

Embargoed until April 12, 2018

DATE: April 2018

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Rose Theater play receives Kennedy Center honor***Upcoming play, Return to Niobrara,
to be included in Kennedy Center Festival***

(OMAHA, Nebr.) The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts will include a play commissioned by The Rose Theater in its 2018 New Visions/New Voices conference, taking place April 27-29, 2018. Dedicated to the development of new plays and musicals for young people and their families, this innovative series pioneers a unique and vital forum for the field of Theater for Young Audiences (TYA).

The Rose's play, ***Return to Niobrara***, is among seven new works by American playwrights being presented at the conference. ***Return to Niobrara*** tells a story that spans through the ages, starting with Chief Standing Bear, the Native American who stood up in court and demanded that a federal judge recognize that Indians were "persons" under the law. Fast forward 180 years, and Chief Standing Bear's great-great grandson, Steven, finds himself in an altercation where he is bullied at school on account of his long hair, Steven must follow in his grandfather's footsteps and speak out against his school district's attempt to force him to cut his hair, and ultimately, to erase his identity. Written by Mary Kathryn Nagle (citizen of the Cherokee Nation) and directed by Roxanne Wach, the play invites the audience to see the past emerging in our present, and ultimately what it means to truly stand for who we are.

While at the Kennedy Center, selected playwrights, directors, music directors, composers and actors work collaboratively in a weeklong intensive workshop setting to develop their projects. After revisions, rewrites and rehearsals of the new plays and musicals, the works are presented as rehearsed reading during a three-day national festival for theater professionals, educators and others interested in the field, which will include discussions, conversations and other events.

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The plays selected for this year's conference have common threads woven among their young protagonists. They each exist in different cultures, different countries, in the past and in the present. They transcend emotional, spiritual and physical obstacles, and, when they emerge on the other side, both they and the audience are changed.

Proposals for New Visions/New Voices are submitted by a theater and include a writer, director, and either the draft of an unproduced play for young and family audiences, or an idea/scenario/treatment for a play. Proposals go through a two-part adjudication process. First, an outside panel reads them; then a Kennedy Center committee reads the top proposals. Selections are made both on the quality of the potential project as well as creating a stimulating combination of shows for the outside audience. The shows are cast for the directors by our casting advisors from a pool of ethnically diverse Washington, DC area Equity actors, many experienced and gifted in new play development. The writer and director work with the actors for five days, 3-4 hours per day. They either rehearse mornings or afternoons, with the rest of the time spent on rewriting, conversations, and planning. The projects are presented for a small national conference of artistic directors, administrators, directors, playwrights, and educators (with 80-125 attending). A 20-30 minute facilitated discussion is held following each reading.

Since its inception in 1991, the program has assisted in the development of 80 new plays, musicals, and operas from 72 playwrights and 32 composers working with 51 US and 7 international theater companies.

"It is now more important than ever to cultivate imagination, curiosity and empathy in young people," says Jonathan Shmidt Chapman, Executive Director of Theatre for Young Audiences/USA. "In developing daring and original theater for them, New Visions/New Voices creates one of the most powerful vehicles to achieve this outcome. As opportunities to develop new work are scarce across the field, New Visions/New Voices continues to offer the vital opportunity to incubate new stories that will go on to surprise, delight and challenge children and their families across the county and around the world."

Upon returning its return from the conference, ***Return to Niobrara*** will be included in The Rose's 2018-19 season, making its world premiere on Jan. 25, 2019 and running through Feb. 10, 2019. It is a part of The Rose's membership package; members receive four free tickets to the production.

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About the Playwright, Mary Kathryn Nagle

Mary Kathryn Nagle is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation. She currently serves as the Executive Director of the Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program. She is also a partner at Pipestem Law, P.C., where she works to protect tribal sovereignty and the inherent right of Indian Nations to protect their women and children from domestic violence and sexual assault. Nagle has authored numerous briefs in federal appellate courts, including the United States Supreme Court. She is a frequent speaker at law schools and symposia across the country. Following law school, she clerked at the United States District Court, District of Nebraska in Omaha, where on May 12, 2009, she worked to produce and write a play (along with director Roxanne Wach) that commemorated the 130th anniversary of a trial wherein the federal court in Omaha became the first court in the United States to declare Indians to be “persons” under the law. This play, *Waaxe’s Law*, was later presented at the Newsuem, New York University School of Law, and the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian.

She is an alumn of the 2012 PUBLIC THEATER Emerging Writers Group, where she developed her play *Manahatta* in PUBLIC STUDIO (May 2014). Her productions include *Miss Lead* (Amerinda, 59E59, January 2014), and *Fairly Traceable* (Native Voices at the Autry, March 2017), as well as *Sovereignty* (Arena Stage, January 2018), and *Manahatta* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival, April 2018). In 2019, the Rose Theater will produce her new children’s play, *Return to Niobrara*.

She has received commissions from Arena Stage (*Sovereignty*), the Rose Theater (Omaha, Nebraska), Portland Center Stage, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and Yale Repertory Theater. Her other plays include *Diamonds are a Boy’s Best Friend*, *Waaxe’s Law*, *Sliver of a Full Moon*, and *My Father’s Bones*.

About the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

As the nation’s center for the performing arts, the Kennedy Center is committed to increasing opportunities for all people to participate in and understand the arts. To fulfill that mission, the Center strives to commission, produce, and present performances reflecting the highest standards of excellence and diversity indicative of the world in which we live, and to make those performances accessible to the broadest possible audience through arts education.

The Kennedy Center believes that the arts are one of humanity’s most eloquent means of understanding the world. Through the arts, we share the highest achievements of every culture and find a universal language which permits communication among all peoples. As such, the arts are an essential component of a complete education.

Through the years, studies have discovered what the Kennedy Center has known for a long time: that the inclusion of the performing arts in a broad-based curriculum improves the quality of a child’s educational experience. The arts teach discipline, improve self-esteem, inspire creativity, and help young people to set and reach goals. Knowledge of the arts makes good teachers better and makes participating schools exciting, challenging places for children--places where they are encouraged to explore, to create, and to reach their full potential.

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