

THE WALLACE ALEXANDER GERBODE FOUNDATION

Contact:

Stacie Ma'a, President

Gerbode Foundation

510-915-8048, info@gerbode.org

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Gerbode Foundation Awards Six \$50,000 Commissions for Theater Arts *Writers selected for Special Awards in the Arts in New Theater Production*

Berkeley, Calif.—The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, in partnership with The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, is pleased to announce the recipients of a \$300,000 initiative to support the creation and production of new theater works by California playwrights and writers. These theater production awards are the second round of a three-year \$900,000 initiative funded by the Gerbode and Hewlett foundations to support the commissioning of individual artists and investing in their creative vision. In 2018, grants were made for new works by choreographers. In 2020, grants will be available for new works by music composers

The new theater works will be commissioned and premiered by Bay Area nonprofit organizations between June 2020 and October 2022. Each organization will receive a grant of \$50,000: \$12,500 or more, will represent a commissioning fee to a California-based writer, playwright, or spoken word artist, and the remaining funds will be used by the presenting organization for expenses related to the creation and premiere of the new theater production.

The recipients of the 2019 Theater Production Awards are (in alphabetical order by organization):

Aurora Theater Company/Britney Frazier, Playwright & Margo Hall, Director

Britney Frazier and Margo Hall's *LAVEAU* is a piece of experimental theatre that will explore the life and work of Marie Laveau, a Louisiana Voodoo Queen. Opening on a Voodoo ceremony in Congo Square, the play follows Laveau – a free woman – as she navigates the racial and cultural politics of early 19th Century New Orleans. A celebration of black women, this multi-disciplinary performance ritual intertwines storytelling with ceremony, honoring cultural tradition and challenging the current idea of what engaging black theatre is and “should be.” This work will premiere in Winter 2020.

Crowded Fire Theater Company/Lisa Marie Rollins

Featuring actors from age 80 to 8, this performance shaped in collaboration with a multigenerational, multi-bodied ensemble of thirteen, will grapple with the complexities of how adults shape and influence children - definitively and inadvertently wielding the power of words and gesture to create the cultural constructs that we struggle against today. Subverting adult language in our youth's mouths, and our children's worldview in our elder's mouths, this piece will seek to discomfit the familiar and make us consider the power we wield over our children

and therefore a future society. This work will premiere in Fall 2021.

Cutting Ball Theater/Christopher Chen

This new play by Christopher Chen will be a no-holds-barred, non-linear, micro and macroscopic examination of "fear"- its permutations, and the ways in which its unseen presence tilts the world in unexpected ways. Chen's play will maximize the potential of Cutting Ball Theater's modular and transformable performance space as a storytelling tool. This work will premiere in Fall 2022.

Magic Theatre/Anna Moench

This play will examine Asian American masculinity from the first Asian immigrant communities in the US to the present day, exploring the emotional legacy of how Asian American men were and are perceived by mainstream American culture as well as the impact that legacy has on Asian American women. It will grapple with the relationship between gender and anger in the Asian American community, as well as Moench's role as a storyteller from and for that community. The play will span a large sweep of history but place the same characters in each of these time periods, allowing the story to accumulate in layers that create a deeper exploration of themes. This work will premiere in Spring 2022.

MACLA/Mercedes Floresislas

The proposed work will involve the development of a unique genre originated by Ms. Floresislas – a Latinx trilingual play incorporating English, Spanish, American Sign Language, and deaf actors. Drawing on her life experience, the playwright examines themes and topics that speak to diverse audiences of marginalized groups in our society, including those who have a voice and those who do not. The new piece will explore issues of mental-health, and isolation at a multi-generational level, all while inspiring people to reach out and connect with one other in the most basic level of humanity. This work will premiere in Fall 2022.

The Living Word Project (fiscal sponsor: Intersection for the Arts)/Yosimar Reyes

Prieto is an autobiographical, one-man show written by nationally acclaimed poet, educator, and performance artist Yosimar Reyes. Known for his frequent exploration into themes of migration and sexuality, Reyes takes *Prieto* viewers on a journey into his experience growing up queer in the hoods of Eastside San Jose. Reyes came to the United States from Guerrero, Mexico as an undocumented immigrant at the age of 3, and he uses humor, drama, and intrigue to recount his experience of understanding what that means. This work will premiere in Fall 2020.

“The playwrights, writers, and theater makers selected in this round represent fresh, timely, and imaginative approaches to creating new theater,” said Stacie Ma’a, the president of the Gerbode Foundation. “This is an important collection of exciting theater pieces and we are thrilled to be able to support these artists and their inspirational work.”

The Gerbode Foundation was assisted in making these grants by an advisory panel composed of the following nationally respected theater experts:

Emilya Cachapero is the director of Theatre Communications Group's Artistic and International Programs and has been active in the US arts community for more than 30 years. Emilya oversees TCG's grant programs, international programs, and selected special projects.

She was instrumental in creating the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival and was its founding producer for the first two years of the program. Her writing has been published in *American Poetry Review* and several poetry anthologies. Emily received her Bachelor of Arts degree in creative writing from San Francisco State University, and an honorary M.F.A. from the American Conservatory Theater. She is an alumna of the James P. Shannon Leadership Institute and artEquity.

Jesus A. Reyes is the Community Partnerships Director at Center Theatre Group (CTG) where he spearheads the design and implementation of community programs that provide access to theatre through free workshops, and play readings at partner sites such as libraries, parent centers, and CTG's costume shop. From 2009-2014, he was a commissioner for the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, a recipient of the CTG's Future Leaders mentorship grant and the Latino Arts Network's Maestro Award, and a British Council's Cultural Leadership International fellow. Jesus co-founded East LA Rep and worked with Teatro Vision as a director, actor and literary manager.

Harold Steward is the Interim Executive Director of The Theater Offensive, a Queer and Trans Theater based in Boston, MA. Most recently, Steward served as Manager of the South Dallas Cultural Center, a division of the City of Dallas, Office of Cultural Affairs, which provides instruction and enrichment in the arts with an emphasis on the African contribution to world culture. Harold is a member of the Board of Directors for the National Performance Network/Visual Artists Network and Theater Communications Group. He is also a Steering Committee member of Black Theatre Commons and NextGen National Arts Network.

Abigail Vega is an actor, director, and the Producer of the Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC), a network of North American Latinx and allied theatre practitioners working to grow the field by forging new connections. At the LTC, she has produced live convenings in Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Seattle, Princeton, Austin, Miami, and New York. Previously, she was an Ensemble Member of Teatro Luna, with whom she performed in over twenty-five cities. Her writing can be found in Micha Espinosa's "Monologues for Latino Actors," and her directing has been seen at Teatro Luna, the Aurora Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia, and Stages Rep in Houston, Texas.

About the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation

[The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation](#) is interested in programs and projects offering potential for significant impact. The primary geographical focus is on the San Francisco Bay Area and Hawaii. The Foundation's interests generally fall under the categories of arts and culture, environment, reproductive rights and health, citizen participation, building communities, inclusiveness, strength of the philanthropic process and the nonprofit sector, and foundation-initiated special projects.

About the Special Awards Program

Since 1987, the Gerbode Foundation has made innovative grants through its Special Awards Program to Bay Area arts institutions to commission new works from choreographers, playwrights, and composers. The Special Awards Program has also supported visual artists, poets, and multimedia artists.

In a time of cultural shifts and fiscal insecurity in the arts, these coveted, nationally respected awards have helped underwrite culturally and aesthetically diverse, acclaimed new works by prominent artists and emerging ones. These grants have supported artists at critical junctures in their careers; enabled nonprofit local arts groups to develop and debut substantial, original works; and enriched Bay Area audiences, readers, and viewers by giving them first access to ambitious new creations.

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