partnerships are expected to bring a richer cultural context to the work and to collectively amplify each communities' voices. Generation Now is guided by a deep respect and advocacy for the intelligence and agency of younger audiences. The consortium also strongly believes that if we are to have an extraordinary theatre culture in this country, we must start young, and it must be inter-generational, inclusive, inspiring, transformative, and lifelong.

"Not only is Penumbra excited to work with such esteemed partners, but really hopeful about the collaborative model that we are developing together," stated Penumbra's Artistic Director Sarah Bellamy. "For the field to change, the canon must be diversified and young people in particular need to

see themselves lovingly and authentically represented onstage. When we imagine the impact of this project, the possibilities are myriad and so vitalizing.”

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation’s largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Through their grants, they seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.

“This is an amazing gift from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,” states Ma-Yi Theater Company’s Artistic Director Ralph B. Peña. “An opportunity to work with Children’s Theatre Company to develop new works for multigenerational audiences is a long-held dream for Ma-Yi Theater, made even sweeter by a cohort of culturally specific theaters we have long admired.”

“Theaters serving multigenerational audiences are often the first places audiences encounter live theater,” states The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Arts and Culture Program Officer Susan Feder. “Yet despite decades of activity that has resulted in the commissioning of original stories and adaptations of classical and contemporary ones, the field lacks a repertoire that includes a plurality of voices and stories from emerging and established artists of color. The Mellon Foundation is delighted to be supporting the 16 artists who will be working with these five eminent theaters to co-develop new plays and musicals serving audiences for whom culturally relevant voices and stories could be formative. We look forward to the development of a significant body of artistically rigorous new work to be produced in multiple venues across the country.”

Due to the scale and ambition of Generation Now, the grant also includes the creation of an annual arts administration fellowship to add support for all the partner theatres in the implementation of Generation Now.

“Children’s Theatre Company is grounded in the deep respect we have for our audiences, our partner theatres, and the desire to create powerful new work,” states CTC Artistic Director Peter C. Brosius. “We look forward to continuing to learn from each other with Generation Now. We know that our distinctive work and practices will profoundly inform and inspire us as we move these plays from conception, through commission and development, and into production for our audiences.”

Playwrights—both established and emerging—will be selected by Latino Theater Company, Ma-Yi Theater Company, Native Voices at the Atrium, and Penumbra, all with expertise in creating artistically excellent, culturally specific theatre, in collaboration with Children’s Theatre Company as the co-commissioner with expertise in creating dynamic and powerful multigenerational theatre. All decisions will be grounded in learning, respect, and celebrating the perspectives of all organizations. Collectively, the partners are acutely aware of the absence of marginalized voices in the canon of plays for multigenerational audiences.

Latino Theater Company Artistic Director José Luis Valenzuela states, “This collaboration gives the Latino Theater Company the opportunity to advance our mission and to engage in a national dialogue with culturally specific theater companies in the development and creation of new works for the American theater canon for young and culturally specific audiences.”

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 Theatre 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. As their mission statement reads, “We open hearts, rehearse strategies for change, and dispel dehumanizing narratives of people of color.” Founded in 1976 by celebrated scholar Lou Bellamy in St. Paul, Minn., their 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, Artistic Director Sarah Bellamy has been testing multigenerational educational 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. Penumbra is now 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.

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