

Playwrights' Center announces 2015-16 McKnight Theater Artist Fellows

(Minneapolis, MN—June 10, 2015)—The Playwrights' Center is pleased to announce the 2015-16 recipients of the McKnight Theater Artist Fellowships:

- Lighting designer **Barry Browning**, who was resident lighting director at the Jungle Theater for 17 years and whose recent shows include the Jungle's "On Golden Pond" and the Guthrie's "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike"
- Actor **Aimee K. Bryant**, seen recently in Park Square's "The Color Purple," currently in Pillsbury House Theatre's "The Gospel of Lovingkindness," and a Core Artist with Ten Thousand Things
- Actor **James A. Williams**, also currently in "The Gospel of Lovingkindness," featured in Park Square's recent production of "The Other Place," and a founding member of Penumbra Theatre

The McKnight Theater Artist Fellowships at the Playwrights' Center recognize Minnesota theater artists other than playwrights whose work demonstrates exceptional artistic merit. The award provides \$25,000 as well as \$7,000 in development funds to create new theatrical work.

"The Minnesota theater community is deep with talent, a fact reiterated each year with the consistently high-caliber McKnight Theater Artist Fellows," says Playwrights' Center Producing Artistic Director Jeremy B. Cohen. "As you can see, this year is no exception. These three artists are not only incredibly gifted, but they've also put in the hard work it takes to create excellent art. Our theater community is lucky to have them, and it's so exciting to see their accomplishments recognized in this way."

Barry Browning has been a fixture in the Twin Cities theater scene since 1983, after graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Professional Theater Training Program. His lighting designs have illuminated dance performances, one-man shows, musical extravaganzas, and hundreds of stage productions from *Mixed Blood* to Children's Theatre Company to the Guthrie Theater. Browning has toured to such places as New York, Los Angeles, Switzerland, Aruba, and even Soviet Moscow. He was the Jungle Theater's resident lighting designer/production manager for 17 years, and was awarded a 2012 Ivey for his lighting design of their production of "Dial M for Murder."

Aimee K. Bryant was named Best Actress of 2015 by *City Pages*. Her most recent theater credits include the roles of Martha, Officer Pilate, Miriam, Ida B. Wells, and Mrs. Thomas in "The Gospel of Lovingkindness" at Pillsbury House Theatre; Mother Earth in "The Nature Crown" with Theatre Forever; Celie in "The Color Purple" at Park Square Theatre; Understudy of all the characters in "Seedfolks" at Children's Theatre Company; Shun in "Marcus; or the Secret of Sweet" with Pillsbury House Theatre, Ensemble member in "My Fair Lady" at the Guthrie Theater, and Marian the Librarian in "The Music Man" with Ten Thousands Things. Aimee is a Core Artist with Ten Thousand Things and a Founding

Ensemble Member of Congo Square Theatre Company in Chicago. She moved to the Twin Cities after completing her B.F.A. at Howard University. 2015 marks Aimee's 20th year performing in the Cities.

James A. Williams has been a mainstay of the Twin Cities theater scene since 1976. He is a founding member of Penumbra Theatre, and is Director of Teen Programming at Pillsbury House + Theatre. Recent performances include "The Other Place" (Park Square); "Habibi" (MN Fringe); "Abe Lincoln and Uncle Tom in the White House" (Carlyle Brown & Company); "The Brother/Sister Plays" (Pillsbury House); "Othello" (Park Square); "Bulrusher" (Pillsbury House); and "Fences" (Penumbra), for which he received an Ivey Award and was named 2008 Artist of the Year by the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*. He's been named best actor twice by *City Pages* and received Macalester College's 2012 Distinguished Global Citizen Award.

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Photos of the artists 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.

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 (four emerging American playwrights);
- Many Voices Fellows (two early-career playwrights of color, one from Minnesota) and Many Voices Mentees (two Minnesota-based 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.