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Contact:

Cleveland Public Theatre (OH), Company One Theatre (MA), Crowded Fire Theater (CA), Mosaic Theater Company (DC), and Perseverance Theatre (AK)

Announce

Major Grant from the Mellon Foundation for the Innovative Future of American Theatre Cohort.

Cleveland Public Theatre (OH), Company One (MA), Crowded Fire Theater (CA), Mosaic Theater Company (DC), and Perseverance Theatre (AK) are thrilled to announce an exciting new collaboration entitled The Future of American Theatre Cohort, bolstered by a generous \$2.5 million grant from the Mellon Foundation. Each of these organizations will receive \$500,000 from Mellon over two years to support their ongoing innovation, cultural change-making, and ambitious artistic programming.

In the face of dwindling arts funding and shrinking audiences, and while many theaters have been forced to shutter, these five small to midsize companies came together in Spring 2023 to share resources, foster collective learning, and champion new visions for the American Theater. Their goal, individually and collectively, is to center historically marginalized artists and audiences in all facets of their work while developing new models for artistic production, audience building, community engagement, new play development, and organizational leadership. Support from the Mellon Foundation will allow the cohort to better sustain their companies, as well as benefit from peer mentorship and collective learning through regular gatherings, in order to continue innovating strategies that can be replicated by the national field.

Each cohort member will focus their work on a unique area of expertise and exploration:

- Cleveland Public Theatre: Deep interconnectivity between communities served and the art on stage
- Company One Theatre: Neighborhood Activation & Production in Civic Spaces, entirely with free and Pay What You Want ticketing
- Crowded Fire Theater: Radical Shared Leadership
- Mosaic Theater Company: Equitable New Work Development Practices
- Perseverance Theatre: Decolonizing for Right-Purposed/Relations with Alaska Natives and all Native/Indigenous Peoples for Collective Liberation

Across their respective geographies and leadership structures, the organizations in this cohort have already begun collective exploration and peer mentorship with the common goal of building more equitable ecologies within their communities that prioritize fair wages for artists and staff, while deepening reciprocal local and national relationships.

"Each organization in this cohort has demonstrated local and national leadership capabilities through coalition-building and their practice of abundant collectivism," said Stephanie Ybarra, program officer for Arts and Culture at the Mellon Foundation, "The close collaborations on behalf of communities and the larger theater ecosystem is thrilling to see, and we're proud to be in partnership with them as they do this important work."

"The history of the regional theatre movement is founded on an idea that community theatre is amateur, creating an inherent divide between theatres that are community centered and those that are "professional. In this time of reckoning what drew us to this cohort was the incredible professionalism of each company and their profound sense of community and their work that is truly connected to the public! In the short time we have been together the cohort gatherings have proven to be a place of innovation and inspiration, and I can't wait to see how Cleveland, the theatre field, and the nation will be changed by the fundamental work of this grant." Raymond Bobgan, Executive Artistic Director, Cleveland Public Theatre

"Company One Theatre is grateful for support from the Mellon foundation. As an organization built on community and deeply collaborative relationships, we believe the future of the field is rooted in our theaters' abilities to collaborate in new and innovative ways. The future of the American Theater also requires a new positioning with the public, one that eliminates elitist notions that the non-profit theatre is created mostly for the white and privileged. Instead, the theatre will benefit from being redefined as a new form of public art, eliminating systemically problematic subscription models and ticket prices, in favor of community building with an audience that truly represents the cities where we make our work. The content of this new theatre will inherently provide truly diverse audiences an opportunity for connection, reflection and for the theatrical work to serve as a powerful tool for social change." -Shawn LaCount, Karthik Subramanian, & Summer L. Williams, Company One Theatre Leadership

"When Crowded Fire envisions the future of American theater, it is interconnected, values-led, vibrant, and THRIVING! This generous grant is a huge step towards realizing that radical vision, and we are so grateful to the Mellon Foundation for their support and investment in culture-shifting on both the regional and national scale. With these funds, we are excited to continue to evolve our new shared leadership model, focusing on sustainability for our staff, artists, and organization as a whole, while also cultivating relationships with some of the most inspiring companies across the country as part of this

innovative cohort of leaders.” — Riley Alyson, Caro Asercion, Nailah Harper-Malveaux, Julie McCormick, & Leigh Rondon-Davis, Shared Leadership Team, Crowded Fire Theater

“It is an honor to receive this remarkable support from the Mellon Foundation and to be in community with this cohort of inspiring leaders and peer theaters. At a time when our field is feeling the pressure to shrink, the Mellon Foundation’s support provides profound encouragement for us to remain unwavering in our commitment to reflecting the diversity of Washington DC on our stage and beyond. We look forward to continuing to center new work and a wide range of storytellers at the core of our vision and are so grateful to the Foundation and the cohort’s collaboration in this important aim.” - Reginald L. Douglas, Artistic Director, Mosaic Theater Company

“We at Perseverance Theater are profoundly moved and grateful to be and feel seen by the Mellon Foundation. This significant support offers the opportunity to continue our work in-community with this brilliant cohort of theater visionaries-change-makers. We are excited for the explorations that will continue to bring forth iterative creative and structural changes to deepen our work and collaborations with Alaska Natives and BIPOC communities of Alaska and the entire theater sector. We strive to contribute learnings for a more just and sustainable theater ecology that will also support the collective liberation, and therefore, the health and wellbeing of our communities.” – Leslie Ishii, Artistic Director, Perseverance Theatre, on the sacred homelands of the A’akw Kwáan on Tlingít Aaní and the Dena’ina on Dena’ ina Elnena.

ABOUT THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation’s largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at www.mellon.org

ABOUT CLEVELAND PUBLIC THEATRE

Cleveland Public Theatre’s mission is to raise consciousness and nurture compassion through groundbreaking performances and life-changing education programs. CPT develops new, adventurous work, and nurtures Northeastern Ohio artists—particularly those whose work is innovative and socially conscious. A majority of CPT’s work is by artists who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, including works by internal ensembles: The Cleveland CORE Ensemble, Masrah Cleveland Al Arabi and Teatro Publico de Cleveland.

Producing more new work than all the Northeast Ohio professional theatres combined, CPT serves local artists at every step of the creative process through our four developmental programs. Simultaneously, our acclaimed education programs engage communities in year round programs centering devising new works that speak to contemporary issues and empower participants to work for positive change in our community. Our programs serve 100s of families who live in public housing, working teens in the city, and formerly homeless adults in treatment for addiction. CPT serves a critical as a local anchor organization with multiple performance facilities—having catalyzed redevelopment and instigated a cultural renaissance in the once-blighted Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood. www.CPTonline.org

ABOUT COMPANY ONE THEATRE

Founded in 1998, Company One has situated itself as a home for social justice and artistic excellence by connecting Boston's diverse communities through live performance, the development of new plays and playwrights, arts education, and public engagement programming. By establishing a dedicated space for marginalized and alternative narratives to thrive and working with partners and collaborators across the city, Company One has become a local leader in the ongoing conversations that continue to define the era of social change in contemporary America.

Company One Theatre's work falls into four main areas: Productions, Education, New Play Development, and Connectivity. Over its 20+ year history Company One has produced over 80 productions, employed over 1500 local artists, and has been awarded over 30 Boston theatre awards. We have served over 100,000 audience members and 15,000 students. www.CompanyOne.org

ABOUT CROWDED FIRE THEATER

Crowded Fire Theater (CFT) is a critically acclaimed company for new play production on the West Coast. Known for developing and presenting poetic, bold, relevant works by up-and-coming playwrights, CFT contributes to the creation of a contemporary canon that reflects the diverse world in which we live. Operating with a shared leadership model, CFT produces one to three mainstage shows each season, and actively supports the creation of high-quality contemporary theater through commissions, in-house workshops, a playwright-in-residence, and an annual free public reading series. Leaders work in deep collaboration with an ensemble of Resident Artists comprising top Bay Area actors, designers, directors, and dramaturgs. This group, with its multiplicity of interests and ideas, as well as the dedication and talent of its members, represents one of the company's most significant strengths. Finally, in our 25-year history, CFT has cultivated rich, long-term relationships with our Bay Area audiences, serving as a true regional home for fierce, new plays. www.CrowdedFire.org

ABOUT MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY

Mosaic Theater Company produces bold, culturally diverse theater that illuminates critical issues, elevates fresh voices, and sparks connections among communities throughout the DC region and beyond. Mosaic's innovative education and engagement programming provides opportunities for community members of all ages and backgrounds to engage more deeply with the themes of Mosaic's plays. As a national leader in new play development work, Mosaic serves as an incubator for stories often untold on US stages. Mosaic is committed to investing in artists and advancing equity practices, which has garnered national attention and served as a model for other theaters. In its first eight seasons, Mosaic has produced over ten world premiere plays (with more underway), engaged nearly 4,500 students across all eight wards of DC through educational initiatives, programmed over 700 panel discussions and conversations, and commissioned or developed over 30 plays and musicals. Mosaic has received the John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company, and in 2022, Mosaic received eleven Helen Hayes nominations, including three for Outstanding New Play. www.MosaicTheater.org

ABOUT PERSEVERANCE THEATRE

At Perseverance Theatre, since the start of its new chapter in 2019, the Team has invited a deliberate and committed look at the makeup of the company, the practices housed by the theater, and what it means to be in right-relations and right-purpose with Alaska Native Elders, Leaders, their organizations, Culture Bearers, and Artists. Perseverance remains on the path to decolonize the colonial structures that are based in a dehumanizing transactional revenue model rather than a relational practice. It is a just and empowering endeavor to train and provide tools and resources to cultivate truly brave spaces on behalf of all BIPOC artists that work in our theatre-making and production processes. It is also exciting to support the Native/Indigenous Language/Arts and Culture Revitalization Movement with Perseverance Theatre's Native Language Translation Initiative. Humbly, Perseverance Theatre remains committed to examining its practices and iteratively changing its structures to continue to decolonize in service of our collective liberation that we know must stem from anti-racism, anti-oppression, and the support of the sovereignty of Alaska Natives and all Native/Indigenous Peoples. We are grateful to the Tlingít, Dena'ina, and Alaska Native Peoples for our ever-growing relations and collaborations with their Elders, Leaders, and organizations that bless us to continue our work and stewardship of Perseverance Theatre on Tlingít Aaní and Dena'ina Ełnena. These on-going changes support Perseverance Theatre to honor its mission of producing professional theatre by and for Alaskans.

www.PTAlaska.org