



PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTER
IMAGINING THEATER FORWARD SINCE 1971

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Contact: Jessica Franken

(612) 332-7481 x118

jessicaf@pwcenter.org

Readings of new Lee Blessing play “*Minneapolis/St. Paul*” April 3 and 4 at Playwrights’ Center

(Minneapolis, MN—March 16, 2017)—The 2016-17 Ruth Easton New Play Series at the Playwrights’ Center concludes **April 3 and 4 at 7 p.m.** with public readings of “*Minneapolis/St. Paul*” by **Core Writer Lee Blessing**. The readings will take place at the Playwrights’ Center, 2301 E. Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. The events are free but reservations are recommended and can be made at pwcenter.org.

Playwright Lee Blessing grew up in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul and now lives in Los Angeles. He has been involved with the Playwrights’ Center since the 1970s and is a permanent Core Writer with the Center. Plays by Blessing recently premiered in the Twin Cities include “For the Loyal” at the Illusion Theater and “Courting Harry” at History Theatre. Blessing has been nominated for Tony and Olivier awards as well as the Pulitzer Prize.

In “*Minneapolis/St. Paul*,” a celebrated crime novelist leads two different lives, one as Randall, the middle-aged husband and father, and the other as Mandy, the newly-wedded wife and stepmother. In a play that is both poignant and bitingly funny, Mandy/Randall struggles with the complexities and repercussions of an identity too vast to fit within binaries.

As Blessing explains, his hometown felt like a particularly apt setting for this new play: “I wanted to write a play about a bigamist situation in which a person was a husband in one case and a wife in the other. It struck me that the Twin Cities would be very handy for that because they are their own different spheres of experience. You can live in one of them and never be that much in the other, even though they’re cheek by jowl.”

Playwrights’ Center Producing Artistic Director Jeremy B. Cohen** will direct, Trevor Bowen (2016 Emerging Artist Ivey Award winner) will serve as costume design consultant, and the lead role will be played by Jeffrey Carlson*, a well-known Broadway actor also celebrated for his portrayal of transgender character Zarf/Zoe on “All My Children” (**Member of Actors’ Equity Association*; ***Member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society*). In 2001, Carlson made his Off-Broadway debut in the Signature Theatre Company production of Lee Blessing’s “Thief River.”

Jeremy B. Cohen says, “In a recent conversation with Lee about bigamy, polyamory, cross-dressing, genderfluidity, and our society’s need to pin down one another’s sexuality, we arrived at the central question of the play: What is the cost when your most authentic self stands in contrast to society’s need to define you? It’s been exciting to dig into this with Lee, and I’m looking forward to the extended workshop time the Ruth Easton New Play Series provides.”

Lee Blessing's plays include: "A Walk in the Woods" (Broadway and London's West End—nominations for Tony and Olivier Awards and a Pulitzer finalist); "Going to St. Ives" (Outer Critic's Circle Award, Best Play, Obie for Ensemble Performance); "Thief River" (Drama Desk nomination, Best Play); "Cobb" (Drama Desk Award, Best Ensemble); "Chesapeake;" "Eleemosynary;" and "Down the Road." In the 1992-93 Signature Theatre Season: "Fortinbras," "Lake Street Extension," "Two Rooms," and the world premiere of "Patient A." The Guthrie Theater premiered both "Thief River" and "A Body of Water" (subsequently produced at Old Globe Theatre and Primary Stages). Recipient of the Steinberg/American Theater Critics Circle Award (twice), the L.A. Drama Critics Award, The Great American Play Award, The Humanitas Award, and the George and Elisabeth Marton Award. Blessing is professor emeritus at Rutgers University, where for a dozen years he headed the Graduate Playwriting Program of Mason Gross School of the Arts.

The Ruth Easton New Play Series at the Playwrights' Center, now in its 12th year, provides selected Core Writers with 20 hours of workshop time to develop a new play in collaboration with top-notch actors and other theater artists. Plays receive two public readings, giving audience members a unique and immediate way to experience new work and a chance to be part of the creative process. Plays recently seen in the Ruth Easton New Play Series that had full productions this theater season include George Brant's "Marie and Rosetta" Off-Broadway at Atlantic Theater and Carlyle Brown's "Finding Fish" at the Illusion Theater in Minneapolis.

"*Minneapolis/St. Paul*" is the final play in the Playwrights' Center's 45th anniversary season, but the celebration continues May 4 when the Center hosts its 45th Anniversary Gala at The Blaisdell. This special evening will honor playwright and director Marion McClinton. See pwcenter.org/gala for details.

All events in the Ruth Easton New Play Series are free and open to the public. Reservations are recommended; reserve your spots at pwcenter.org or by contacting the Playwrights' Center at (612) 332-7481 or info@pwcenter.org.

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Note: The playwright requests the title be italicized thus – Minneapolis/St. Paul – when possible.

Photos of the playwright and previous Ruth Easton New Play Series readings are available at pwcenter.org/media-room or by contacting Jessica Franken at jessicaf@pwcenter.org.

THE 2016-17 RUTH EASTON NEW PLAY SERIES

December 5 & 6 at 7 p.m. "Wink" by Jen Silverman
January 9 & 10 at 7 p.m. "queens" by Martyna Majok
February 6 & 7 at 7 p.m. "Eden Prairie, 1971" by Mat Smart
March 6 & 7 at 7 p.m. "The Sea & The Stars" by Harrison David Rivers
April 3 & 4 at 7 p.m. "*Minneapolis/St. Paul*" by Lee Blessing

"Wink" by Jen Silverman

Sofie is an unhappy housewife. Gregor is her bread-winning husband. Dr. Frans is their psychiatrist. Wink is the cat. And Gregor has just skinned the cat. A dark comedy about the complicated and dangerous territory of the human heart.

"queens" by Martyna Majok

The lives of two generations of immigrant women in Queens collide in a series of small apartments. When you are working so hard to move forward in America, what cannot—and should not—be left behind?

"Eden Prairie, 1971" by Mat Smart

On the night *Apollo 15* lands on the moon, a draft dodger steals home to Eden Prairie, Minnesota from Canada. He risks arrest to deliver a message to a young woman from his high school class. This beautifully etched play challenges notions of our own bravery and the true cost of freedom.

"The Sea & The Stars" by Harrison David Rivers

Simon is a lifeguard. Finn is terrified of water. Both are adrift, with broken hearts, returning to the tiny beach town of Jupiter and to families who need them. A play about love, karaoke, and the sea.

"*Minneapolis/St. Paul*" by Lee Blessing

A celebrated crime novelist leads two different lives, one as Randall, the middle-aged husband and father, and the other as Mandy, the newly-wedded wife and stepmother. In a play that is both poignant and biting funny, Mandy/Randall struggles with the complexities and repercussions of an identity too vast to fit within binaries.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTER

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 the Center's 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 \$315,000 each year for residencies, commissions, and development funds. Through these fellowships, the Playwrights' Center functions as a home for:

- Jerome Fellows (four emerging American playwrights);
- Many Voices Fellows (two early-career playwrights of color, one Minnesota-based) and Many Voices Mentees (two Minnesota-based beginning playwrights of color);
- McKnight Fellows in Playwriting (two accomplished Minnesota-based playwrights);
- McKnight National Residency and Commission (one playwright selected annually from an impressive national pool); and
- McKnight Theater Artist Fellows (three exceptional Minnesota-based theater artists, other than playwrights).

Membership is open to all and provides more than 1,900 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.

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 collaborations include partnerships with Denver Center on Idris Goodwin's *Victory Jones and the Incredible One Woman Band*, Marin Theatre Company on Carson Kreitzer's *Lasso of Truth*, Mixed Blood on Aditi Kapil's *Brahman(i) and Shiv*, Pillsbury House Theatre on Tracey Scott Wilson's *Buzzer*, and The Walker Art Center and Elevator Repair Service on Sibyl Kempson's *Fondly, Collette Richland*. The Center also flies in 10-15 artistic leaders each year to meet writers and hear their work. The newly-launched Regulars program brings together a group of nearly 100 producing theaters in the United States who seek the support of the Center in order to meet new writers, develop their work, and move them into production.