

McKnight Theater Artist Fellows Austene Van and Sally Wingert present Works in Progress June 29

(Minneapolis, MN—June 3, 2015)— 2014-15 McKnight Theater Artist Fellows Austene Van and Sally Wingert, along with their collaborators, will present selections from works in progress on **June 29 at 7 p.m. at the Illusion Theater**. The event is free and open to the public; advance reservations are strongly recommended and can be made at pwcenter.org. The Illusion Theater is located on the eighth floor of Hennepin Center for the Arts at 528 Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis.

In addition to the \$25,000 fellowship, the McKnight Foundation provides up to \$7,000 in development funds to McKnight Theater Artist Fellows, allowing them to explore new work with collaborators they choose. This year's projects:

Austene Van is developing a musical titled "Once Upon a Time" with director Peter Rothstein and musical director Sanford Moore. Van will be joined by cast members Shá Cage, T. Mychael Rambo, and Jamecia Bennett. In the play, the legendary Josephine Baker, inspired to leave a legacy for young women worldwide, begins to write her final and most colorful autobiography on the last day of her life. As she sifts through carefully crafted fairy tales of her magical life, she is confronted by shadows baring some truths and challenging certain myths.

Sally Wingert is collaborating with Transatlantic Love Affair on "Emilie/Eurydice," directed by Isabel Nelson and with music by Joanna Harmon. The performing ensemble is Wingert, Heather Bunch, Derek Lee Miller, Eric Nelson, Adelin Phelps, Natalie Remus, and Allison Witham. The showing for "Emilie/Eurydice" is the result of thirty hours' rehearsal-based research and development by the ensemble into the myth of Eurydice, the myth of Demeter, and Emilie Gossiaux's story as told on the Radiolab episode "Finding Emilie." In particular, the ensemble has investigated the idea of a "nether" or other world and its performance using the convention of a Greek chorus. They have also explored themes of ambiguous loss: if your loved one is lost-but-not-lost (e.g., in a coma, as in Emilie's story), how do you negotiate the often-overlapping spaces of grief and hope? How does this manifest in physical ritual, in our relationships with each other, in the act of waiting? When life is on pause, how does life go on?

The McKnight Theater Artist Fellowships at the Playwrights' Center recognize Minnesota theater artists other than playwrights whose work demonstrates exceptional artistic merit and potential. Recent McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship recipients include Sarah Agnew, Ansa Akyea, Shá Cage, Sun Mee Chomet, Christopher Lutter-Gardella, Isabell Monk O'Connor, Denise Prosek, Michael Wangen, and Stephen Yoakam. Along with Van and Wingert, costume designer Mathew LeFebvre is also a 2014-15 fellow.

Seats for “McKnight Theater Artist Fellows Present Works in Progress” are free and going fast—reservations are recommended. Reserve your seats by visiting pwcenter.org, emailing info@pwcenter.org or calling (612) 332-7481.

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ARTIST BIOS

Photos of the artists are available at pwcenter.org/media-room

AUSTENE VAN

Austene Van’s Penumbra Company member credits include “Detroit ’67,” “Spunk,” “Amen Corner,” “Blue,” “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” “Dinah Was,” “Blues for an Alabama Sky” and “Seven Guitars.” Van performed the title role in “Aida” at the Pantages with Theater Latté Da; Blanche Dubois in “A Street Car Named Desire” with Ten Thousand Things; “In the Next Room” at the Jungle Theater; “Gem of the Ocean,” “Crowns” and “A Christmas Carol” at Guthrie Theater; “Radio Golf” at IRT/Cleveland Play House; “To Kill a Mockingbird” at Park Square Theatre; “Once on this Island” at Children’s Theatre Company; and “Singing in the Rain” at the Ordway. Recent credits as a director include “Six Degrees of Separation” at Theatre in the Round Players; “Joan: Voices in the Fire” at Rarig Center; “Hot Chocolate,” “Gee’s Bend” and “Lady Day” at Park Square Theatre; “Lonely Soldier Monologues” and “A Civil War Christmas” at History Theatre; “Blues in the Night” at the Ordway; and “Black Nativity” at Penumbra. Van is Artistic Director of New Dawn Theatre Productions.

SALLY WINGERT

Sally Wingert has been a Twin Cities actor for over 30 years. She considers the Guthrie her theatrical home, having appeared in more than 80 productions there, including “Other Desert Cities,” “Tribes,” “Pride and Prejudice,” “Faith Healer,” “Arsenic and Old Lace,” “Third,” “Happy Days,” “Too Clever By Half,” “K: Impressions of a Trial” and many others. Recent credits include “Hir” at Mixed Blood Theatre, “Master Class” and “Cabaret” with Theater Latté Da, and “The Receptionist” with Dark and Stormy Productions. She has appeared on Broadway and the West End, Yale Repertory Theatre, McCarter Theatre, American Repertory Theater, Chicago Shakespeare Theater and many local stages, most notably Ten Thousand Things. Wingert was named 2013 Artist of the Year by *The Star Tribune*.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTER

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

One of the nation's most generous and well-respected theater organizations, the Playwrights' Center focuses on both supporting playwrights and moving new plays toward production at theaters across the country. The Center has helped launch the careers of numerous nationally recognized artists, notably 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 \$225,000 each year for residencies, commissions, and development funds. Through these fellowships, the Playwrights' Center functions as a home for:

- Jerome Fellows (three to five emerging American playwrights);
- Many Voices Fellows (two early-career and two beginning playwrights of color);
- McKnight Fellows in Playwriting (two Minnesota-based playwrights whose work demonstrates exceptional artistic merit and potential);
- McKnight National Residency and Commission (one playwright selected annually from an impressive national pool); and
- McKnight Theater Artist Fellows (three Minnesota-based professional theater artists recognized for their outstanding skill and talent).

Membership is open to all and provides more than 1,500 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. The Center works with several theaters each year to develop work for their stages. Recent partners have included Tectonic Theater Project, Mixed Blood Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, The Public Theater (NY), Goodman Theatre (Chicago, IL), Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Guthrie Theater, Ten Thousand Things Theater Company, Berkeley Rep, Marin Theatre Company, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and others. The Center also collaborates with local community organizations such as Jazz88 KBEM and Veterans for the Arts to develop theater that enriches their programming.