



## SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL ST. LOUIS

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### **Shakespeare Festival St. Louis Announces the Confluence Regional Writers Project, a New Initiative for Emerging Playwrights**

ST. LOUIS (Jan. 3, 2019) – Three emerging playwrights – two from St. Louis and one from Chicago – have been selected to participate in a new initiative developed by Shakespeare Festival St. Louis called the Confluence Regional Writers Project. As part of the program, the festival has also selected St. Louisan Carter Lewis, a two-time nominee for the American Theatre Critics Award, as the Festival’s 2019 Playwriting Fellow.

Mariah L. Richardson and Shualee Cook of St. Louis, and Kristin Idaszak, of Chicago, will participate as the emerging playwrights.

“Confluence brings together two of the Festival’s top priorities: investing in local artists and engaging with our surrounding region,” said Tom Ridgely, executive producer of the Festival. “This sparkling cohort of writers is speaking from the unique perspective of not only who they are, but also where they live and work. If we truly want to understand what’s going on in America today, we need voices like theirs as part of our country’s cultural conversation.”

In addition to fostering a regional culture of playwriting, the new program and its annual Playwriting Fellowship, will also include an annual Emerging Playwrights Cohort, staged readings, public workshops and a fully-produced new work for the stage. Nancy Bell, who authored the dynamic Shakespeare in the Streets productions, will serve as Confluence project director.

“It’s an incredible opportunity for us to work with these very talented up and coming playwrights who live both locally and regionally throughout the Midwest. While St. Louis has a tremendous theatre scene, with lots of great opportunities for actors, directors and designers, we thought it important to cast a light on the ones who actually start the process for everyone else, the playwrights themselves,” Bell said. “The Emerging Playwrights Cohort will help us do just that by creating more resources for playwrights and helping to foster a more vibrant culture of new play development throughout our region.”

Each cohort will attend a weekend retreat in February as well as monthly visits to St. Louis throughout the year for writing sessions, day-long workshops and mentorship activities with Lewis. Each will then be committed to producing a new full-length work.

As part of his year-long residency at the Festival, Lewis, a playwriting and dramaturgy professor at Washington University in St. Louis, will receive a commission for a new work to be developed during the Festival. Through the years, Lewis has been recognized with several national playwriting awards including: the Julie Harris – Playwriting Award; the State Theatre – Best New American Play; the Cincinnati Playhouse Rosenthal New Play Prize (1996, 2001); the New Dramatist Arnold Weissberger Playwriting Award; and the Playwright’s Center Jerome Residency, to name a few. Lewis’ play, “While We Were Bowling,” won the Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation Award for Best New American Play.

In addition to the mentoring with Lewis, the festival will also provide each cohort with a stipend, workshops with guest artists and industry professionals, dedicated time and space to write together, as well as actors, a director and rehearsal time for a public reading of the work in St. Louis.

Background highlights of playwrights:

**Mariah L. Richardson**

Richardson most recently served as the Playwriting Fellow in the remounting of the Festival’s 2018 Shakespeare in the Streets “Blow, Winds” production. Additional works of hers have premiered at the Kranzberg Theatre (“Soy Yo! An Afro-Latina Suite”), St. Louis Community College (“Idris Elba is James Bond,” “Sistahs Indeed!”) and Metro Theater Company (“Delilah’s Wish”/Kevin Kline Award, 2011). Richardson has performed with both Metro Theater and the St. Louis Black Repertory Theatre. She received her Communications degree from the University of New Mexico and an MFA in Playwriting from Smith College.

**Shualee Cook**

Cook’s most recent work includes “Sunset Artists of the American West” (Chicago’s About Face Theatre) and “Cercle Hermaphrodites” (National Queer Theatre in New York). She also served as Resident Playwright with Tesseract Theatre (“Earworm”) in St. Louis and as the spring/summer resident at Stage Left in Chicago. Cook’s other plays that have received productions or readings include “Tempest in a Teapot” (R-S Theatrics, 2016 Idle Muse Athena Festival), “An Invitation Out” (Mustard Seed Theatre, 2017 Benchmark Theatre Fever Dream Festival), “Osgood Rex” (Saint Lou Fringe), “The Geography of Nowhere” (Mustard Seed Theatre), and “Music of the Goddess” (SATE’s Aphra Behn Emerging Artists Showcase). She was also a finalist for the 2016 David Calicchio Prize, the 2016 Jane Chambers Award, the 2015 and 2016 Goodman Theatre Playwrights Unit, and was this year’s Honorable Mention Playwright for the Annual Parity Commission.

**Kristin Idaszak**

Idaszak is a playwright, dramaturg, performance maker, and the Artistic Director of Cloudgate Theatre. Her play, “Second Skin,” received the Kennedy Center’s Paula Vogel Playwriting Award and the Jean Kennedy Smith Playwriting Award. “Another Jungle” (Relentless Award Honorable Mention) received its world premiere with Cloudgate Theatre and The Syndicate in April 2018. Idaszak’s work has also been developed through residencies at the City of Chicago’s Department of Cultural Affairs, Stage Left Theatre, and the Qualcomm Institute at Calit2 in San Diego. Kristin has co-created collaborative original work that has been seen at the WoW Festival at La Jolla Playhouse and the Blurred Borders Festival, an international showcase of contemporary dance theatre. Her numerous awards and accolades include: Joseph Jefferson Award for Best New Work nominee; two honorable mentions on the Kilroys’ List; 2015 Kennedy Center Fellow at the Sundance Theatre Lab; and two Playwrights’ Center Jerome Fellowships. Idaszak is an adjunct faculty member at The Theatre School at DePaul University.

The Confluence Regional Writers Project is generously funded by Sondra and Dorsey Ellis.

**About Shakespeare Festival St. Louis**

Shakespeare Festival St. Louis presents Shakespeare and works inspired by his legacy of storytelling. Since 2001, the festival has grown from producing a single production of Shakespeare in the Park to a year-round season of new plays in exciting and accessible venues throughout the St. Louis community. The festival’s artistic and education programs reached more than 50,000 patrons and students during the 2018 season and over one million since the festival’s first season in 2001. Leadership support for Shakespeare Festival St. Louis’ 2019 season is provided by the Whitaker Foundation. The festival is also funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Missouri Arts Council, the Regional Arts Commission, and the Arts & Education Council of Greater St. Louis. For more information, please visit [www.sfstl.com](http://www.sfstl.com), or call 314-531-9800.

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