

PRESS RELEASE

STUDIO
THEATRE

1501 14TH ST NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20005

202.232.7267
STUDIOTHEATRE.ORG

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
DAVID MUSE

CONTACT:

Mike Fila

Associate Director of Marketing and Communications

mfila@studiotheatre.org

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STUDIO THEATRE EMBARKS ON LARGEST ROUND OF COMMISSIONING IN ITS HISTORY, AWARDING GRANTS TO 10 THEATRE ARTISTS AND SUPPORTING AUDIO PLAYS FOR THE FIRST TIME

Building on over 40 years of producing powerful contemporary theatre, Studio Theatre is pleased to announce its largest class ever of commissioned artists to **Studio R&D**, its incubator to support the creation of new work. Studio will award grants to 10 artists—playwrights, directors, and multidisciplinary creators—investing in its future while supporting theatre-makers and expanding the idea of what it means to be a generative artist. For the first time, Studio R&D commissions are being awarded to support the creation of audio plays, as Studio explores alternate modes of theatrical storytelling in response to the present moment.

The latest individuals to join Studio R&D are: (creating audio plays) **Anne Washburn, Staceyann Chin, David Cale, and Ike Holter**; (directing) **Marti Lyons**; (creating new theatrical works) **Liliana Padilla, Steph Paul, Erika Dickerson-Despenza, Kimberly Belflower, and Brittany K. Allen**. Padilla and Paul will work collaboratively on a joint project.

“With the pandemic shuttering theaters around the country, two things seemed clear: There are great artists who have lost work. And many of these artists have time on their hands. So, we’ve expanded our commissioning class this year, welcoming nine writers and a director to our commissioned artists,” said Studio’s **Artistic Director David Muse**. “We’ve also expanded the kind of work we’re commissioning, inviting four very different writers to create audio plays in a Studio vein—we believe that they’ll meet the opportunity of the form in surprising ways. And for all of us, it’s important to keep creating work for the future, work inflected by the lives we’re living now, so it will be there for us when we can convene in person again.”

Muse introduced the Studio R&D commissioning program in 2012, inviting new and established writers to develop work for the theatre’s intimate spaces. Past commissions include: Stew and Heidi Rodewald, Vivienne Franzmann, Rachel Bonds, Clare Lizzimore, Mary Elizabeth Hamilton, Ike Holter, Aaron Posner, Sarah DeLappe, Abe Koogler, Qui Nguyen, Steph Del Rosso, Adam Bock, Emily Schwend, James Ijames, and James Fritz. In 2016, Studio began extending commissions to directors, which have included Lileana Blain-Cruz, Mike Donahue, and Jackson Gay.

ABOUT STUDIO R&D

Studio’s intimate spaces are uniquely suited to the immediacy of new work, providing a direct relationship between the actor and audience. Studio R&D is the Theatre’s incubator for new plays, new

relationships, and new modes of collaboration. Encompassing the full range of Studio's commissioning and development activities, Studio R&D supports artists through both the writing and development of their work, offering commissions, residencies, and artistic retreats for its artists. Studio R&D provides artists the resources and tools they need to create, and allows Studio to introduce aesthetically diverse new work into the international repertoire. It develops new work, fosters a culture of innovation that embraces rigor and risk-taking, and invests in new ideas and new ways of working.

ABOUT THE COMMISSIONED ARTISTS

Anne Washburn is a New York based playwright. Anne's plays include *Mr. Burns, A Post Electric Play* (*New York Times* Critic's Pick; recently listed as #4 on the *New York Times* "The 25 Best American Plays Since 'Angels in America'"), *Shipwreck, 10 out of 12*, *Antlia Pneumatica*, *A Devil at Noon*, *Apparition*, *The Communist Dracula Pageant*, *I Have Loved Strangers*, *The Ladies*, *The Internationalist*, *The Small*, an adaptation of *The Twilight Zone*, and transadaptations of Euripides' *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Her work has been produced nationally and internationally and has premiered with 13P, Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Almeida Theatre, American Repertory Theater, Cherry Lane Theatre, Classic Stage Company, Clubbed Thumb, The Civilians, Dixon Place, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Folger Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Soho Rep., Two River Theater, Vineyard Theatre, and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. Honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Whiting Award, an Alpert Award in the Arts, a PEN/Laura Pels Theater Award for artist in mid-career, a New York Film Academy Fellowship, a Time Warner Fellowship, and residencies at MacDowell Colony and Yaddo. She is an associated artist with The Civilians, Clubbed Thumb, New Georges, Chochiqq Backyard Theater, and is an alumna of New Dramatists.

Poet, actor, and performing artist **Staceyann Chin** is the author of the new poetry collection *Crossfire: A Litany For Survival*, the memoir *The Other Side of Paradise*, cowriter and original performer in the Tony Award-winning Russell Simmons' *Def Poetry Jam* on Broadway, and author of the one-woman shows *Hands Afire*, *Unspeakable Things*, *Border/Clash*, and *MotherStruck*. She has appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and *60 Minutes*, and her poetry been featured in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. She proudly identifies as Caribbean, Black, Asian, lesbian, a woman, and a resident of New York City, as well as a Jamaican national.

David Cale is the writer and performer of 11 solo works including *The History of Kisses*, which premiered at Studio Theatre, *Palomino* (Bay Area Critics Award), *A Likely Story*, *Lillian* (Obie Award), *Deep in a Dream of You* (Bessie Award), *Smooch Music*, and *The Redthroats* (Bessie Award), the latter two were both also presented at Studio Theatre. Cale wrote the book, lyrics, co-composed the music for, and starred in the musical *Floyd and Clea Under the Western Sky* (Outer Critics Circle Nomination) and collaborated with Dael Orlandersmith on *The Blue Album*. His most recent works include the solo play *Harry Clarke*, starring Billy Crudup, which premiered at the Vineyard Theatre and transferred to the Minetta Lane Theatre as the inaugural theatre production of Audible. For *Harry Clarke*, Cale received the 2018 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Solo Show. His solo musical memoir *We're Only Alive for A Short Amount of Time*, for which he wrote the book, lyrics, and co-composed the music with Matthew Dean Marsh, premiered at the Goodman Theatre and received the 2019 Jeff Award for Best New Musical and a Jeff nomination for Best Solo Performance. *We're Only Alive for A Short Amount of Time* opened at The Public Theater and received a 2020 Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Solo Performance, a 2020 Lucille Lortel Nomination for Outstanding Solo Show, and a 2020 Drama Desk Nomination for Outstanding Solo Performance.

Ike Holter is a Chicago playwright and winner of the Windham Campbell Prize, one of the highest awards for writing in the world. He's the writer of several award-winning plays including *Exit Strategy*, *Hit The Wall*, and *Lottery Day*. He was a writer for the Emmy-nominated series *Fosse/Verdon* on FX, and

won the Writers Guild Award for Best Long Form Adaptation. His commissions include South Coast Rep and Playwrights Horizons. He is a member of Victory Gardens Theater.

Marti Lyons was most recently directing the world premiere of *The Scarlet Letter* by Kate Hamill at South Coast Rep, which, unfortunately, never had a chance to open. Previous to that, Marti most recently directed *How to Defend Yourself* by Liliana Padilla at Victory Gardens Theater as part of a co-production with Actors Theatre of Louisville. Marti also directed *Cambodian Rock Band* by Lauren Yee (Victory Gardens Theatre, City Theatre in Pittsburgh, Merrimack Repertory Theatre); *Witch* by Jen Silverman (Geffen Playhouse in LA, Writers Theatre in Chicago); *The Niceties* by Eleanor Burgess (Writers Theatre); *Native Gardens* by Karen Zacarías (Victory Gardens Theatre); *Botticelli In The Fire* by Jordan Tannahill (Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company); *The Wolves* by Sarah DeLappe and *Kings* by Sarah Burgess (Studio Theatre); *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* (The Court Theatre); *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Montana Shakespeare in the Parks); Short Shakes! *Macbeth* and Short Shakes! *Romeo and Juliet* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre); *Wit* (The Hypocrites); and *The City of Conversation* by Anthony Giardina (Northlight Theatre Company). She directed *Wondrous Strange* by Meg Miroshnik, Martyna Majok, Jen Silverman, and Jiehae Park (2016 Humana Festival) and *Title And Deed* by Will Eno (Lookingglass Theatre Company). Other projects include Laura Marks' *Bethany and Mine*, and Will Nedved's *Body and Blood* (The Gift Theatre); Catherine Treischmann's *Hot Georgia Sunday* and Theresa Rebeck's *Seminar* (Haven Theatre); *Prowess* by Ike Holter, *The Peacock* by Calamity West, and *The Last Duck* by Lucas Neff (Jackalope Theatre); *The Play About My Dad* by Boo Killebrew (Raven Theatre); *Give it all Back* by Calamity West, *Mai Dang Lao* by David Jacobi, *9 Circles* by Bill Cain, *Maria/ Stuart* by Jason Grote, and co-directed *The Golden Dragon* (Sideshow Theatre). Marti was the 2015 Maggio Directing Fellow at the Goodman Theatre. Marti is an ensemble member at The Gift Theatre, an Artistic Associate with Sideshow Theatre and a proud member of SDC.

Liliana Padilla makes plays about sex, intersectional communities, and what it means to heal in a violent world. Their play *How to Defend Yourself* won the 2019 Yale Drama Prize and was a 2018-2019 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize Finalist. It was produced in the 2019 Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville and at Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago in 2020. Padilla's work has been developed with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ojai Playwrights Conference, Victory Gardens Theater, INTAR Theatre, Hedgebrook, Seattle Rep, the Playwrights' Center, and San Diego Repertory Theatre. They received their MFA from the University of California, San Diego, and their BFA from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Padilla is currently commissioned to make new plays with the National New Play Network, Colt Coeur, and South Coast Rep. They are also a director, actor, and community builder who looks at theatre as a laboratory for how we might be together.

Steph Paul is a choreographer and director who clears space for uninhibited, physical truth. What comes up must come out. She weaves together her lived experience as a first-generation Haitian-American, body percussionist, dancer, and athlete, and is passionate about art as a means to build a team. Steph's theatre and movement credits include Studio Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, City Theatre, Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Goodman Theatre, Court Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Third Rail Projects, National Theatre of Scotland, and Royal Opera House Muscat. Steph is a Resident Director of Albany Park Theater Project and an Artistic Associate of Chicago Dance Crash. She is a Helen Hayes Award winner, Jeff Award and St. Louis Theater Circle Award nominee, and an inaugural 3Arts Make a Wave grantee. Steph is a proud member of SDC and is in awe of the improbable comeback.

Erika Dickerson-Despenza is a Blk, queer, feminist poet-playwright, cultural worker, educator, and grassroots organizer from Chicago. She's the recipient of the 2020 Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award, a 2020 L. Arnold Weissberger New Play Award finalist, the recipient of the 2019 Princess Grace Awards Playwriting Fellow, and the 2019-2020 Tow Playwright-in-Residence at The Public Theater, where she is

also under commission. Erika is a 2020 Grist 50 Fixer and was a National Arts & Culture Delegate for the US Water Alliance's One Water Summit (2019). Residences and fellowships include: New York Stage and Film Dramatists Guild Fellow (2019), New Harmony Project Writer in Residence (2019), Dramatists Guild Foundation Fellow (2018-2019), and The Lark Van Lier New Voices Fellow (2018). Erika's work has also been developed at Vineyard Arts Project, The Public Theater, Victory Gardens Theater, Fault Line Theatre, and Jackalope Theatre. She is a 2019-2020 member of Ars Nova Play Group and a member of Ensemble Studio Theatre's Obie-winning Youngblood collective. Current plays in development: *ocean's lip/ heavn's shore*, *took/tied*, *hung/split*, *shadow/land*, and *cullud wattah* (2019 Kilroys List; The Public Theater, 2020). In addition to this water tetralogy, Erika is developing a 10-play Katrina Cycle, including [*hieroglyph*] (2019 Kilroys List), focused on the effects of Hurricane Katrina and its state-sanctioned man-made disaster.

Kimberly Belflower is a playwright and educator originally from a small town in Appalachian Georgia. Her play *Lost Girl* is published by Samuel French and won the 2018 Kennedy Center Darrell Ayers Playwriting Award. Her other plays include *John Proctor is the Villain* (2019 Kilroys List), *Gondal*, *The Use of Wildflowers*, and *The Sky Game*, which have been commissioned, produced, and developed by Ojai Playwrights Conference, South Coast Rep, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, The Farm Theater, We the Women Collective, Peppercorn Theatre, Less Than Rent Theatre, and The Cohen New Works Festival, as well as many colleges and universities across the country. Kimberly has also worked as a writer and narrative lead for Meow Wolf, Santa Fe's celebrated immersive arts company, and is currently a Playwriting Fellow at Emory University. She proudly holds an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin.

Brittany K. Allen is a Brooklyn-based writer and actor. She's a proud member of Ensemble Studio's Theatre's Obie-winning Youngblood collective, an alumna of the Emerging Writers Group at The Public Theater, and was a 2017 Van Lier New Voices fellow at the Lark. Her play *Redwood* (2017 Kilroys List) received its world premiere at Portland Center Stage in 2019, and will appear in upcoming seasons at the Jungle Theater and Ensemble Studio Theatre. She's developed work at Manhattan Theatre Club, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Ars Nova, the Lark, and Kansas City Repertory Theatre, and currently holds commissions from Playwrights Horizons and Manhattan Theatre Club/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Her writing has been supported by residencies at SPACE on Ryder Farm and the Sewanee Writers' Conference, where she is a recurring staff member. Recent acting credits include the world premiere of *Redwood* (Portland Center Stage), *Gloria: A Life* (Daryl Roth Theatre—DR2), *Minor Character* (New Saloon Theater Co.; New York Innovative Theatre Award for Best Ensemble), and workshops with Clubbed Thumb, Atlantic Theater Company, New Georges, the Dennis and Victoria Ross Foundation, and New York Stage and Film. Her prose appears or is forthcoming in *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, *Catapult*, *Kenyon Review Online*, and *Longreads*, among other places. Her short fiction has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She received her BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.

STUDIO THEATRE

Studio Theatre is Washington's premier venue for contemporary theatre, "where local audiences will find today's edgiest playwrights" (*Variety*). One of the most respected midsized theatres in the country, Studio produces exceptional contemporary drama in deliberately intimate spaces. Drawing inspiration from great ensembles—where people work together with a spirit of generosity and professional rigor—Studio brings characteristic thoughtfulness and daring to its work onstage and off, through its new work incubator and engagement, education, and workforce training initiatives. Studio serves nearly 75,000 people each year, including more than 1,000 youth and young adults through community engagement initiatives. Founded in 1978, the quality of Studio's work has been recognized by sustained community support, as well as 72 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in professional theatre.

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