

## Seattle Rep Announces Largest Playwright Commissioning Project in the Company's History

*Nonprofit to commission 20 playwrights, multiple leading directors in American theater, and Cheryl L. West in the commission of a new Public Works play.*

**Seattle, WA. (November 19, 2020)** -- With an eye toward the future, Seattle Rep today announced the largest playwright commission project of the organization's history. After what has and continues to be a relentless year for the arts, Seattle Rep plants seeds for the future of the industry by devising an ambitious commission project featuring three initiatives: **20x30: Reimagining the Anthropocene**, a program that will commission 20 playwrights; **New Directions**, a program that will commission directors each year; and the launch of **a commissioning program for Seattle Rep's Public Works**.

"An investment in playwrights, directors, and the work they create with their collaborators is an investment in the future of Seattle Rep and the future of the American theater, said Artistic Director Braden Abraham. "There is no better time to make these investments than right now."

While Seattle Rep has a long-standing commitment to commissioning and premiering new plays, these new initiatives are the largest single commitment to the commissioning of new projects in Seattle Rep's 57-year history, and contribute to the organization's effort to bring live theater back to the stage in a post-COVID era.

### **20x30: Reimagining the Anthropocene**

20x30 ("20 by 30") is Seattle Rep's ambitious new playwright commissioning project for the new decade. Between now and 2030, the program will commission twenty playwrights to each write a play inspired by life in our moment.

Anthropocene is a term that suggests we have entered a new geological age where human activity is the dominant force shaping our environment. The commissioning project's goal is to engage a diverse group of theater artists around the idea of the Anthropocene during what promises to be a pivotal and transformational decade for our nation and our world. What does this moment in time mean for each of us, and how is our experience differentiated by—or united across—race, culture, country, class, or generation?

"It struck me that interpreting this 'age of the humans' would contain a lot of creative possibilities for theater makers," Braden says, "the topic is so large, it's almost impossible to wrap our minds around it. But we've entered a time of wide agreement that the repercussions of climate change are inescapable--economically, politically, and ontologically. It's part of our culture now and culture must be part of how we address it. We need new stories, new forms of communication, a different understanding of how we think about our relationship to the planet, and towards one another. The idea is meant as a starting point, not a destination. I wanted to create a large container for creative inspiration to hopefully expand the ways we think about this transformational moment we're living in, and imagine new pathways going forward."

The first round of 20x30 commissions will feature work from an exciting range of notable playwrights, including: **Nathan Alan Davis** (*The Refuge Plays*, *The High Ground*, *Nat Turner in Jerusalem*, *Dontrell Who Kissed the Sea*, and *The Wind and the Breeze* – winner of the Lorraine Hansberry Award), **Larissa**

**Fasthorse** (2020 MacArthur Genius Fellow; co-founder of Indigenous Direction; *The Thanksgiving Play*, *What Would Crazy Horse Do?*, *Average Family*), **Zora Howard** ( STEW – 2020 Drama League nominee for Outstanding Play, *AtGN*, *BUST*, *HANG TIME*, and *GOOD FAITH*), **Sylvia Khoury** (*Selling Kabul*, *Power Strip*, *Against the Hillside*, *The Place Women Go*), and **Mary Kathryn Nagle** (*Manahatta*, *Sovereignty*, *Katrina Stories*, *Welcome to Chalmette*; Executive Director of the Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program).

For more information and complete playwright biographies, [please visit >>](#)

## **New Directions**

Through its New Directions program, Seattle Rep will begin to commission leading directors in American theater annually in their investigation of new ideas and projects.

“We want to more fully recognize the capacity of directors as generative artists,” said Abraham. “They take an idea and create a world. Especially during the pandemic when so many directors are out of work, it was the right time to start this innovative program for leading directors in the American theater—to give them resources to explore new collaborations; nurture their most intuitive, unformed ideas; and renew their process at the earliest creative stages.”

This year, Seattle Rep announces the commission of five professionals for this unique program including: **Donald Byrd** (Artistic Director of Spectrum Dance Theater; Choreographer: Tony-nominated *The Color Purple*, Bessie Award-winning, *The Minstrel Show*, and *A Rap On Race*), **Valerie Curtis-Newton** (Head of Directing at the University of Washington School of Drama; Founding Artistic Director of The Hansberry Project; Awards: 2020 – *Seattle Times* Most Influential People of the Last Decade, 2019: Theatre Puget Sound – Gregory Falls Award for Sustained Achievement, 2016: *Seattle Times* Footlight Award – Best in Show, and more; Director: *Nina Simone: Four Women*, Seattle Rep, *Last Night and the Night Before*, DCPA, *Trouble in Mind*, Guthrie), **Taibi Magar** (Director: *Is God Is* – NYT Critics Pick, 2018 Obie Award Winner, *Underground Railroad Game*, NYT Critics Pick, NYT Best of 2016, *Master*, NYT Critics Pick, NYT Best of 2017), and **Carey Perloff** (Director: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* world premiere; Playwright: *Kinship*) in collaboration with actor **John Douglas Thompson** (Lucille Lortel Award, Outer Critics Circle Award, two Drama Desk Awards, two Obie Awards, Tony nomination; Broadway - *King Lear*, *Carousel*).

For more information and complete director biographies, [please visit >>](#)

## **Public Works Commission**

With a mission to create theater of, by, and for the people, Seattle Rep's Public Works partners with community-based organizations to invite people from all walks of life to take classes, attend performances and events, and to join in the creation of ambitious works of participatory theater. Through this process, strangers become neighbors, creating a space that is welcoming for all. Seattle Rep's breakout inaugural production, a musical adaptation of *The Odyssey*, was first presented to the greater Seattle community in 2017, followed by the incredibly popular musical adaptation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in 2019.

With the future of the Public Works program at heart, Seattle Rep has committed to commissioning a new play for use in the Public Works program worldwide with a community-centered musical adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*, based on the novels by L. Frank Baum. Seattle Rep's most-produced living playwright Cheryl L. West (*Shout Sister Shout!*, *Pullman Porter Blues*) will bring to life the stunning world of Oz with

a Pacific Northwest spirit, highlighting and embracing local artists, partner organizations, cameo groups, and community pillars.

“We’re so excited that Cheryl L. West is writing our first Public Works adaptation. We’ve always wanted to bring a project to the stage and to our community that not only worked in our region, but was written for us,” said Public Works Director Angie Kamel. “We can’t wait to share Cheryl’s interpretation of the journey and the joy of this classic, and all the friends that are made along the way.”

To sign-up for news about Public Works, for a complete playwright biography, and for more information, [please visit >>](#)

## **ABOUT SEATTLE REP**

Seattle Rep puts theater at the heart of public life. Founded in 1963 and winner of the 1990 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, Seattle Rep is currently led by Artistic Director Braden Abraham and Managing Director Jeffrey Herrmann. Over a season and throughout the year, Seattle Rep collaborates with extraordinary artists to create productions and programs that reflect and elevate the diverse cultures, perspectives, and life experiences of the Pacific Northwest. Seattle Rep’s nationally recognized programs include the New Play Program, Seattle Rep’s Public Works, the August Wilson Monologue Competition, Pay What You Choose ticketing options, and numerous audience enrichment and engagement opportunities including post-play panels, discussions, and community events and presentations.

Seattle Rep has always been committed to supporting new work from playwrights, directors, composers, and more. Through commissions and its new play development lab, The Other Season, Seattle Rep offers artists the resources they need to bring the next great play to life. Recent and notable commissions that have been produced on Seattle Rep’s stages include *Pullman Porter Blues*, *Lizard Boy*, *The Great Society*, *The Great Wilderness*, and the adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The commission projects announced today represent the largest, most sustainable, consistent, and robust commissioning program the organization has ever committed to.

Seattle Rep’s artistic staff reads material for consideration from a variety of sources including agent recommendations, colleague theater seasons, the Kilroys List, and more. Seattle Rep is dedicated to considering work by BIPOC and female identifying/trans/non-binary artists and commits to that work representing at least half of the scripts read by our season planning committee. All artists selected for commissioning programs are committed to Seattle Rep’s racial equity policies as part of their commission partnership.

*SeattleRep.org.*

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