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**SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL ST. LOUIS  
PRESENTS THE CONFLUENCE NEW PLAY FESTIVAL  
AND ANNOUNCES SECOND COHORT OF PLAYWRIGHTS  
FOR CONFLUENCE REGIONAL WRITERS PROJECT**

**November 18, 2019** -- Shakespeare Festival St. Louis (Tom Ridgely, Producing Artistic Director) will present the Confluence New Play Festival November 20-23 at the Kranzberg Black Box in Grand Center. The culmination of its inaugural Confluence Regional Writers Project, the festival will feature staged readings of four new plays by the emerging writers cohort and master playwright. The Festival also announced today the three playwrights of the 2020 cohort.

“If we want to understand what’s going on in America today, we need to hear the stories of people living here in the heart of the country,” said Tom Ridgely, Producing Artistic Director, in a statement. “These four playwrights - based in Missouri and Illinois - have urgent, important things to say and are crafting wonderfully original and compelling ways to share them. The Festival is honored to be nurturing these extraordinary artists and to be fostering a culture of playmaking throughout the bi-state region.”

A committee led by Confluence Project Director Nancy Bell chose the second year of participating playwrights: Elizabeth Archer of Chicago, IL, Myah Gary of Carbondale, IL and Rob Maesaka of St. Louis, MO.

The new cohort attended a weekend retreat in early November and will visit St. Louis throughout the year for writing sessions and workshops. Each playwright has committed to producing a new full-length work to premiere during next year’s Confluence New Play Festival.

This year’s Confluence New Play Festival will take place November 20 - 23 in the Black Box Theater at the Kranzberg Arts Center. The schedule of staged readings from the 2019 writing cohort include *The Story Blinked* by Carter W. Lewis and directed by Tom Martin, *Suffer the Children* by Mariah L. Richardson and directed by Jacqueline Thompson, *And Certain Women* by Shualee Cook and directed by Deanna Jent, and *Tidy* by Kristin Idaszak and directed by Lucy Cashion.

"Working with great actors and directors is the final, and crucial step in our play development process. Being in a rehearsal hall with collaborators is an important proving ground for a play, the time when it truly comes to life through the voices of fellow artists" says Bell. "It's exciting to be presenting these four brand new, made-in-STL plays by our very first cohort of emerging playwrights. This time next year, we'll be gathered in the theatre again to grab the first look at three more new plays that the artists have only

just now begun to conceive. It's wonderful to have plays from Chicago and New York and LA on our STL stages. We're here to give voice to the great plays that are born here in our region, too."

Tickets for the Conclufnece New Play Festival can be purchased online or at the door and are \$10 per reading and \$5 for students. [www.sfstl.com/confluence](http://www.sfstl.com/confluence)

2020 Cohort Bios:

**Elizabeth Archer (Chicago, IL)** hails from Edmonton, Alberta, and holds an MFA in Writing for Screen+Stage from Northwestern University, a BA in English from Fordham, and an Associate's Degree from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts East. She is a graduate of The Second City Chicago's Musical Improv and Improv Conservatories. A book of Ukrainian folk verses she compiled and edited was published by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta and is now used as part of the curricula at Ukrainian bilingual schools in Western Canada. In June 2014, her play *Old Gray Devil* was performed as a part of the Source Festival (Washington, D.C.). In December 2014, her play *Both Sides, Now* received a staged reading at Chicago Dramatists and was also performed as part of the 2015 Source Festival. In summer 2016, Elizabeth served as co-producer for her play *TROLL* put on by Fraud & Phony Theatricals, a new Chicago theatre collective she co-founded. She is a two-time semi-finalist for the Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, and a semi-finalist for the 2016 P73 Playwriting Fellowship. Her play *El Words* was produced by Chicago's Fury Theatre as a part of their 2016 SAST Festival and her 10-minute play *La Donna e Mobile* received a reading in May 2017 at the Stella Adler School of Acting (in conjunction with the Harold Clurman Playwrights Unit) in NYC. Elizabeth was a finalist for the 2018 Campfire Theatre Festival. [eaarcher.com](http://eaarcher.com)

**Myah L. Gary (Carbondale, IL)** is a playwright-health educator from Carbondale, Illinois. She is an interdisciplinary doctoral student in Health Education and Theater at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Her plays focus on creating a dialog around health and social issues. Myah is the author of the full length plays, *Blemished Brown Beauties*, *Jesus in the Ivory Tower*, *The Woman Who* and *Penetrate*. In 2018, she wrote, directed and produced the full-length children's musical *Kendall Saves the Day* as part of *The Creative Academic Performing Arts Academy (T.C.A.P.A.A)* program that she founded. In June 2019, her piece *Blood Memory* was performed at a Valiant Theater summit (Chicago, IL). Most recently, her full-length play, *Blemished Brown Beauties* was performed as a staged reading at The Playwright's Center in Minneapolis, MN. Myah's love for writing and performance began when she was eight years old. A classically trained vocalist, she sang in several traveling jazz and musical theatre choirs. In 2005, she participated in the Carbondale Community Arts (CCA) / McLeod Summer Playhouse program. For nearly ten years, Myah participated in SLAM Poetry competitions. In 2012, Myah began writing one-woman shows. She performed her shows in college courses and in women's centers. She also began touring her one-woman shows with a faith-based non-profit. Her shows were toured in Illinois and Texas. In 2018, Myah co-founded The Gary Learning Institute (TGLI). TGLI is a behavioral-health wellness, personal development and research institution. The institute aims to add a health-theater component by the year 2021.

**Rob Maesaka (St. Louis, MO)** was born and raised in New York City with a passion for theatre. He came to St. Louis to attend Washington University where he received his Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and then his Masters of Arts in Theatre. Since the days of being a professional student, Rob has taught at Wydown Middle School in the Clayton School District for the past 25 years — 9 years of drama and 16 years of Literacy. Rob’s playwriting career began with adapting classic stories to be performed at school. The first adaption of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” which was written with musical collaborator Jerry Estes was published by Shawnee Press. Other adaptations include *Around the World in 80 Days*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Treasure Island*, *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves*, and *The Canterville Ghost*. After many years of writing adaptations, Rob began writing full length original scripts several years ago. His first script *White to Gray* was developed during a Summer playwriting workshop with Dr. Deanna Jent and was performed by The Mustard Seed Theatre Company in 2015. Rob’s one minute play *The Birthday Wish* was also performed at the Every 28 Hours Play Festival in 2017. Other full-length scripts include *A Question of Loyalty* about the Japanese Internment during WWII and *The Butterfly People* which is set in Joplin, MO when the class five tornado struck in 2011.

The Confluence Regional Writers Project is generously funded by Sondra & 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 impactful theater in exciting and accessible venues throughout the St. Louis community. The festival’s artistic and education programs reached over 50,000 patrons and students during the 2018 season and have reached over one million since 2001. In 2019, the Festival received a “What’s Right with the Region” award from Focus St. Louis.