

## **Annual PlayLabs festival runs October 17–23 at the Playwrights' Center**

(Minneapolis, MN—October 4, 2016)—The Playwrights' Center's 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary season kicks off October 17 with PlayLabs, a week-long new play festival featuring Core Writers **Christina Ham** ("**West of Central**"), **Susan Soon He Stanton** ("**we, the invisibles**") and **Ken Urban** ("**The Remains**"). Tickets are free and can be reserved at [pwcenter.org/playlabs](http://pwcenter.org/playlabs).

During the festival, the playwrights each have 30 hours to workshop their script with a team of collaborators: top actors, directors, designers, and dramaturgs from the Twin Cities and around the country. Each play has two public readings with time for rewriting in between.

PlayLabs also features a showcase of work by 2016-17 Playwrights' Center Jerome and McKnight Fellows and the first event in a year-long conversation series called #Theater2060, discussing how theater will change over the next 45 years.

"This year's lineup of plays tells stories not often represented on stage," says Playwrights' Center Associate Artistic Director Hayley Finn, who produces the festival, "from the story of immigrants who work at an elite hotel to gay divorce to a noir thriller that explores how race affects the real estate industry and places an African-American female protagonist at the center of the story. Christina, Ken, and Susan are bringing to light facets of the American landscape not always seen. Being part of new stories is at the heart of theater, and I am thrilled that we can support these talented and insightful artists and their timely work."

Around 75% of plays developed at PlayLabs over the past decade have gone on to production, including Christina Ham's "Scapegoat," Philip Dawkins' "Le Switch," Sarah Gubbins' "Cocked," Mat Smart's "The Royal Society of Antarctica" and "Tinker to Evers to Chance," Dan O'Brien's "The Body of an American," Allison Moore's "Slasher," Samuel D. Hunter's "The Few," Christine Evans' "Can't Complain," and Winter Miller's "In Darfur."

All PlayLabs events are free and open to the public, and take place at the Playwrights' Center, 2301 E Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. For tickets, see [pwcenter.org/playlabs](http://pwcenter.org/playlabs) or contact the Playwrights' Center at (612) 332-7481 or [info@pwcenter.org](mailto:info@pwcenter.org). The schedule for PlayLabs 2016 is as follows:

### **"The Remains" by Ken Urban**

Monday, October 17 and Saturday, October 22 at 7 p.m.

Married for a decade, Kevin and Theo are the ideal couple in the eyes of their families. But at dinner this Sunday, Kevin and Theo have big news. A comedy about the tragedy of loving.

**Director:** Jeremy B. Cohen\*\*

**Cast:** Damian Baldet\*, Maulik Pancholy\* (of TV's "30 Rock" and "Weeds"), Sue Scott\*, Robert Rosen, Mo Perry\*, Riley O'Toole

*\*\*Member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society*

*\*Member of Actors' Equity Association*

---

**"West of Central" by Christina Ham**

Tuesday, October 18 and Friday, October 21 at 7 p.m.

The year is 1966 and the remnants of the Watts Riots are still smoldering against the backdrop of South Central Los Angeles. When a mysterious man stumbles into the office of private eye Thelma Higgins looking to warn her husband that his life might be in danger, she soon discovers that the man she's been married to for ten years is not who he claims to be. As her investigation leads her on a tangled trail of deceit, corruption, and treacherous backroom deals, she and her husband must learn to trust one another again to find out who's trying to kill him and why.

**Director:** Hayley Finn\*\*

**Dramaturg:** Michael Kinghorn

**Sound designer:** Andrew Dolan

**Cast:** Juanita Jennings\*, Shawn Hamilton\*, James A. Williams\*, Ricardo Beard, Thomasina Petrus\*, Mark Benninghofen\*, Chaz Hodges\*

*\*\*Member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society*

*\*Member of Actors' Equity Association*

---

**"we, the invisibles" by Susan Soon He Stanton**

Wednesday, October 19 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, October 22 at 1 p.m.

In 2011, the director of the International Monetary Fund was accused of sexual assault by a hotel maid, Nafissatou Diallo, but all charges were dismissed. "we, the invisibles" shares the rarely-heard stories of people like Diallo, people from all over the globe working at New York's luxury hotels. Funny, poignant, and brutally honest by turns, the play is an investigation of the complicated relationship between movers and shakers and the people who change their sheets.

**Director:** Dámaso Rodríguez\*\*

**Dramaturg:** Wendy Weckwerth

**Design consultant:** Joel Sass

**Cast:** Kurt Kwan\*, Sara Ochs, Nathan Keepers\*, H. Adam Harris\*, Adia Morris\*, Angela Lin\*

*\*\*Member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society*

*\*Member of Actors' Equity Association*

---

### **PlayLabs Party**

Saturday, October 22 following 7 p.m. reading of "The Remains"

A party to celebrate the PlayLabs artists and the local theater community.

---

### **Playwriting Fellows Showcase**

Sunday, October 23 at 12 p.m.

Scenes from new work by Jerome Fellows **Katie Bender**, **Emily Feldman**, **Jessica Huang**, and **Kristin Idaszak**; Many Voices Fellows **Benjamin Benne** and **Marisa Carr**; McKnight Fellows in Playwriting **Andrew Rosendorf** and **Rhiana Yazzie**; and McKnight National Residency and Commission Recipient **Francine Volpe**.

**Director:** Brian Balcom

**Cast includes:** Christian Bardin, Larissa Kiel\*, Song Kim, Nicole Kruex, Kurt Kwan\*, Billy Mullaney, David Mura, Skyler Nowinski, Stephen Yoakam\*

*\*Member of Actors' Equity Association*

---

### **Critical Conversation: Theater in 2060**

Sunday, October 23 at 2:30 p.m.

**H. Adam Harris**, **Aditi Brennan Kapil**, **Kwame Kwei-Armah**, and **Kira Obolensky** provide their manifestos for what theater will look like in the future, followed by a discussion.

###

*Photos of the playwrights are available at [pwcenter.org/media-room](http://pwcenter.org/media-room) or by contacting Jessica Franken at [jessicaf@pwcenter.org](mailto:jessicaf@pwcenter.org)*

## QUOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHTS ABOUT THEIR PLAYS

### **Ken Urban on “The Remains”:**

“In June 2015, as the United States had finally legalized gay marriage nationally, I filed for divorce from the man who had been my partner for 18 years. The end of our marriage felt truly tragic, not because it was the wrong choice, but because it was the right one, despite the fact that we genuinely still cared for each other. For Hegel, a ‘genuine’ tragedy is not a conflict between right and wrong, but instead a conflict between two rights. This play is my exploration of the tragedy of gay divorce.”

### **Christina Ham on “West of Central”:**

“The two genres that I love the most are noir and horror. I’ve already had the privilege of working on my supernatural play ‘The Hollow’ in the Ruth Easton New Play Series a few years ago. This time I’m looking forward to exploring noir with ‘West of Central.’ Typically, most noir features male protagonists, and I wanted to turn that on its head by utilizing a strong, black, female protagonist who has to navigate the cutthroat world of an explosively changing South Central Los Angeles. For me this workshop will provide the opportunity to revisit noir standards and to also create new ones.”

### **Susan Soon He Stanton on “we, the invisibles”:**

“This play is much larger in scope and more deeply personal than anything else I have written. PlayLabs is providing the first opportunity to explore this play with an audience. I am particularly excited to share the true-life stories of immigrants in Minneapolis, a city where so many people share a similar experience.”

## PLAYWRIGHT BIOS

### **Ken Urban**

Ken Urban is a playwright and screenwriter based in New York. His plays have been produced Off-Broadway at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, 59E59 Theatres, The Summer Play Festival at The Public, and Studio 42. He has developed new work at Playwrights Horizons, The Huntington, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and Donmar Warehouse (London). Recent productions include “A Future Perfect” at SpeakEasy Stage Company in Boston, “Sense of an Ending” at Theatre503 in London and 59E59 Theatres in New York, and “The Awake” at Chicago’s First Floor Theatre. His new play “A Guide for the Homesick,” part of the Playwrights’ Center’s 2015-16 Ruth Easton New Play Series, will receive its world premiere at the Huntington Theater Company in Boston in 2017-18. He wrote the screenplay for “The Happy Sad,” which screened internationally at over 25 film festivals, and is now available on iTunes and Amazon. His plays are published by Dramatists Play Service and Methuen. His band Occurrence’s new album “The Past Will Last Forever” is released on vinyl and digital in October 2016.

### **Christina Ham**

Christina Ham’s plays have been presented at the Kennedy Center and the Guthrie Theater among others. She is the recipient of the Marianne Murphy Playwriting Award, two McKnight Fellowships for Playwrights, and a Jerome Fellowship from the Playwrights’ Center. She has received commissions

from the Guthrie Theater and Park Square Theatre among others. She is a graduate of the University of Southern California and holds an M.F.A. in Playwriting from the UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television. She is a member playwright of the Workhaus Collective and the Dramatists Guild of America. [www.christinaham.com](http://www.christinaham.com)

### **Susan Soon He Stanton**

Susan Soon He Stanton is a playwright and screenwriter based in New York, originally from the consonant-free town of Aiea, Hawaii. Plays include "SEEK," "Takarazuka!!!," "cygnus," "Furball," "The Things Are Against Us," "The Underneath" and more. Her work has been produced or developed at Clubbed Thumb, Playwrights Horizons, Joe's Pub, the Lark, Kennedy Center, East West Players, Terra Nova, Flea, Kumu Kahua Theatre, and others. She is a member of Ma-Yi Writers Lab and was a member of the Public Emerging Writer's Group, SoHo Rep Writer-Director Lab, and the Van Lier fellowship at the Lark. M.F.A.: Yale Playwriting.

## 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 \$315,000 each year for residencies, commissions, and development funds. Through these fellowships, the Playwrights' Center functions as a home for:

- Jerome Fellows (four emerging American playwrights);
- Many Voices Fellows (two early-career playwrights of color, one Minnesota-based) and Many Voices Mentees (two Minnesota-based beginning playwrights of color);
- McKnight Fellows in Playwriting (two accomplished Minnesota-based playwrights);
- McKnight National Residency and Commission (one playwright selected annually from an impressive national pool); and
- McKnight Theater Artist Fellows (three exceptional Minnesota-based theater artists, other than playwrights).

**Membership** is open to all and provides more than 1,650 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 collaborations include partnerships with Denver Center on Idris Goodwin's *Victory Jones and the Incredible One Woman Band*, Marin Theatre Company on Carson Kreitzer's *Lasso of Truth*, Mixed Blood on Aditi Kapil's *Brahman(i) and Shiv*, Pillsbury House Theatre on Tracey Scott Wilson's *Buzzer*, and The Walker Art Center and Elevator Repair Service on Sibyl Kempson's *Fondly, Collette Richland*. The Center also flies in 10-15 artistic leaders each year to meet writers and hear their work. The newly-launched Regulars program brings together a group of nearly 100 producing theaters in the United States who seek the support of the Center in order to meet new writers, develop their work, and move them into production.