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Austene Van named Yellow Tree Theatre’s new Producing Artistic Director

The Twin Cities’ Yellow Tree Theatre has announced Austene Van will be its next Producing Artistic Director, following the departure of Jason Peterson and Jessica Lind Peterson, who founded the theater in 2008. Ms. Van has been a powerhouse in the Twin Cities theater community and beyond for 35 years. A social justice based director, performer, choreographer, administrator and educator, she has been a staple at renowned stages, including: The Guthrie, Penumbra, Children’s Theatre Company, Ten Thousand Things and Mixed Blood, among others. Ms. Van is a 2013-2014 McKnight Theatre Fellow, a Woodie Award nominee and an Ivey recipient. She served as Associate Artistic Director of History Theatre from 2011-2013, where she curated new work for Raw Stages Play Festivals, and is the founding Artistic Director of the Twin Cities based [New Dawn Theatre Company](#). Yellow Tree fans will remember her critically-acclaimed staging of *The Royale* by Marco Ramirez in 2018 (named a *Top Ten Production of the Year* by Minneapolis Star Tribune), as well as her 2020 staging and co-production of *Skeleton Crew* by Dominique Morisseau which coincidentally, was the last fully-staged production seen at Yellow Tree before the pandemic hit.

In a mere twelve years, the nationally acclaimed, award winning Yellow Tree has made a huge splash in the Twin Cities’ theater scene. A recipient of a National Theatre Company Grant from the American Theatre Wing, two Ivey Awards, the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council Arts Achievement Award, and with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the McKnight Foundation, and Minnesota State Arts Board, Yellow Tree stages productions that consistently sell out and draw artists from prominent Twin Cities stages. Despite the pandemic, Yellow Tree is still standing strong and has been offering audiences a series of outdoor and virtual programming created by local artists.

After running Yellow Tree for over twelve years, Jason and Jessica Lind Peterson recently announced their departure to pursue new opportunities in Duluth. Says Jessica, “As we contemplated stepping away from Yellow Tree, Austene Van was always in our minds as someone who we knew would be an extraordinary successor. As a director and co-producer, she has brought some of YTT’s most beautiful and impactful plays to life on our stage. Our patrons already know Austene and her work, she is deeply rooted in and cares for this community, and we feel a kindred spirit with her that is a little bit magical. She is passionate about caring for artists, passionate about opening YTT’s doors wider to be more inclusive, and as an artist and educator she has a legacy in the Twin Cities that is truly unparalleled. After a national search led by our amazing search committee and board of directors that spanned many months, Jason and I are over the moon that she rose to the

top. Austene is one of the bravest, most versatile, most compelling theater makers in the Twin Cities. With her at the helm, Yellow Tree will be in very capable hands.”

“I am deeply rooted and dedicated to touching diverse communities with excellent art which peaks awareness, transforms and empowers by way of giving vision to those that may feel unseen and voice to those that may feel unheard through powerful, relatable and often joyful stories of our shared human experiences,” says Ms. Van. “Which is why assuming the role of Yellow Tree’s Producing Artistic Director is a perfect fit for me. Plainly put, what Jason and Jessica have built with Yellow Tree – their mission, commitment to community, diversity, inclusion and dynamic programming is the blood that runs through my marrow, aligning with who I have been and have become as an artist, educator, administrator and theater maker. Because of the Petersons’ work, Yellow Tree audiences are already primed for stellar, cutting-edge content, diverse casting, new work and classic plays with relevant twists. This beautiful and brilliant couple have founded and established something so special, nothing short of extraordinary. And I am overjoyed to carry on Yellow Tree’s bright torch and expand upon their rich legacy.”

New Dawn Theatre Company will continue its programming. The artistic leadership and its Board of Directors will continue to exist and fulfill the company’s mission as an Art for Social Justice organization. Among other works, New Dawn will continue to offer its programming of *A Breath for George* to various institutions, organizations and communities. In this time of transition, New Dawn has appointed Company Member Andre Shoals as its Associate Director of Community Outreach and he will be responsible for all day-to-day operations. New Dawn plans to mount one play per year as a co-production with Yellow Tree.

For more information visit: <http://www.yellowtreetheatre.com>

