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Playwrights' Center McKnight Theater Artists Present Works in Progress June 16

(Minneapolis, MN—May 7, 2014)—The 2013-14 Playwrights' Center McKnight Theater Artist Fellows **Sun Mee Chomet**, **Denise Prosek** and **Stephen Yoakam**, along with their collaborators, will present selections from works in progress on **June 16 at 7 p.m. at the Southern Theater**. The event is free and open to the public; advance reservations are strongly recommended and can be made at www.pwcenter.org. The Southern Theater is located at 1420 S Washington Avenue in Minneapolis.

Each artist is teaming up with collaborators to create new theater work or explore new approaches to their work, and attendees at this event will be the first audience to see selections from the works in progress. These collaborations are made possible by increased project development funding from the McKnight Foundation; for the first time, McKnight Theater Artist Fellows can use up to \$7,000 on developing new work, above and beyond the \$25,000 fellowship itself. Playwrights' Center Associate Artistic Director Hayley Finn says, "The new funds were intended to launch possibilities for artistic collaborations and the birth of new theatrical work," and that is just what they have done:

Sun Mee Chomet is collaborating with nationally-acclaimed performance artist Brenda Wong Aoki and local taiko artist Susan Tanabe on a reimagining of Aoki's *The Queen's Garden*.

Denise Prosek, much-lauded as a music director, is now writing a musical of her own. She is working with actors Joshua James Campbell, James Detmar and Max Wojtanowicz on a musical about the restaurant industry called *Fire It Up*.

Stephen Yoakam is partnering with dancer/choreographer Uri Sands and his company TU Dance. Sands has received numerous awards for his work, including the inaugural 2005 Princess Grace Award in Choreography.

The McKnight Theater Artist Fellowships at the Playwrights' Center recognize Minnesota theater artists other than playwrights whose work demonstrates exceptional artistic merit and potential. Recent McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship recipients include Sarah Agnew, Ansa Akyea, Shá Cage, James Craven, Marcus Dilliard, Kate Eifrig, Masanari Kawahara, Christopher Lutter-Gardella, Greta Oglesby, Sonja Parks, Robert Rosen, Joel Sass and Michael Wangen.

Seats for *McKnight Theater Artists Present Works in Progress* are free and going fast—reservations are recommended. Reserve your seats by visiting www.pwcenter.org, emailing info@pwcenter.org or calling (612) 332-7481 x110.

About the 2013-14 McKnight Theater Artist Fellows:

Sun Mee Chomet performed her award-winning one-woman show *How to Be a Korean Woman* as part of the Guthrie's 2013-14 season, after performing the show in South Korea. In addition, Sun Mee was chosen as one of 10 North Americans to participate in the 2013 Korean Education and Exposure Program, a peace delegation trip to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Sun Mee recently played Oberon/Hippolyta in *Ten Thousand Things'*

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production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Bianca in Guthrie Theater's *Othello*. Sun Mee has performed in other shows with the Guthrie Theater (*The Burial at Thebes*, *Macbeth*, *The Intelligent Homosexual...*); as well as Mu Performing Arts (*WTF*, *Cowboy vs. Samurai*, *Asiamnesia* [playwright and actor]); History Theatre (*100 Men's Wife*); Penumbra Theatre (*for colored girls...*); Mixed Blood Theatre (*Elemeno Pea*) and many other theaters locally and nationally.

Denise Prosek has worked extensively as a music director, pianist and arranger in the Twin Cities for the past 20 years. As resident music director of Theater Latté Da, she has music directed 40 mainstage productions and numerous cabarets, including *Spelling Bee*, *Evita*, *The Full Monty* and the Ivey award-winning *Spring Awakening*. Other credits include Children's Theatre Company (*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *Mr. McGee and the Biting Flea*), Ordway (*Broadway Songbook*), Guthrie Theater (*She Stoops to Conquer* – workshop), Park Square Theatre (*Ragtime*, *Johnny Baseball*) and Mu Performing Arts (*Into the Woods*, *Little Shop of Horrors*). She was named Outstanding Musical Director by the *Star Tribune* in 2006 and 2008, Best Music Director by *Lavender* in 2010, and was honored as *Lavender's* 2012 Theater Artist of the Year.

Stephen Yoakam has appeared in more than 75 Guthrie Theater productions, including the recent production of *Othello* and the critically-lauded one-person show *An Iliad*, as well as *The Burial at Thebes*, *Oedipus*, *Three Sisters*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Black No More*. Other notable Twin Cities productions include *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Seafarer* and *A Delicate Balance* (Jungle Theater); *Blackbird* and *Bug* (Pillsbury House Theatre); and *Peer Gynt* (Minnesota Orchestra). He is a founding member of Mixed Blood Theatre, and was named Best Actor of 2011 by *City Pages*.

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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 Grants (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 and dramaturgs.

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.