



For Immediate Release

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The Flea Theater Announces Transformation of Strategic Direction and New Dedicated Focus on Black, Brown, Queer Artists

Key Initiatives and New Season Details Announced as New Mission Statement, Core Values, and Board of Directors Set the Course for an Equitable Future

Rearticulated vision for the future includes:

The Fled Collective appointed the first-ever **Key Resident Company**, marking the continuation of partnership and restoration of this relationship with former resident artists

Five new members appointed to the Board of Directors, with new co-chair **Nona Hendryx**

New programming aesthetic focusing on experimental work by Black, brown, and queer artists, including:

Spring 2022 premiere marking the return of live, in-person performance commissioned and produced by The Flea

Arden: A Ritual for Love and Liberation conceived by **Carrie Mae Weems, Diana Oh, Okwui Okpokwasili, Peter Born, and Niegel Smith**

Four original commissioned public art presentations celebrating Juneteenth in locations across New York City

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New York, NY (October 7, 2021) — **The Flea Theater** today announced a major strategic evolution for the performing arts organization, committing to positive and equitable artists relations while prioritizing Black, brown, and queer artistry through partnership and programming. The institution's board, leadership, and staff have resoundingly endorsed a refined mission statement, core values, operating model, a restorative engagement plan, and aesthetic direction for in-house work.

Since its founding, The Flea has sought to champion voices least likely to be at the forefront and art that pushes the limits of theater. A dedicated focus on Black, brown, and queer artists in experimental theater comes at a moment in which a national spotlight is shining widespread— and longstanding—on the inherent value of BIPOC voices.

The Flea engaged CJAM Consulting, LLC to facilitate a comprehensive vision process to determine its new mission and core values. Key internal and external stakeholders were invited to participate in surveys, focus groups, and community conversations to ensure these statements accurately reflected those served.

New Mission Statement and Core Values

The new mission notes that the institution will focus on "supporting and investing in experimental art by Black, brown, and queer artists" and "providing space, financial support, and producing partnership so

these artists may develop and share their vision in community with audiences." New core values will support its new mission, shape the culture from within, and reflect what is truly important to The Flea as an organization.

The Flea's new core values are **Human-Centered, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression, Collaboration, Innovation, Sustainability, and Transparency.**

This new direction will set the organization and its key constituents up for long-term success and reflect the true heterogeneity of its communities. To achieve those goals, The Flea will operate under a new leadership model, continue to restore positive relationships with former artists through a reparative partnership, and in 2022 launch a new artist residency and aesthetic direction for The Flea's in-house work.

"We have been evolving our work over the past several months, digging deep into our identity and listening to community members. And today, we are happy to be unveiling our new direction as a transformational moment in our history," said The Flea Theater Artistic Director **Niegel Smith**, who also serves on the board of directors. "At The Flea, we believe in the power of the arts to reflect the world around us and facilitate a deeper understanding of the human experience. Now, we urgently ask the question, 'Who specifically is The Flea serving?' We are looking to address historical inequities in the arts. Our mission clearly reflects our values and the core of our artistic approach. And we invite folks in as we look and work towards a revitalized future for The Flea."

New Leadership Model & Board of Directors

In tandem with its vision and core values, today the institution announces five new board members and a new board co-chair who will provide strategic direction for growth around the theater's new mission—centering Black, brown, and queer artists while deepening its focus on experimental art— and new leadership model.

The new leadership model will be collaborative and transparent in nature, with staff invited into decision-making discussions and artists having autonomy over their work and represented at the Board level. The Board has specified seats to be filled by developing artists and resident companies.

New board members include Board Co-Chair **Nona Hendryx**, Grammy Award-nominated, art- and funk-rock pioneer; **Sarah East Johnson**, founder and Artistic Director of LAVA; **Rick Miramontez**, veteran press agent and president of DKC/O&M; **Cauvery Patel**, Chief Operating Officer & Head of People and Culture at Dropps; and **Charles Randolph-Wright**, writer, producer, and award-winning director. They join **Tony Tramontin** (Co-Chair), **Frank Lavadera**, **Melissa Poulos**, and **Niegel Smith**.

"I'm excited to welcome such a strong group of new board members who will bring diverse expertise and insight into our work. It's important that the board looks and feels like the folks served by the organization," said Smith. "I'm also thrilled that Nona Hendryx will lead the next chapter of our work in her new role as board co-chair. As a visionary artist, as a Black woman, Nona's passion for making an impact through the arts makes her an ideal board leader for the Flea at this moment. Nona's experience as an artistic innovator and risk-taker, her vast network, and breadth of perspective will be great assets to the artists we serve, and we're looking forward to her leadership."

"I am thrilled to join the Flea Theater in its new mission to support Black, brown, and queer artists, demonstrating inclusivity and creating groundbreaking work confronting the most important issues of our time," said **Nona Hendryx**, newly appointed co-chair of the board. "One thing that excites me the most about the Flea's new identity is that it was developed in partnership with our community leading to a fundamental change in our leadership model, including how we view the board at the Flea. We

removed the give/get contribution and are rebuilding a board that reflects and includes folks served by the theater. Building a healthy, equitable, and inclusive community is a Board priority, as we work together to reach the widest audience possible and become a more service-oriented institution."

New Reparative Partnership with Former Resident Artists—The Fled Collective

Beginning in February 2021, the Flea and The Fled engaged in a restorative process inclusive of facilitated conversations, mediated healing circles, and collaborative program design. The Theater and former resident artists have since established a positive path forward for a new partnership structure and mutually beneficial relationship.

The Flea is excited to welcome The Fled Collective as its first Key Resident Company beginning in January 2022, marking the continuation of partnership and further restoration of this relationship with the newly formed collective. The inaugural residency is a reparative grant and partnership offered to a nascent company that centers Black, brown and queer artists. The artist collective will function as an autonomous company and will receive a three-year residency that includes the presentation of work, \$10,000 unrestricted cash support each year, \$50,000 space rental credits each year, in addition to production and marketing support and resources to develop their new projects.

"This is tremendous news, and we are happy to embark on this new chapter with The Fled Collective. We recognize this is absolutely the work to be doing right now. They are artists we are invested in, who we care deeply about and their artistry impacting the theater," said Smith. "We also recognize that the practices, historically, at The Flea haven't always uplifted these artists and their well-being. So working with The Fled, which is about the artist's autonomy, and then turning out their own direction and interests, and having complete control over their artistic output, is completely aligned with where we want to take The Flea and our investment in these artists."

"The Collective is interested in finding solutions that offer alternatives to cancel culture and instead lean on restorative justice principles that may create lasting change. That is not to say we are ignorant to the fact that all wounds have not been healed. Acknowledging that is what keeps us in the room. Rather than putting our differences aside, we've put them on the table and intend to work through the hurt with empathy as our guide," said actor and community leader of The Fled Collective, **Dolores Avery Pereira**.

"So much communal labor has gone into building The Fled in the hope that we can transform the American Theater. Transformation and reclamation are possible and we are seeing this in our relationship with the new Flea," said actor and producer **Adam Coy**, and leading artist of The Fled Collective.

"This partnership represents the culmination of almost 18 months of work on both sides," said stage and screen director **Raz Golden**, a leading member of The Fled Collective. "It's ultimately an experiment in reparations in real-time and like any experiment."

The Fled identifies as an artist collective with non-hierarchical leadership practices, providing a radically equitable, anti-racist, anti-oppressive platform for theater artists. Their present mission is to build community, expand their artistry, and make theater that is actively engaged in collective liberation and the dismantling of colonialist practices and white ideals. Their inaugural season is being planned using an unconventional democratic process based on methods created by the theater companies Chinatown Soup, Detroit Soup, and Rude Mechanicals. Their upcoming work will fulfill the Collective's three pillars of programming: Artistic Development, Theater Production, and Industry & Community Justice. The Fled will later announce details on its upcoming season.

Resident Company Initiative: Nurturing Experimental Art by Black, Brown and Queer Companies

In addition, the organization will launch a multi-year residency offering itinerant and mission-aligned artistic companies the ability to leverage The Flea's in-house support system—creative, technical, and producing—to further their artistic reach. This program offers dance, music, visual and performance art, and theater companies and collectives, at pivotal stages in their development, assistance, and resources. The first participating company is the renowned modern dance troupe **EMERGE125** a Black woman-led organization.

"The Flea has been my artistic home in the city with Niegel [Smith] and his team supporting me, both personally and professionally. When I think of what presenter/artist relationships should look like, The Flea immediately comes to mind," said EMERGE125 Artistic Director, **Tiffany Rea-Fisher**. "To have the added security to know that we will be a resident company at The Flea for the next three years is an absolute gift. Having another arts organization trust and invest in you in that way, especially now, will definitely change my artistic trajectory for the better, and I am truly grateful."

New Aesthetic Direction and Spring 2022 Programming

Dedicated to commissioning, producing, and presenting new theatrical work, The Flea will return to live in-person performances for its spring 2022 season. The programs reflect the organization's new values and provide commissioned artists with the flexibility to create and present ambitious new work that might not be realized in other spaces. The return of live, in-person performances at The Flea Theater will signal a new aesthetic direction for The Flea's in-house work.

Arden: A Ritual for Love and Liberation

Opens Early 2022

Conceived by **Carrie Mae Weems, Diana Oh, Okwui Okpokwasili, Peter Born, and Niegel Smith**
Produced by The Flea

Arden: A Ritual for Love and Liberation is a large-scale theatrical experience that centers a plurality of voices and aesthetics by using As You Like It's "Forest of Arden" as a starting point. It aims to create moments of discovery, ritual, and awe around the theme of love and liberation in a place where queers, feminists, and intellectuals dare to create the world that centers their desires.

Thinking about *Arden's* conception Niegel Smith said, "I wanted to bring together a brilliant group of artists questioning form and content and give them the support to realize what has not yet been experienced in the culture. At the intersection of theater, visual art, dance, and queer ritual, we are making a work that will invite audiences into an active practice of love and liberation. This is not a passive space, this is a ritual to practice an ardent desire for connection."

Renowned choreographer, performer, and writer **Okwui Okpokwasili** said, "What I hear Niegel [Smith] asking of me, of us, is to imagine what we have been denied from institutions, imagine what we want to build, and what we need to build it and then to do it. What Niegel is proposing is that the Flea be a space for Queer, Black, and brown artists to bring their love and their courage and their imagination so that we can build the art and the future we want and need together. As one of the few theater spaces in New York City headed by a queer, Black man, his vision is one I share, it is necessary and I will not turn away from it."

Multi-hyphenate Generative Artist **Diana Oh** said, "I am here to be with other artists of Marginalized Identities and to create with integrity, pain, love, embodied truth, and my joyful perversion. As an Artist who intentionally explores the apex of my intersections, I am not here for the institution: I am here for the invitation. I am here to be a part of what we build up after we burn it down and to thank those who have burned it down before us. And I could watch the ashes settle, or I could be a part of building back up what's left of the beating heart that I find to be worth saving and worth investing my time into."

Juneteenth Public Art Commissioned Celebrations

Monday, June 13, 2022— Sunday, June 19, 2022

The Juneteenth Public Art Commissions are four examinations of personal reflections of the holiday that honors the resilience of the African American spirit and the promise of powerful Black futures. The series was piloted in June 2021, and each artist has creative and budget autonomy to present their Juneteenth mediations to the public. The Flea will continue this commission series in 2022, expanding it to a full week of public art.

Jus' Like A Tree Planted By The Water finds vocalist and composer **Imani Uzuri** on a journey of encounters through Central Park and Harlem as she sings an experimental interpolation of the African American Spiritual "I Shall Not Be Moved;" dance artist and Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women **Chanon Judson** provides a public meditation on liberation and how to activate the spirit of now in *Times Up! A Liberation Ritual*; renowned writer **James Scruggs** is a strolling Juneteenth Historian in *Ask Me About Juneteenth*; and Bessie Award-winning director Niegel Smith's *The Worthy* takes participants on an intimate walking contemplation on justice, resilience, worth, and Black men starting at the African Burial Ground Memorial. The works span creative disciplines and were presented simultaneously and in public spaces around New York City.

Chanon Judson said, "In this time when arts organizations are being charged to examine equitable practices, it was such an appreciated narrative shift to receive production support that offered that I shape the scope of my work. I took to heart, the invitation to 'make the art [you] need to make,' creating a performance ritual for myself and community participants. The Flea commissioning support allowed me to assemble a team of support so I could stay absorbed with the artmaking, investigative in the performance practice, and stay authentically in relationship with community participants throughout the engagement."

The Flea will further demonstrate its new values through continuous community and stakeholder outreach, including feedback from surveys and community conversations. Continuing to allow The Flea to reflect on its organizational culture through the lens of equity — examining the structures of oppression (racism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia, ageism, regionalism, and classism)—that shape the experiences and outcomes for artists. The Flea views strategic planning as an ongoing process; development will be assessed annually, and the plan will continue to be updated based on the changing needs of the organization and its stakeholders.

Additional details about the 2022 season will be announced in the coming months. Information about The Flea's new mission, core values, board of directors, and partnerships can be found at theflea.org, along with information about programming plans.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Bios

EMERGE125 (formerly Elisa Monte Dance) is a hub for dance performance, creation, and education. The organization operates dual homes in Harlem and Lake Placid, NY, while serving audiences locally and around the world. Their rigorous dance education programs impact children, families, pre-professionals, and professionals. Their movement and wellness programs engage multi-generational learners from the diverse communities they serve. Emerge 125 has established itself as a leader in the field by using movement as a catalyst for community building while expanding the reach, purpose, and impact of the art of dance.

The Fled Collective is an artist collective providing a radically equitable, anti-racist, anti-oppressive platform for theater artists — to build community, expand artistry, and make theater actively engaged in their collective liberation and the dismantling of colonialist practices and white ideals. With artists at the helm, particularly the global-majority and historically marginalized artists, The Fled leads its community with curiosity, empathy, and

celebration. By prioritizing accessibility and the decolonization of art, they aim to create space for new audiences and innovate how theater is made and organized. Marginalized and underrepresented artists must steer the ship—beginning with Black artists, as well as Indigenous, AAPI, Latinx, MENA, Queer, Trans, Gender-nonconforming, Intersex, Disabled, and the multitude of intersecting experiences and aesthetics therein. A space is only safe for all when it is safe for its most vulnerable members. The Fled chooses to share power and resources equitably and abundantly and actively practice the values we espouse.

Peter Born is a director, designer, and filmmaker. In addition to his work with Okwui Okpokwasili, he collaborates with David Thomson on a cycle of installation and performances revolving around a post-sexual incarnation of Venus. Born created the set for nora chipaumire's *rite/riot*, and has created performance videos with chipaumire, including *El Capitan Kinglady*. He is a former New York public high school teacher, an itinerant floral designer, corporate actor-facilitator, and furniture designer. His collaborations with Okpokwasili have garnered two New York Dance Performance "Bessie" Awards.

Chanon Judson joined the critically acclaimed Urban Bush Women (UBW) in 2001. She served as rehearsal director, director for UB2 – Urban Bush Women's performing apprentice ensemble, and now furthers her work with UBW as co-artistic director and co-director of BOLD (Builders Organizers and Leaders through Dance). Chanon and Samantha Speis are choreographic directors for UBW's new evening-length work, "Hair and Other Stories," in collaboration with Raelle Myrick-Hodges. Judson is a recipient of the APAP Leadership Fellowship Cohort II and Director's Lab Chicago Fellowship 2018. Additional credits include *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* (Taylor Mac), *Cotton Club Parade* (Warren Carlyle), and the Tony Award-winning musical *Fela!* (Bill T. Jones). Her commercial credits include Victoria's Secret Live, L'Oreal Live, The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, Apple Watch, and the Michael Jackson 30th Anniversary Concert. Judson is an avid arts educator and has served as faculty with Urban Assembly of Music and Arts High School, Ailey Camp Kansas City MO (Site Director), Alvin Ailey Arts in Education, Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Earl Mosley's Institute of the Arts. Additionally, Chanon is the proud founder of Cumbe Center for Diasporic Arts' Dance Drum and Imagination Camp for Children and Family Arts Movement LLC, offering creative movement and art-making for children.

Diana Oh is the creator and performer of *My Lingerie Play* creating national underground installations and concert-staged to provide a safer, more courageous world for women, queer, trans, and non-binary humans. Recent work includes *Clairvoyance*, a year-long installation, concert series, and tree planting with American Repertory Theatre; *The Infinite Love Party: An Intentional Barefoot Potluck Dinner, Dance Party, and Sleepover for QTPOC And Their Allies* at Bushwick Starr; and *MY H8 LETTER 2 THE GR8 AMERICAN THEATRE* at The Public Theater. *Refinery29* named Oh a "Top LGBTQ Influencer," and they are the first queer Korean-American to be interviewed on Korean Broadcast Radio. Oh is a Tom Fellow at Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre, a Van Lier Fellow in Acting with the Asian American Arts Alliance, a Venturous Capital Fellow, a Sundance Institute Fellow, and a writer with The Public Theater's Mobile Unit and Emerging Writers Group. Oh tours their art in unexpected spaces and enjoys not fitting into boxes.

Okwui Okpokwasili is a performer, choreographer, and writer creating multidisciplinary performance pieces. The child of immigrants from Nigeria, Okpokwasili was born and raised in the Bronx. The histories of these places and the girls and women who inhabit them are prominently featured in much of her work. Her productions are highly experimental in form, bringing together dance, theater, and visual arts elements. The Walker Art Center has commissioned Okpokwasili's work, Danspace Project, Performance Space New York, the Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA, the 10th Annual Berlin Biennale, and Jacob's Pillow, among others. She has held residencies at the Maggie Allesee National Choreographic Center, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the Rauschenberg Foundation Captiva Residency, and New York Live Arts.

James Scruggs is a writer, performer, producer, who creates screenplays and large-scale topical, theatrical, multi-media work focused on inequity or gender politics. His solo theater piece, *A Voluptuary Life*, received a MAP Grant. It explored the hetero-washing of LGBTQ+ history and in 2019 was presented at HERE Arts Center. In 2018, he created a site-specific immersive, interactive, satirical work for *The High Line*, MELT!. He was awarded a 2015 MAP Grant and a 2016 Creative Capital Grant, to create 3/Fifths. Performed in May 2017, it was a fully immersive, interactive ethno-theme park, exploring race and racism called SupremacyLand. It got "4 stars in *Timeout NY*". His 3/Fifths Trapped in a Traveling Minstrel Show, a piece about how in 2017 unarmed black men are often feared and legally killed. It was awarded an *Elliot Norton Award* for Outstanding Fringe Production,

shown at BCA in Boston. Other grants include a 2016 New Jersey state grant *NJSCA Fellowship* for artistic excellence. Currently, he's working with Rattlestick Theater to create a solo piece, *Dark Bravado*, a trans-media piece about the virus of hatred and his intimate connection to 9/11. James Scruggs has a BFA in Film from the School of Visual Arts.

Niegel Smith is a Bessie Award-winning theater director and performance artist. His work has been produced by The Alley, The Barbican, Goodman Theatre, HERE Arts Center, Hip Hop Theatre Festival, Magic Theatre, The Melbourne Festival, Mixed Blood, New York Fringe Festival, New York Live Arts, Phoenix Theatre Ensemble, Playwrights Horizons, Pomegranate Arts, The Public Theater, St. Ann's Warehouse, Summer Play Festival and Under the Radar, and his participatory walks and performances have been produced by Abrons Arts Center, American Realness, The Brooklyn Museum, Dartmouth College, Elastic City, The Invisible Dog, Jack, The New Museum, Prelude Festival, PS 122, the Van Alen Institute and Visual AIDS. Smith often collaborates with playwright/performer Taylor Mac and with artist Todd Shalom. Smith was co-director of the critically acclaimed *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, winner of the Kennedy Prize in Drama, the Edwin Booth Award, and a Pulitzer Prize finalist.

One of the most influential contemporary American artists, **Carrie Mae Weems** has investigated family relationships, cultural identity, sexism, class, political systems, and the consequences of power. Weems has sustained an ongoing dialogue within contemporary discourse for over thirty years. During this time, Carrie Mae Weems has developed a complex body of art employing photographs, text, fabric, audio, digital images, installation, and video. Weems has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions at major national and international museums and has received multiple awards, grants, and fellowships, including the prestigious Prix de Roma, The National Endowment of the Arts, The Alpert, The Anonymous was a Woman, and The Tiffany Awards. In 2013 Weems received the MacArthur "Genius" grant and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award. Weems is currently Artist in Residence at the Park Avenue Armory.

Called a "postmodernist Bessie Smith" by *The Village Voice*, composer, vocalist, and cultural worker **Imani Uzuri** has collaborated with an eclectic array of artists, including Herbie Hancock, John Legend, Vijay Iyer, Carrie Mae Weems, and Robert Ashley. Her breakthrough album *The Gypsy Diaries* was released to critical acclaim. In 2016, Imani made her Lincoln Center American Songbook debut and was featured on *Black Girls Rock!* on BET. She also composed and co-wrote lyrics for a new musical *GIRL Shakes Loose*, selected for the 2016 O'Neill National Music Theater Conference. She is currently composing a contemporary opera, *Hush Arbor*. She recently collaborated with The Public Theater on a concert tour of community centers, shelters, and prisons and is Founder and Artistic Director of Revolutionary Choir.

Board of Directors Bios **Nona Hendryx (Co-Chair)**

Revolutionary art-rock, new-wave goddess Nona Hendryx is a celebrated vocalist, record producer, songwriter, musician, and author, Ambassador of Artistry in Music for Berklee College of Music. Hendryx's legendary career spans six decades of sound and style evolution, tackling social issues, love, and politics. Longtime Nona Hendryx fans know her as one of the founding members of the "girl group," Patti LaBelle & the Bluebelles. In 1970, Patti, Sarah Dash and Nona morphed into the groundbreaking group Labelle, delivering a No.1 worldwide hit with *Lady Marmalade (Voulez Vous Coucher Avec Moi C'est Soir?)* Hendryx emerged as the chief songwriter of socially conscious and illuminating message songs. Nona's solo career includes an impressive lineup of collaborators (George Clinton, Prince, Peter Gabriel, Talking Heads, Laurie Anderson, Bono), top ten hits, and a Grammy nomination for "Rock This House" with The Rolling Stones' Keith Richards on guitar.

Tony Tramontin (Co-Chair)

Tony Tramontin is the Chief of Operations and Strategy at Holmusk; a healthcare company working to help patients who live with poor mental health. Before Holmusk, Tony was the Chief Scientific Officer at Axcella Health; a Boston biotechnology company focused on metabolic modulation. Prior to Axcella, Tony was a Partner in McKinsey & Company's Global Healthcare Practice.

Frank Lavadera is the recently retired operational leader for the U.S. Tax Information Reporting and Withholding Services group at KPMG. In this role, he was responsible for leading a group of professionals focused on providing tax advisory and compliance services related to the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA),

Compliance Reporting Standard (CRS), and an increasing array of other obligations involving information reporting and/or withholding taxes.

Sarah East Johnson is the founder and Artistic Director of LAVA, founded in 2000. The 13-member company's feminist acrobatic dance has become known for its explosive choreographic language that pushes the accepted boundaries of dance while embodying empowerment and offering visions of gender equality. The award-winning company collaborates to create works they perform around the country. LAVA offers instruction in their unique movement training to youth and adults in Brooklyn, upstate NY, and around the U.S. Johnson is also a member of Cry The Moon, a 3-person music and dance band based in Callicoon, NY. She is grateful for working with Circus Amok and the Church of Stop Shopping Gospel Choir for many years. Johnson has been awarded a New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie) and a Village Voice Off-Broadway Theater Award (Obie) for her choreographic work and has received residencies and fellowships from The Jerome Foundation, The Heathcote Foundation, The Bossak-Heilbron Charitable Trust, Meet the Composer, Red Cinder (Hawaii), The Djerassi Resident Artist Program, The Puffin Foundation, and the New York State Council on the Arts. In 2004, she opened the LAVA Studio in Prospect Heights (Brooklyn) to house its burgeoning community and outreach programs, which serve over 500 people each year and a school that served over 5,000 adults and children during its ten-year life span.

Rick Miramontez is a top Broadway publicist at DKC/O&M PR. He began his career, direct from college, as the press director of the Center Theatre Group / Ahmanson Theatre where he organized the campaigns for more than 25 major productions, including the RSC's *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* and world premieres of Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *Biloxi Blues*, and James Kirkwood's infamous *Legends!* He was the press director for the 1987 and 1990 Los Angeles Festival, where he presented *Cirque du Soleil* to the U.S. media, as well as Peter Brook's epic *The Mahabharata*. From 1988-1996, Rick headed his own firm, Rick Miramontez Company, which represented many of the major arts events on the West Coast, including the American Premiere of *Sunset Boulevard* and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. In New York, Rick along with his friends and colleagues Richard Kornberg, John Barlow, and Michael Hartman, was behind the press campaigns for *Hairspray*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, and was account executive for *Rent*, *The Producers*, and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. At DKC/O&M PR, Rick's clients include *Dear Evan Hansen*, *A Doll's House, Part 2*, and *1984*. O&M Co. orchestrated the publicity campaigns for *Kinky Boots*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, and *Fun Home*— other shows include *Beautiful*, *Hand to God*, *Bright Star*, *Eclipsed*, and *School of Rock*.

Cauvery Patel is currently the Chief Operating Officer & Head of People and Culture at Dropps, an e-commerce start-up that manufactures and sells plant-based laundry detergents with rigorous standards for sustainability. Prior to that, she worked as a Corporate Strategy Associate with IBM. Cauvery is passionate about social justice, authentic climate sustainability and has an affinity for funky, experimental art. Cauvery holds an MBA from Harvard Business School, is a supporter and affiliate of Progressive International and speaks approximately 3.25 languages. In her spare time enjoys photography, Sichuan cooking, CrossFit, reading Current Affairs magazine, and raising Gobi, her enormous dog, in Brooklyn with her husband Dan.

Having built her 17-year career in business development, sales, and marketing strategy, **Melissa Poulos** is currently a Director at Google, leading strategy, operations, and product go-to-market for Google's Global Client and Agency Sales organization. Before this, she managed some of the company's largest global partnerships with the "Big 6" advertising holding companies. Prior to Google, she received her MBA from INSEAD after working on Wall Street for several years as a Vice President at Goldman Sachs in the asset management division. Melissa graduated from Princeton University with a B.A. in Art & Archeology. She is an investor and advisor to tech & retail start-ups and a passionate mentor to fellow female professionals. A music lover and frustrated singer/songwriter, Melissa has been a patron of the arts ever since acting in musical theater as a student. Melissa is originally from Chicago but is a longtime New Yorker and, in addition to being an ardent traveler, has called four different countries across three continents home.

Charles Randolph-Wright has built a dynamic and diversified career in directing, writing, and producing theater, television, and film. He directed the smash-hit *Motown the Musical* (Broadway, National Tour, and London) and recently was the Producing Director and Executive Producer with Oprah Winfrey on the new television series *Delilah* on OWN. Theater credits include the Broadway-bound musical *Born For This*, which he co-wrote

with gospel icon Bebe Winans; the Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Ruined* and the musical *Sophisticated Ladies*, starring Maurice Hines, at Arena Stage; the 75th-anniversary tour of the opera *Porgy and Bess*; Brian Stokes Mitchell in *Love/Life* at Lincoln Center; *Guys and Dolls* (the 50th-anniversary national tour); *They're Playing Our Song* (in Portuguese in Brasil); *Cabaret Verboten* at the Mark Taper Forum with Bebe Neuwirth and Roger Rees; and *The Diva Is Dismissed*, starring Jenifer Lewis at the Public Theater.

Randolph-Wright wrote the play *Blue*, which premiered at Arena Stage (where Charles is an inaugural resident playwright). *Blue* has had productions throughout the U.S., including the Roundabout and Pasadena Playhouse (which starred Ms. Rashad, Diahann Carroll, and Clifton Davis). Charles also wrote *Cuttin' Up* (based upon the book by Craig Marberry), *The Night is a Child* (starring JoBeth Williams), *Love in Afghanistan*, and co-wrote the Tony-nominated *Just Between Friends* starring Bea Arthur. Television credits include directing the series *Greenleaf*, *Katy Keene*, *Step Up Highwater*, *Lincoln Heights*, *South of Nowhere*, and *Live at Lincoln Center*. He directed the award-winning film *Preaching to the Choir* and produced and wrote the series *Linc's*. Charles is an Executive Producer of the film *Maurice Hines: Bring Them Back*, which recently won the Grand Jury Prize at the NY Doc Film Festival.

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