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The Playwrights' Center announces 2014-15 McKnight Theater Artists

(Minneapolis, MN—June 12, 2014)—The Playwrights' Center is pleased to announce the 2014-15 recipients of its McKnight Theater Artist Fellowships: costume designer **Mathew LeFebvre**; actor, director and choreographer **Austene Van** and actor **Sally Wingert**.

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.

"There is a significant body of art created in Minnesota that exists because the McKnight Foundation does. It is our sincere pleasure to partner with them on two playwriting fellowships and this important fellowship recognizing three incredible theater artists," says Producing Artistic Director Jeremy B. Cohen. "Mathew has done great work with the Guthrie and Penumbra, among other theaters, and is the first costume designer to win the fellowship since 1997, before the fellowship was increased from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Austene and Sally have been involved with the Playwrights' Center for years, bringing their artistic talents to play development workshops; we're so thrilled to have them involved on this new level next year."

Mathew LeFebvre's Off-Broadway credits include "Two Trains Running" at Signature Theatre and "Back at Leipzig" at New York Theatre Workshop. Locally, he has designed for more than 20 productions at the Guthrie Theater and 15 productions at Penumbra Theatre Company, including "The Amen Corner," "Two Trains Running," "I Wish You Love," "A Raisin in the Sun," "Fences," "Get Ready" and "Gem of the Ocean." Other credits include The Old Globe, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Arizona Theatre Company, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, American Players Theatre, Geffen Playhouse, Minnesota Opera, Children's Theatre Company, Cleveland Play House, Trinity Repertory Company, The Acting Company, Theatre de la Jeune Lune and Mixed Blood Theatre. LeFebvre is a TDF/Irene Sharaff Young Master Award recipient and teaches and directs at the University of Minnesota.

Austene Van's Penumbra Company member credits include "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 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. Most recently she appeared in Theater Latté Da’s production of “Cabaret” directed by Peter Rothstein and “The Receptionist” directed by Ben McGovern for 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. This fall she will again work for Theater Latté Da in “Master Class,” and in 2015 she can be seen in a production of Mac Taylor’s “Hir,” for Mixed Blood Theatre. Wingert was named 2013 Artist of the Year by *The Star Tribune*.

The public is invited to see works in progress by the current (2013-14) McKnight Theater Artists Sun Mee Chomet, Denise Prosek and Stephen Yoakam on Monday, June 16 at 7 p.m. at the Southern Theater. See pwcenter.org for details and to RSVP.

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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 our 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 Advancement Fellows (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 1,400 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.