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Baltimore Center Stage Announces Slate of Commissions

Creating Multiple Pathways for New Work at Baltimore Center Stage

Baltimore, MD March 8, 2022— Baltimore Center Stage (BCS) is proud to announce this year's slate of commissioned artists, continuing the organization's long standing support for developing new projects by some of today's most exciting theater makers. These commissioned artists are **Will Davis, Marisa Carr, Miranda Rose Hall, Otis Ramsey-Zoe, Storm Thomas, Ronee Penoi, Michelle J. Rodriguez, and John Tyler**— Full bios are listed herein.

Including several innovative new models, this year's commissions consist of a **Director Commission, Seed Commissions, Keep Going Commissions**, and an **Arts Entrepreneur in Residence**— each of which makes a critical intervention in standard industry practice. The constellation of commissions extends support for artists across wide-ranging disciplines including a director, a devising dramaturg, musicians, and of course playwrights. These new models also expand the kinds of support that an institution can offer to the developmental process, from the seed of an idea all the way to the final touches of a project.

BCS's commissioning program is led by **Director of Artistic Partnerships & Innovation, Annalisa Dias**. "When Stephanie hired me, some of our first conversations were about ways to disrupt standard industry practice around new project development. The field often speaks of 'pipelines,' 'development hell', and projects being 'workshopped to death.' The language we use as a field about how new plays get made feels oddly violent, and that's telling," says Dias. "With these new commissioning models, we're prioritizing investing in artists, listening to what they tell us they need, and creating multiple pathways for new work to have a life at BCS and beyond. We believe the range of these artists' aesthetics, subject matter, disciplines, and identities is very important to the developments of the field, and BCS is thrilled to support them."



Director Commission: Baltimore Center Stage is committed to supporting directors as lead generative artists. We recognize the lack of field-wide infrastructure for directors to develop their craft and authorial voice, and this commission seeks to disrupt that.

- [Will Davis](#) for an UNTITLED PROJECT

Seed Commissions: In this new commissioning model for BCS, we direct a small seed fee to artists to compensate for the labor of writing an outline or treatment of a new idea for a project. So often, in institutional commissioning programs and even in grant applications for artists, artists are expected to provide outlines, synopses, and other written descriptions of their ideas in order to secure funding for their work. This labor often goes unpaid. BCS Seed Commissions seeks to disrupt that industry norm by compensating artists simply for writing their ideas down. We hope that the projects we seed at BCS will go on to flourish, whether at BCS or other organizations.

- [Marissa Carr](#) (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) for a project called POW WOW SUMMER.
- [Miranda Rose Hall](#) for a project called BOSTON
- [Otis Ramsey-Zoe](#) for an UNTITLED PROJECT

Keep Going Commissions: In this new commissioning model for BCS, we provide financial support for artists to continue developing a project that already exists but which is not yet complete. Artists are free to use the funding however they see fit. Some are using the funding to record demos, some are paying themselves for their writing time, some are using it to pay rent! With each “Keep Going Commission,” we work with the artists to attach another BCS opportunity, like a BCS Sound Check event or a writing residency at BCS, to support the developmental life of the project.

- [Storm Thomas](#) for their project BE LIKE BONE
 - BE LIKE BONE will be featured at an upcoming BCS Sound Check event, where Storm will showcase brand new material from the piece.
- [Ronee Penoi](#) (Laguna Pueblo/Cherokee) for her project THE CARLISLE PROJECT
 - Penoi will participate in a writing residency at BCS in spring 2022 and songs from THE CARLISLE PROJECT will be featured in an upcoming Baltimore Butterfly Session.
- [Michelle J. Rodriguez](#) for her project PRESENCIA
 - PRESENCIA will be featured in an upcoming BCS Sound Check event in fall 2022, where Michelle will showcase new material from the project.

Arts Entrepreneur in Residence: This year, we are piloting a residency for an Arts Entrepreneur as part of BCS’s new Shared Space Initiative. Our Arts Entrepreneur in Residence is [John Tyler](#), founder of the [Love Groove Music Festival](#). As the Arts Entrepreneur in Residence, John produced the annual **Love Groove Music Festival** at Baltimore Center Stage in August 2021 and will be gearing up to host it at BCS again in 2022. As Arts Entrepreneur in Residence, John also receives access to use BCS for meeting space throughout the year.

2021-2022 BCS Commissioned Artist Bios

Director Commission

Will Davis is a transgender director and choreographer focused on physically adventurous new work for the stage. Off-Broadway credits include: *Road Show* (Encores! Off-Center); *India Pale Ale* (MTC); *Bobbie Clearly* (Roundabout Underground); *Charm* (MCC); *Men on Boats* (Clubbed Thumb and Playwrights Horizons—Lucille Lortel nomination); and *Duat* (Soho Rep). Regional credits include: *The Swindlers* (Baltimore Center Stage), *Spamtown, USA* (Children’s Theater Company); *Everybody* (Shakespeare Theater Company); *A Doll’s House, Part 2* (Long Wharf Theatre); *The Carpenter* (The Alley Theatre); *Colossal* (Olney Theatre Center and Mixed Blood Theater—Helen Hayes award for best direction); *Evita* (Olney Theatre Center—Helen Hayes award nomination); and multiple productions for ATC in Chicago where Davis also served as artistic director. He is an alum of the Princeton Arts Fellowship, Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab, the NYTW 2050 Directing Fellowship and the Brooklyn Art Exchange’s Artist in Residence program. Davis is currently writing his first play, a queer little musical about horses.

Seed Commissions

Marisa Carr is a playwright from Milwaukee, now living in Chicago after a decade in the Twin Cities. Her work has been seen at Milwaukee Rep, The Guthrie, Pillsbury House + Theater, the Playwrights’ Center, Montana Repertory Theater, Intermedia Arts, and University of Iowa MFA Program. Selected awards and honors include: Victory Gardens Playwrights Ensemble (2021-2024), Montana Repertory Theater Warren Miller Commission (2021), Goodman Playwrights Unit (2020-2021), American Blues Theater Blue Ink Award Finalist (2020), Bay Area Playwrights’ Festival Finalist (2019), McKnight Fellowship in Playwriting Finalist (2019) and Jerome Artist Fellowship Finalist (2019). Marisa is Co-Founder/former Artistic Director of the Turtle Theater Collective, a Twin Cities-based company committed to producing high-quality, contemporary work that explores Native experiences and subverts expectations about how and when Native artists can create theater, and has taught playwriting for theaters including the Guthrie and Jungle Theatre. She is Turtle Mountain Ojibwe from the Turtle clan, and she is thrilled to be working with Baltimore Center Stage!

Miranda Rose Hall is a playwright from Baltimore, MD. Her plays include *Plot Points in Our Sexual Development* (LCT3/Lincoln Center Theater, finalist for the 2019 Lambda Literary Award in Drama), *The Hour of Great Mercy* (Diversionary Theater, 2019 San Diego Critics Circle Award for Outstanding New Play), and *The Kind Ones* (upcoming Magic Theatre). She is under commission from LCT3/Lincoln Center Theater, Yale Repertory Theater, and Playwrights Horizons Soundstage. She was honored with a 2020 Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award, and *A Play for the Living...* is a finalist for the 2021 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. She is a co-founder of LubDub Theatre Co. BA: Georgetown University, MFA: Yale School of Drama.

Otis Cortez Ramsey-Zöe is a care worker, dramaturg, director, theatre arts educator, and Literary Manager at Arena Stage. He has developed new works at such institutions as Sundance Institute, Kennedy Center, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Playwrights Center, and National New Play Network. He has led modules in dramaturgy and antiracist theatre practices at Yale School of Drama and held posts in Theatre at Northeastern University, Dramaturgy at Carnegie Mellon University, Women’s Studies and Honors Humanities at University of Maryland, Performing Arts at American University, and Theatre Arts at Howard University. He was Associate Artistic Director at *banished? productions*, *Future Classics* Program Coordinator at The Classical Theatre of Harlem, and Literary Manager at Center Stage.



Keep Going Commissions

Ronee Penoi (Laguna Pueblo/Cherokee) is a composer, arts presenter, facilitator and activist. She is at work on two new musicals, *The Carlisle Project* and *#RESIST* with collaborator Annalisa Dias under the banner of FLORA MUSICALS, and is a two-time recipient of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities Individual Artist Fellowship for her musical composing work. Her music has been heard at the Hopkins Center for the Arts (Dartmouth College), The Tank (NYC), the Berlind (McCarter Theater), CulturalDC's Mead Theater Lab, banished? Productions, bodiography dance, and more. She is a Sundance Institute Interdisciplinary Program Grantee, and has been commissioned by Pittsburgh Public Theater.

Ronee is currently Director of Artistic Programming at ArtsEmerson, Boston's leading presenter of contemporary world theater. Prior to that appointment, she was Producer at Octopus Theatricals, advancing the work of many outstanding artists from development, to production, to touring in the US and internationally. These artists and projects include Byron Au Yong and Aaron Jafferis (*Activist Songbook*), DeLanna Studi (*And So We Walked*), Phantom Limb Company (*Falling Out*), Ripe Time (Haruki Murakami's *Sleep*), Homer's Coat (*An Iliad* by Denis O'Hare and Lisa Peterson), Christine Jones' Theatre for One, Poland's Song of the Goat Theatre, and many more. Ronee is a proud NEFA (New England Foundation for the Arts) National Theater Project Advisor and is on the Working Consortium of First Nations Performing Arts. She is on the board of The Producer Hub, is a core collaborator with Groundwater Arts, and is a Co-Founding Member of The Industry Standard Group, which looks to expand investment opportunities for BIPOC commercial producers.

Ronee's prior roles include NNPN Producer-in-Residence at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Senior New Play Producing Fellow and Directing Fellow at Arena Stage, and ASM for the national tour of Anna Deavere Smith's *Let Me Down Easy*. Ronee is a two-time ISPA (International Society for Performing Arts) Global Fellow, and has been an APAP (Association of Performing Arts Professionals) Leadership Fellow and TCG (Theatre Communications Group) Rising Leader of Color. Ronee also spent three years with the Consensus Building Institute, a non-profit specializing in facilitation and mediation services. Her current anti-racism practice builds upon a decolonization framework and embraces systems change as a key component of that work. She graduated with honors from Princeton University with a degree in Music with certificates in Vocal Performance and Theatre & Dance.

Michelle J. Rodriguez (she/her) is an artist who performs and writes in the worlds of music and theater. Raised in the Pacific Northwest and Kentucky by Puerto Rican parents, Michelle's work explores kids-of-immigrants stories, divine femininity, intuition, joy as resistance, healing and spaces in-between. Her music project MICHA became a finalist for NPR's 2018 Tiny Desk Contest with her song "Nena Nena Nena," praised for a "bilingual set spanning laid-back southern soul and Latin pop flare" (NPR). Ms. Rodriguez is a commissioned artist at Portland Center Stage and at Black Cap Productions, a Van Lier Fellow at Ars Nova in their Makers Lab, an Artist in Residence at the Lexington Theater Company in Lexington, KY and has received support from New York Theater Workshop, The Public Theater, the Sundance Institute, SPACE on Ryder Farm, The Sol Project, Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts, Salonathon and the University of Chicago.

Musicals include the bluegrass and folktale inspired *East o', West o'!* (Ars Nova/ANTFEST) and many works in development. Known for her concert works, she has presented *VISIONS* at Joe's Pub, *J. Lo at the Dance Call* at Ars Nova, and given concerts at Signature Theater, Rattlestick Theater, and presented a concert of *East o' West o'!* at Steppenwolf. Michelle made her Public Theater debut in 2019 composing the music for The Mobile Unit's production of *The Tempest* directed by Laurie Woolery and subsequently toured *MICHA MÚSICA: In Transit* in collaboration with The Mobile Unit and Joe's Pub.

Theatre performance credits include *The Conversationists* by Jerome Ellis and James Harrison Monaco (Bushwick Starr; “gorgeously sung” -NYT), *The Fly Honey Show* (The Inconvenience), *La Havana Madrid* (lead role u/s, Teatro Vista/Steppenwolf/Goodman Theater) (ALTA Award for Music Direction for Goodman run), Ava in *East o’, West o’!* (Ars Nova), and early iterations of *Hundred Days* by The Bengsons.

Michelle has kept up a rigorous international teaching artist practice, spending two years teaching music, theater and art at the Monteverde Friends School in Monteverde, Costa Rica and visiting King's Academy in Madaba, Jordan twice as an artist in residence. In the United States she has worked fostering creativity and teaching songwriting and musical theater songwriting in Vermont public schools, the Chicago Public Libraries, Greenwich House Music School and the Bushwick Starr in New York, Musical Theater Factory’s Musical Theater Institute, Voices From the Field at Centrum in Washington State, and through various residencies throughout the country.

Michelle was trained in voice as a high school student at the University of Kentucky under Dr. Noemi Lugo, is a proud public-school-trained violinist and received her BA in Theatre and Arabic Studies from Williams College. She is represented by WME. www.michamusica.com

Storm Thomas is a black-mixed trans/gnc writer, drummer and multi-hyphenate artist from Los Angeles who plays many instruments (drums, guitar, piano, mandolin, midi, etc.) and writes experimental, process-based, afro-futurist musicals: *Notes on the Past* (Trans Theater Fest), *Ancient Future* (in-house production, Polyphone Festival), and *Be Like Bone* (in progress). Storm is a co-founder of the performance collective Theater, But Dance. MFA, Sarah Lawrence College; undergraduate, UC Santa Cruz & CUNY Empire State. Proud member of Rainbow Theater & The African American Theater Arts Troupe (UCSC). Teaching: Black Musical Theater (Uarts), Music for Performance (Playwrights/NYU), New Musical Theater Lab beg. & adv (Uarts), Theater of the Oppressed NYC (Red Hook, Housing Works), Dreamyard (Musical Theater Factory), Completely Ridiculous Productions (Toward an Anti-Racist Theater). Dramaturgy: *Orchid Receipt Service* (Theater Mitu), *Guys and Dolls* (Uarts), *Noise* (The Public Theater, workshop). Workshops: *Elementary Spacetime Show* (Ars Nova), *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.* (Soho Rep), *The Temple* (Phreak and Queer Festival, PhilaMOCA), *Merced de Papel* (Vox Theater Festival, Dartmouth College), *Parade Ground* (Fresh Ground Pepper). Performances: Heather Christian’s *Animal Wisdom* Album Recording, *Streep Show* (Connelly Theater), Individual World Poetry Slam (Finals Stage), *The Skin of Our Teeth* (TFANA), *Futurity* (Soho Rep/Ars Nova), Obie Awards 2017, Lexus Verses & Flow Season 3 Episode 1 feat. Jill Scott, guest speaker at The Immersive Design Summit on Participation and Agency. Featured Compositions: Capricorn 29 (The Tank Online), "A Place for Us: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary Artists in Musical Theatre," Times Square Songs for Our City. New Visions Fellowship Finalist. Storm is currently in residence with Musical Theater Factory Cohort II, has been commissioned by Baltimore Center Stage and will be teaching Queer Musical Theater at NYU/Tish Drama in the fall.

Arts Entrepreneur in Residence

John Tyler is a 21-year-old artist, multi-instrumentalist, multi-genre producer, Founder of Love Groove Music Festival, and film scorer for Under Armour, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Visit Baltimore, and Maryland Public Television. He has been featured in upcoming HBO show “We Own The City”, Charm TV, Hulu Advertisements, BET Instagram Promotions, Baltimore Magazine, Afro Newspaper, Baltimore Sun, B’more Art, Baltimore’s 92Q, & WTMD. At 16, John released his first mixtape and has since released two more. In 2019, John’s debut album “The Good Side of Things” dropped, setting a high standard for Baltimore music. This project highlights his abilities to merge multiple genres into one.



At 17, John started the Love Groove Music Festival to bring together young artists from different genres of art to showcase talent and to offer learning and networking opportunities. This year marks his fifth showcase, partnering with Hot Sauce Artists Collective, Baltimore Center Stage, to bring an ultimate music, arts, and education festival.

For other media related inquiries and interview requests please contact the Communications office. For general information, visit www.centerstage.org or call the Box Office at 410.332.0033

About Baltimore Center Stage

Founded in 1963 and designated the State Theater of Maryland in 1978, [Baltimore Center Stage](http://www.centerstage.org) provides the highest quality theater and programming for all members of our communities, including youth and families, under the leadership of Artistic Director Stephanie Ybarra. Baltimore Center Stage ignites conversations and imaginations by producing an eclectic season of professional productions across two mainstages and an intimate 99-seat theater, through engaging community programs, and with inspiring education programs. Everything we do at Center Stage is led by our core values—chief among them being Access For All. The Baltimore Center Stage mission is heavily rooted in providing active and open accessibility for everyone, regardless of any and all barriers, to our Mainstage performances, education initiatives, and community programming.