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**THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES/USA (TYA/USA) ANNOUNCES PROGRAMMING FOR THE
2020 TYA/USA NATIONAL FESTIVAL & CONFERENCE**
Co-Presented with *New Visions/New Voices* at The Kennedy Center
MAY 14-17, 2020

FEATURING APPEARANCES BY
PIGPEN THEATRE CO., SOUL SCIENCE LAB,
MO WILLEMS & DEBORAH WICKS LA PUMA,
METRO THEATRE COMPANY, CENTER FOR SCHOLARS & STORYTELLERS,
AND PRESENTING 8 READINGS OF NEW WORKS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

New York, NY, October 17, 2019 – For the first time in 20 years, TYA/USA partners with The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC to present the **2020 TYA/USA National Festival & Conference** from May 14-17, 2020. This annual festival offers the largest convening of arts leaders, educators and artists in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences to provide a platform for professional and artistic exchange over four days of performances, rehearsed readings, keynote speakers, master classes and workshops.

The **TYA/USA National Festival & Conference** theme is **The State of the Story**, exploring the ways in which new work is developed for family audiences across the country. The programming will offer a variety of conversations investigating the commissioning trends across the industry; the need for more diverse voices and stories developed in the field; and the ways that theatres, publishers, artists, and audiences can more effectively partner to expand the canon of theatre for young audiences. Curated by **TYA/USA**, the national organization representing the field of Theatre for Young Audiences, the **2020 TYA/USA National Festival & Conference** will be presented in conjunction with *New Visions/New Voices 2020*, the Kennedy Center's new play development program focused on work for young audiences. The partnership marks the 20-year anniversary of the joint festival presented at the Kennedy Center in 2000; much of the event will take place in the Kennedy Center's new REACH space.

Festival Highlights include:

- A concert from **PigPen Theatre Co.** featuring music from their acclaimed theatre productions, followed by a Master Class focused on their devising process.

- A celebration of the music from award-winning author and playwright **Mo Willems** & celebrated composer **Deborah Wicks La Puma**, the most produced artists across the 2019-20 season in the TYA field.
- A Keynote Presentation from **Dr. Yalda T. Uhls** and the **Center for Scholars & Storytellers**, a UCLA-based non-profit that looks to advance the art of youth-targeted storytelling by grounding its creative process in child development research and social science insight.
- A Keynote Conversation led by **José Casas**, featuring artists and scholars from his recent publication of *Palabras del Cielo: An Exploration of Latina/o Theatre for Young Audiences*.
- Performances of *The Girl Who Swallowed a Cactus* (Metro Theater Company, St. Louis MO) and Soul Science Lab's *Soundtrack '63* (New York NY).
- A presentation of works-in-progress and conversation with **New Victory LabWorks**, the leading new work development program supporting NYC artists in the creation of innovative and multi-disciplinary work for young audiences.

Additionally, *New Visions/New Voices* 2020 will present rehearsed readings of eight new works by American playwrights:

- *The Boy Who Kissed the Sky* by Idris Goodwin, directed by Tim Bond (Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle, WA)
- *Farewell Opportunity* by Georgette Kelly, directed by Julie Ritchey (Filament Theatre, Chicago, IL)
- *Inez Was Perfect*, The Translation Project, by Simone Spiteri from Malta and directed by Karin Serres
- *Only One Day a Year* by Michelle Tyrene Johnson, directed by Nedra Dixon (The Coterie Theatre, Kansas City, MO)
- *Selena Maria Sings* by Miriam Gonzales with music by Daniel French, directed by Melissa Crespo (Childsplay, Tempe, AZ)
- *this is what I chose no I'm not sorry and yes if you'd ask I'd do it again* by Daria Miyeko Marinelli, directed by Will Kiley (Jackalope Theatre Company, Chicago, IL)
- *United We Shout: Queer Youth Revolution!*, from *Project Pride Players, Omaha, NE and Kansas City, MO*, directed by *Brian Guehring/Carina DuMarce (Omaha, NE) and Amanda Kibler/Aniseto Herrera (Kansas City, MO)*
- *What Do You Do With An Idea, the Musical* with book and lyrics by Adam Tobin and music by Deborah Wicks La Puma, directed by Nina Meehan, and adapted from the book by Kobi Yamada (Bay Area Children's Theatre, Oakland, CA)

"The field is growing, and we are thrilled to expand the TYA/USA National Festival & Conference in response to the TYA artists, practitioners and leaders from across the country who seek the rare opportunity to convene and gain the inspiration they need to fully serve the children and families in their communities," says **Jonathan Schmidt Chapman**, Executive Director of TYA/USA. "We can't think of a better home for it than The Kennedy Center. Through our partnership with *New Visions/New Voices*, we will investigate the state of new work development across the TYA landscape, asking important questions about the stories we currently tell, the stories that need to be told, and the way we are creating them."

“We are delighted to partner with TYA/USA on this year’s festival,” says **Mario Rossero**, Kennedy Center Senior Vice President of Education. “This impactful collaboration demonstrates not only the Kennedy Center’s support of new work development, but also our strong commitment to the field of theater for young audiences – doubling down on the festival nature of this convening and creating, with TYA/USA, an essential four-day gathering for the field across the campus, including our new REACH expansion.”

Registration is now open. More information can be found at www.tyausa.org/festival

About TYA/USA: Theatre for Young Audiences/USA (TYA/USA) is the leading national organization representing nearly 900 member theatres, organizations, and individual arts professionals across 42 states committed to the professional field of theatre for children, young adults, and families. Dedicated to ensuring that all young people have access to high-quality theatre experiences, TYA/USA offers a variety of programming that connects professionals working in the sector through in-person gatherings and virtual sessions; provides opportunities for field-wide learning and leadership development; disseminates field news and research through a variety of print and online channels; and advances the field both internally and externally through a range of advocacy efforts.

Founded in 1965, TYA/USA is the only theatre organization in the United States which has the development of professional theatre for young audiences and international exchange as its primary mandates. TYA/USA is the United States Center for the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ). TYA/USA hosts an annual national conference, produces TYA Today Magazine, and offers a range of professional development opportunities, both for its membership and the greater field. In addition to the Festival & Conference, TYA/USA will partner with IPAY (International Performing Arts for Youth) to present a one-day convening entitled *Hear Them Roar: Exploring How the Youth Voice Takes Center Stage Across the World and in our Work*. In addition to member events, TYA/USA offers a series of webinars on such topics as Artist-Parents in the Theatre, child safety in TYA spaces, and the challenges of developing original work. More information can be found at www.tyausa.org.

About Education At the Kennedy Center: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts sets a national standard for arts learning. Working through model programs and a nationwide network of partners, the nation’s cultural center harnesses the power of the arts to address education challenges, accelerate best practices, and uplift citizen artists. Across all its programs, the Kennedy Center is committed to increasing accessible, inclusive opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in, learn about, and learn through the arts. New York Times best-selling author and illustrator Mo Willems serves as the Center’s first-ever Education Artist-in-Residence. Throughout his two-year residency, Willems will invite kids and former kids into the creative process with original productions and hands-on, interactive moments.

Highlights of the 2019-2020 season include the 51st annual Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, which impacts thousands of college-aged theater students across the country; two Kennedy Center world premiere commissions comprising of Education Artist-in-Residence Mo Willems’s *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! (The Musical)*, and a hip-hop adaptation of Prince and the Pauper, from playwright Brian Quijada, *Kid Prince and Pablo*; the 5th year of the DC Public Schools Performing Arts Festival at the Kennedy Center; and *New Visions/New Voices*, the biennial festival dedicated to the development of new plays and musicals for young people and their families. On September 7, 2019, the

Kennedy Center opened the REACH, an immersive arts and learning center with significant space and programming for arts education.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center's Education programs utilize the arts to embrace President Kennedy's ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude. By cultivating the citizen artist in everyone, the Kennedy Center brings the arts and creativity to the center of our lives. For more information, please visit kennedy-center.org/education/.

More About the Featured Programming:

José Casas is a playwright and Assistant Professor who heads the Playwriting Minor in the Department of Theatre & Drama at the University of Michigan. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild as well as a Board Member of Children's Theatre Foundation of America. He has a BA in Theatre Arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara, a MA in Theatre Arts from California State University, Los Angeles, a MFA in Playwriting from Arizona State, two years of graduate coursework in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities (DTYC) at the University of Texas at Austin. His plays include *la rosa grows beyond the wall*, *all brown all chingon*, *aDoBe*, *a million whispers all at once*, *the vine*, *la ofrenda* and *somebody's children* and *Flint*. His work has been included in a number of anthologies such as *The Bully Plays*, *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre*, and *Theatre for Youth II: More Plays With Mature Themes*. His published work includes *la ofrenda*, *14*, *somebody's children*, and *Palabras del Cielo: An Exploration of Latina/o Theatre for Young Audiences*. His plays, *la ofrenda* and *somebody's children* were awarded both the Bonderman National Playwriting Award and the American Alliance of Theatre and Education's Distinguished Play Award. His most recent project is a Documentary Theatre piece titled *Flint* which examines the current Flint Water Crisis.

Metro Theater Company's *The Girl Who Swallowed A Cactus* by Eric Coble When school is out, there's nothing to do and the desert sun beats down hot. So when a walking, talking and surprisingly well-dressed coyote shows up, Sheila and her friends jump at the chance to embark on the adventure of a lifetime! Filled with magical realism and surprises at every turn, this funny story of friendship and imagination brings the desert landscape to life. A cautionary tale about our impact on the environment and the creatures who live in it, this is a storytelling tour-de-force in a new, original play. This piece was workshopped by Metro Theater Company in April 2018 at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as part of *New Visions/New Voices* 2018.

Mo Willems & Deborah Wicks *La Puma in Conversation*. Collaborators for over a decade, Deborah and Mo have adapted four of Willems' award-winning books for the stage. The most produced writing/composing team of TYA in America, their shows have been performed extensively on tour and in repertory. Additionally, their songs have been showcased in concerts at the Kennedy Center's Concert Hall and the opening of The REACH expansion. Mo and Deborah will discuss the work method, approach, humor, and philosophy that underpins their playful collaboration.

New Victory LabWorks, the new work development program of New Victory Theater, supports artists in the creation of innovative, adventurous new work for young audiences made in the U.S. By supporting New York artists and connecting them with NYC kids as well as the nonprofit theater's international community of arts professionals, New Victory LabWorks invites artists to hone their craft, expand their skills, make contacts in the field, take artistic risks and make bold choices with their work. New Victory LabWorks has helped develop over 55 projects on their journey to the stage, more than half of which

have gone on to become full productions touring across the country and around the world, expanding the canon of American family performing arts.

PigPen Theatre Co. began creating their unique brand of theatre, music, and film as freshmen at the Carnegie Mellon School of Drama in 2007. They have since produced their original plays in New York City and toured the country – earning them critic’s picks from The New York Times, Time Out New York, Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, Boston Globe, and many more, ranking them in the top ten theatrical events of 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2016. They were the first group to win the NYC Fringe Festival’s top honor for a play two years in a row (2010/11) and have gone on to win IRNE (2012, 2015) and Jeff Awards (2014) for their theatrical productions. In 2016, Sir Trevor Nunn invited PigPen to be a part of his first American acting company for a production of Shakespeare's "Pericles". PigPen's debut album, "Bremen", was named #10 album of the year in The Huffington Post's 2012 Grammy preview sending PigPen on tour playing to sold-out crowds across the country. American Songwriter premiered their follow-up EP, "The Way I'm Running", in 2013 while the band was playing a series of concerts that became one of the most popular residencies of the past decade at the legendary Schubert's Tavern in Chicago. In 2015, PigPen released their sophomore album, "Whole Sun", performed at Mumford & Sons' return to the Gentlemen of the Road Festival, and made their feature film debut in Jonathan Demme's "Ricki and the Flash" starring Meryl Streep. In 2018, PigPen announced that they are creating two stage musicals based on beloved novels: The Tale of Despereaux by Kate DiCamillo (in partnership with Universal Theatrical Group) and Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen (in collaboration with Rick Elice). In 2020, they will premiere their first interactive theatrical experience, "The Phantom Folktales", for Richard Branson's groundbreaking cruise line, Virgin Voyages.

Soul Science Lab's Soundtrack '63 (New York NY) From the folk and gospel-influenced songs that reflect the sentiments of the 1963 Civil Rights Movement to the hip-hop anthems recognizing that Black Lives Matter, music has always supported and strengthened outcries for social justice. Created by the brilliant minds of Soul Science Lab, *Soundtrack '63* is a live, multimedia musical performance that traces the African American experience from before the Middle Passage to the present Black Lives Matter movement. Archival video footage, animation, and narration are combined with a live soundtrack of spirituals, protest songs, and popular music performed by an 11-piece orchestra and dynamic vocal ensemble.

Yalda T Uhls, MBA, PhD is an internationally recognized, award-winning research scientist, educator and author, studying how media affect young people. Her peer reviewed research has been featured in many news outlets including NPR and the NY Times. As a big believer in bridging research and practice, along with many years of translational work for lay audiences, Uhls recently founded **The Center for Scholars & Storytellers**, affiliated with UCLA. Uhls is also an adjunct professor at UCLA where she does research on how media affect the social behavior of tweens and teens and teaches a class on Digital Media and Human Development; she is a senior advisor for national non-profit Common Sense Media; and is the author of the parenting book *Media Moms & Digital Dads: A Fact not Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age*. In her former career, she was a senior movie executive at MGM and Sony. Dr. Uhls knowledge of how media content is created and the science of how media affect children inform her unique perspective.

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