

New Kira Obolensky musical kicks off reading series at the Playwrights' Center

MINNEAPOLIS (November 21, 2017) — As chilly weather settles into Minnesota, local playwright Kira Obolensky has a wintery new musical to share. “**The Overcoat: A Low-Fi Musical**” is the first play in the Playwrights' Center's 2017-18 Ruth Easton New Play Series, a long-running series offering Playwrights' Center Core Writers 20 hours of workshop time to develop a new play and giving theater fans a chance to see free public readings of the plays in progress. Readings of “The Overcoat: A Low-Fi Musical” will take place **Monday, December 4 and Tuesday, December 5 at 7 p.m. at the Playwrights' Center**, 2301 E. Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. Reservations are recommended and can be made at pwcenter.org.

Kira Obolensky is a beloved and celebrated playwright, especially in the Twin Cities where she is known for her collaborations with Ten Thousand Things Theater. For “The Overcoat: A Low-Fi Musical,” she worked with composer Brian Harnetty on a haunting and minimal score to accompany her reimagining of Nikolai Gogol's short story “The Overcoat.” In the play, poor beleaguered Charlie Shoe needs a new coat to keep Winter away—she's there, on the bridge, on the stair, waiting for his body and soul. Funny and tragic, this short musical wonders if empathy and love are really enough to save us from the clutches of coldness.

The workshop and readings will be directed by Seth Bockley, joined by a cast of Eric Sharp*, Katherine Fried, Thomasina Petrus*, Jennifer Baldwin Peden*, Joy Dolo, Skyler Nowinski, Craig Johnson*, and Malick Ceesay (**Member of Actors' Equity Association*).

“This musical was originally conceived by Brian Harnetty and me as something simple and stripped down,” says playwright **Kira Obolensky**. “We wanted to make the musical somehow more accessible—to make a theatrical experience with music that didn't require the big guns of orchestration and highly trained voices. The music is seemingly simple and so is the story—but in the lightness we hope to approximate what Gogol's short story does, which is to contemplate the great divide between poor and rich and the ways in which empathy can be born in even the most barren of hearts.”

Jeremy B. Cohen, producing artistic director at the Playwrights' Center, says this adaptation is timely in its exploration of empathy within a world of shifting values. He adds, “In our own world today, we are clearly in a struggle to protect our most vulnerable citizens and to find more ways towards warmth, community, and compassion. We invite you to join us December 4 and 5 for the communal experience of sharing story, music, and space with one another.”

Kira Obolensky is a Mellon Foundation Playwright in residence at Ten Thousand Things Theater. She has written several plays for that theater, most recently “The Changelings” which premiered in the spring of 2016 and “Park and Lake” which will premiere in February 2018. Her plays have been performed around the country and abroad. She has received many awards and fellowships including a

Guggenheim Fellowship, the Kesselring Prize and Le Comte de Nuys playwriting fellowship, as well as grants from the Bush, McKnight and Jerome Foundations. Kira has written three books about architecture and design, including co-authoring the national best seller, "The Not So Big House." Her novella, "The Anarchists Float to St. Louis," won Quarterly West's novella prize. A graduate of Juilliard's playwriting program and Williams College, Kira teaches at the University of Minnesota and in Spalding University's low residency MFA program.

The Ruth Easton New Play Series provides selected Core Writers with 20 hours of workshop time to develop a new play with collaborators of their choice: top local and national actors, directors, designers and dramaturgs. Each play has two public readings, allowing the playwright to experiment and see the play on its feet in front of two different audiences. The Center brings in visiting artistic leaders to see the readings and connect with the playwrights, and more than half of the plays developed in the series over the past decade have gone on to production.

The 2017-18 Ruth Easton New Play Series will also feature "How The Ghost Of You Clings, The Anna May Wong Story" by John Olive on January 8 and 9, "Three Quarter Inches of Sky" by Sherry Kramer on February 5 and 6, "Tiny Houses" by Stefanie Zadravec on March 5 and 6, and "the bandaged place" by Harrison David Rivers on April 9 and 10.

All events in the Ruth Easton New Play Series are free and open to the public. Reserve your spots at pwcenter.org/ruth-easton-series or by contacting the Playwrights' Center at (612) 332-7481 or info@pwcenter.org.

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Photos of the playwright and previous Ruth Easton New Play Series readings are available at pwcenter.org/media-room or by contacting Jessica Franken at jessicaf@pwcenter.org

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTER

The Playwrights' Center champions playwrights and new plays to build upon a living theater that demands new and innovative works.

The Center serves playwrights by sustaining careers, developing new work, and connecting playwrights to theaters. Each year at the Center, fellows and Core Writers receive more than \$315,000 in direct support, 70+ new plays are workshopped, playwrights connect with 100 producing theaters through partnership programs, and 2,000 member playwrights from around the world find resources to achieve their artistic vision.

Since its founding in 1971, the Playwrights' Center has become one of the nation's most generous and well-respected theater organizations, helping launch the careers of numerous nationally recognized artists such as August Wilson, Lee Blessing, Suzan-Lori Parks, Jordan Harrison, Carlyle Brown, Craig Lucas, Jeffrey Hatcher, Melanie Marnich, and Kira Obolensky. Work developed through Center programs has been seen nationwide on such stages as Yale Rep, Woolly Mammoth, the Guthrie, Goodman, and many others.

Programs and services

The Core Writer program gives 25-30 of the most exciting playwrights from across the country the time and tools to develop new work for the stage. All Core Writers receive play development workshops at the Center, in collaboration with prominent directors, actors, dramaturgs, and designers. Selected work by Core Writers makes up the Center's formal season of public readings: the PlayLabs festival and the Ruth Easton New Play Series. Core Writers are also promoted by the Center and provided opportunities through an extensive network of colleges and universities, cultural institutions, and producing theaters.

Fellowships, made possible by the McKnight and Jerome foundations, provide more than \$315,000 each year for residencies, commissions, and development funds. Beyond the financial stipend, the value of fellowships is more than doubled with the year-long support the Playwrights' Center adds through workshops with professional collaborators and through the connections the Center makes between playwrights and producers of new work. This holistic and customized combination of financial support, access to talent, and professional connections is career-changing for most playwrights. Fellowship programs: Jerome Fellows, Many Voices Fellows, McKnight Fellows in Playwriting, McKnight National Residency and Commission, McKnight Theater Artist Fellows.

Membership is open to all and provides nearly 2,000 playwrights worldwide with tools, resources, and support. Benefits include a database of playwriting opportunities, online and in-person seminars and classes, access to readings with professional actors, dramaturgical services, and more. In addition, the Playwrights' Center's **New Plays on Campus** program serves dozens of colleges and universities nationwide, providing script-matching services, arranging playwright residencies, and offering immersive apprenticeships to student playwrights.

Local and national partnerships elevate the role of living playwrights. Through the Regulars partnership program, the Playwrights' Center partners with 100 theaters around the country to bring their artistic staff to the Center in order to spend time with playwrights and to co-develop new plays with a keen eye towards production. In fact, 60% of these plays have gone on to full production within two years (rather than the average seven-year timeframe for most plays to see production). Recent and upcoming productions resulting from Playwrights' Center co-development workshops include "The Great Leap" by Lauren Yee at Denver Center Theatre, "Dancing on the Edge" by Adam Kraar at Theatre Novi Most, "The Gentleman Caller" by Philip Dawkins at Raven Theater, "Duet" by Daniel Alexander Jones at Soho Rep, "Early Morning Song" by Rachel Jendrzejewski at Red Eye Theater, "Fickle: A Fancy French Farce" by Meg Miroshnik at Olney Theatre Center, and "The Happiest Place on Earth" by Philip Dawkins at Greenhouse Theater Center/Sideshow Theatre Company.