



# FISCAL YEAR 2019

## ANNUAL REPORT

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### *ABOUT THE FLEA*

The Flea Theater was founded in 1996 by a group of downtown artists seeking to “raise a joyful hell in a small space.” That spirit of adventure and irreverence, which defines the Off-Off-Broadway movement, will always be alive at The Flea.

In 2015, Artistic Director Niegel Smith—the only African-American artistic director of a non-culturally specific theater in New York City—joined Producing Director Carol Ostrow. Under their visionary leadership, artistic rigor and experimentation continue to ensure that The Flea remains a driving force in New York City’s cultural economy and a destination Off-Off-Broadway theatrical institution.

In December 2009, we began our quest to build a permanent home. Against the odds, we purchased a non-descript and un-landmarked brick building at 20 Thomas Street. Thanks to our innovative architects and designers, and the perseverance of our Flea community, in fall 2017 we opened the doors to our new home. Today, three intimate theaters and a host of spaces for rehearsals, writing sessions, talkbacks, and gatherings create a hive of creativity and community for our artists and audiences alike.

At The Flea, our artists redefine genre, explore racism and oppression, and take the kinds of artistic risks that are only possible in a brave artistic space. Our shows surprise, intrigue, enliven, provoke, affect, and, ultimately, transform our audiences and artists.

At The Flea, we get under your skin!

# PROGRAMS AT THE FLEA

Over the past two decades, The Flea has created and maintained programs targeted to the specific needs of emerging artists. Simultaneously, we have embraced mid-career artists seeking to solidify their creative aspirations and economic goals and encouraged established artists to invest in genre-defying discoveries and new works. The mix of emerging and established artists has attracted audiences from a diverse array of backgrounds who are united in their desire for adventurous theater.

The Flea is now known for four distinct Resident Artist programs and three Performance Series:

## RESIDENT ARTIST PROGRAMS

**THE BATS:** Our critically acclaimed resident acting company, cast through annual open-call auditions, is a rigorous training ground for diverse young artists seeking to launch a professional career.

**RESIDENT DIRECTORS:** A practicum that provides real work experience for early-career directors, allowing them to develop the unique collaborative skills so critical to a successful directing career.

**SERIALS WRITERS ROOM:** A residency for writers that steeps them in the fast-paced environment of SERIALS, where they meet young and energetic performers, build up their writing chops, and see their work performed consistently in a professional theater setting.

**ANCHOR PARTNERS:** A capacity-building program for small theater, music, and dance companies seeking a home and a helping hand to take their work to the next level.

## PERFORMANCE SERIES

**SERIALS:** Our popular, audacious late-night play competition featuring The Bats and some of NYC's hottest young playwrights and directors. Five plays go in, three plays come out – your vote decides!

**CEREALS:** Our children's theater program, which launched in 2017 with the commissioning of ethnically specific fairytales from Syria, Russia, Hong Kong, Italy, and New Orleans. (Ages 5+)

**FLEA FRIDAYS:** An immersive “happy hour” cabaret, featuring some of downtown's most daring artists and inviting audiences to engage with our most pressing political and social questions. Curated by Associate Artist Michael Raine.



Sophia Aranda and Drita Kabashi in *The Invention of Tragedy* by Mac Wellman. Photo by Hunter Canning.

# WE CONTINUED TO BE BRAVE... COLOR BRAVE

This past spring, The Flea completed its “Color Brave” season and addressed – with a clear-eyed boldness – the issues of white supremacy and the #metoo movement that are at the very center of our churning cultural debate. Thomas Bradshaw’s incendiary *Southern Promises* featured an all-POC cast navigating the socio-economic and sexual power structures on a 19<sup>th</sup> century Virginia plantation. Kristiana Rae Colón’s *good friday*, a NY premiere, flipped the script on feminism, race, and intersectionality with the story of a college Women’s Studies class trapped on campus by an open shooter. Some of our audience members gasped and looked away. Many told us they could not stop thinking about these productions and the lives and circumstances of the characters.

In 2019, we produced theater that rivaled the news of the day. Our commitment to being “Color Brave” demanded we do so. Actor and Flea Board member Jeremy Smith sums up his “Color Brave” experience:

*“Though shaken to the core by the integrity of this heart-wrenching production [of Southern Promises], I somehow emerged with a newfound respect for the brave artistic choices of this unique theater, that is not afraid to take big risks and ask bold questions of its artists and audiences.”*

At The Flea, we trust the intellectual bravery and deep humanity of our audiences.

Caturah Brown, Erin Noll, Raiane Cantisano, and Dolores Avery in *good friday* by Kristiana Rae Colón. Photo by Joan Marcus.



*“The Flea took on racism, white supremacy and gun violence this year – tough to spend an evening at the theater with that! We applaud our artists and most especially our audience members who stuck with us. We live in harrowing times and this season The Flea embraced and reflected our collective unease. But isn’t that what theater is supposed to do?”*

–Carol Ostrow, Producing Director

# WE LOOKED BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

In August, The Flea launched a 10-week “Mac Fest” featuring five new incarnations of works by Flea founder and theater maverick Mac Wellman. The festival opened with two of Wellman’s earliest and most well-known plays, *Sincerity Forever* downstairs in The Siggys, about the fictional Southern town of Hillsbottom, its teenaged KKK members, the infestation of furballs and a mysterious black woman whose name is Jesus H. Christ. *Bad Penny*, Wellman’s Obie Award-winning play that took place on Central Park’s Bow Bridge in 1989, was reconfigured to The Pete’s outdoor courtyard and played nightly under the stars from August to the first chilly night in October.



Amber Jaunai, Nate DeCook and Vince Eyrne in *Sincerity Forever* by Mac Wellman. Photo by Allison Stock.

Upstairs, Meghan Finn directed *The Invention of Tragedy*, filling The Sam with dense choral passages, an operatic score, an organist and a chorus of Bats playing dogs and cats. Audiences were confounded and exhilarated as they were asked to plumb the depths of their own disengagement and attraction to groupthink. We closed the festival with a double bill, back in The Siggys, of Mac’s tee shirt play, *The Fez* and *The Sandalwood Box*, his Brooklyn dream play.

In addition to festival productions, we welcomed 20 of Wellman’s foremost collaborators, protégés, and scholars in a three-day symposium that explored the demands of interpreting his plays, the breadth of his career, and the legacy of his writing and teaching on generations of theater makers. The symposium also featured Obie Award-winner Steve Mellor in a revived staged reading of Wellman’s Off-Off-Broadway hit *Terminal Hip*.

# WE CHRISTENED OUR FLEA HOME

Creating a new home starts with a building. But that is just the beginning...

In 2019, we completed a decade-long dream – our \$23M capital campaign to solidify The Flea as a center of inspiration, and inquiry. In December, we celebrated with the ceremonial unveiling of our donor wall and naming plaques, marking this momentous occasion with the many individuals who believed in our vision.

To support our new physical structure, we have strengthened our institutional practice. Inclusiveness is at our core. Not just in participation, but in decision making. Not as a destination, but a process to which we commit each day. Empathy and respect are present among everyone at our tables, on our stages, and in our rooms.

We welcome all NYC residents and our city’s visitors. We are fully accessible and flexible in our accommodation. We are proud to say that 54% of our resident artists and 45% of our staff members identify as people of color, gender-queer/non-binary, or disabled.

From early morning rehearsals and mid-day collaborations to late-night performances and impromptu hallway conversations, at The Flea we are truly defined by the diverse community we have created here on Thomas Street.

# 2019 SEASON LIST

good friday

32 Performances, NY Premiere, 11 Bats

Not My Monster! (Remount)

12 Performances, 8 Bats

Southern Promises

27 Performances, 12 Bats

Sincerity Forever

22 Performances, 12 Bats

Bad Penny

24 Performances, 10 Bats

The Invention of Tragedy

31 Performances, World Premiere, 11 Bats

The Fez

22 Performances, World Premiere, 13 Bats

The Sandalwood Box

22 Performances, 7 Bats

SERIALS @ The Flea

Cycles 50-55

36 Performances, 78 Bats

Flea Fridays

“Inspiration,  
Representation  
& Appropriation”

2 Performances, 12 Performers



Joseph Huffman, Emma Orme, Bailie de Lacy and Lambert Tamin in *Bad Penny* by Mac Wellman. Photo by Allison Stock.

## 2019 BY THE NUMBERS

226 Total Artists Served

112 Performers 18 Writers 38 Directors

61% identify as a Woman or Gender-Queer

42% identify as a Person of Color

7,788 Audience Members

208 Performances

37,206 Social Media Followers

\$20 Average Ticket Price

2 World Premieres

443 Donors



Annie Perales, Jen Parkhill, Amber Jaunai, Joan Marie and Laurel Andersen in *Agnes Bloodfelt* presents *The Feminine Condition* by Jessica Moss, SERIALS Cycle 50. Photo by Hunter Canning.

# 2019 ANCHOR PARTNERS

## THEATER

Hook & Eye  
New Georges  
New Light Theater Project  
New York City Children's Theater  
New York Deaf Theatre  
Notch Theatre Company  
Spicy Witch Productions  
The Other Side of Silence (TOSOS)

## MUSIC

Experiments in Opera  
New Camerata Opera  
Talea Ensemble

## DANCE

The Bang Group  
LAVA  
Tiffany Mills Company  
Elisa Monte Dance  
Jody Oberfelder Projects  
TAKE Dance



The cast of *The Fez* by Mac Wellman. Photo by Marina McClure.

# THANK YOU!

# OUR BOARD MEMBERS

Charlie Crane • Michael Graff • Lynne Halliday  
Jamie Harris • Wendy Harrison Hashmall^  
Frank Lavadera^ • Douglas Liebhafsky  
Rick Miramontez • Stephanie Morimoto^  
Carol Ostrow^ • Melissa Poulos • David Prittie\*  
Jim Simpson • Jeremy Smith • Niegel Smith  
Michael Sternberg • Celeste Tramontin  
Tony Tramontin • Sigourney Weaver

^Officer \*Emeritus/In Memoriam

# FINANCIAL REPORT

## OPERATING REVENUE

\$1,669,022

## NET ASSETS

\$8,519,833

## OPERATING EXPENSES

\$1,587,252

# OUR FUNDERS

The National Endowment for the Arts  
The New York State Council on the Arts  
The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

Axe-Houghton Foundation  
Booth Ferris Foundation  
Distracted Globe Foundation  
The Educational Foundation of America  
The Ettinger Foundation  
The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation  
Howard Gilman Foundation  
The John Golden Fund  
Google  
Gurney Playwrights Prize Fund  
KPMG  
Lazard Frères & Co.  
Lucille Lortel Foundation  
Morgan Stanley  
The Poses Family Foundation  
The Prospect Hill Foundation  
The Shubert Foundation  
The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust  
The Dorothy Strelsin Foundation  
Warburg Pincus