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THEATER MU ANNOUNCES THE MEMBERS OF ITS NEW EMERGING PLAYWRIGHTS’ CIRCLE

The Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Cohort will meet for eight weeks to polish their craft and learn about the industry.

(Minneapolis/Saint Paul) – Theater Mu is once again expanding its artist development programming by introducing the Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Circle, a cohort for local Asian Americans at the genesis of their playwriting careers. The program is designed and facilitated by Mu Literary Associate Jane Peña and Mu Artistic Associate Annie Jin Wang, with the inaugural 2022 members being Philip de Sa e Silva, Emma Y. Lai, Katie Rein, and Sunny Thao.

“The Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Circle is an exciting part of Mu’s commitment to nurturing and developing early-career Asian American theater artists,” Mu Artistic Director Lily Tung Crystal says. “Like our Mu Tang Clan, Mu Training Institute, and design, directing, and dramaturgy assistantships and fellowships, the cohort will widen the artist circle not only for Mu, but for Asian American theater at large. And it couldn’t be in better hands with such generous and astute artists as Jane and Annie.”

HOW THE COHORT WORKS

The idea for the Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Circle began in 2021 as Peña and Wang discussed how the training they had received in the wider world didn’t always center their needs or experiences. To address these gaps with the cohort, the four members, Peña, and Wang will meet weekly for eight weeks to workshop drafts, discuss industry practices and opportunities, and more.

Peña says, “Annie and I could not be more thrilled to see this cohort launch this summer. We are so excited to nurture and get to know these four Twin Cities playwrights by writing,
reading, and attending theater together during these eight weeks. We have spent so long dreaming about this, and we can’t wait to finally experience the fruition of the Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Circle.”

In addition to the weekly meetings, the cohort members will also receive a small stipend to remove access barriers to the Twin Cities arts scene, as well as comped tickets to productions by Artistry, Chanhassen Dinner Theatres, Guthrie Theater, History Theatre, Lyric Arts, Minnesota Fringe Festival, and Park Square Theatre.

Wang says, “The Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Circle was borne out of our desire to create a foundational space for emerging Asian American artists to generate their body of work in an environment that will specifically serve them. Through my own work with Mu over the past few years, I’ve been fortunate to experience firsthand the vibrancy of the Twin Cities theater community, and it’s very exciting to see that our artists’ development will be supported not just by this program, but by many other theaters in the area.”

MEET THE CIRCLE

The 2022 Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Circle includes theater appreciators and theater workers, writers hoping to complete their first full-length play, and artists who want to continue ongoing projects while learning more about the craft from a production perspective. Across all four of the members’ applications were hopes to help diversify Asian American stories.

As Philip de Sa e Silva, a former English teacher and recent law school graduate, writes in his application, “I believe everyone has a valuable story and perspective to share, and I want to become more confident in sharing mine and helping others share theirs.”

Emma Y. Lai is an early-career theater director and producer who hopes the cohort connection will help better her playwriting. “I’m someone who gets very inspired through consistent conversation and discussion, and I know these sessions would have a huge impact on helping my progress as a writer,” she writes in her application. She adds that she also hopes to explore and discuss how other Asian Americans see themselves in her writings.

Sunny Thao, who has previously worked with Theater Mu as assistant stage manager for Man of God, also looks forward to the support the cohort provides. Grad school is one of the steps toward her goal of being a full-time playwright and theater maker, so she aims to finish a script she can use to apply to playwriting programs. “I also hope to explore different writing styles and find one that fits my voice,” she writes. “I hope this Circle exposes me to new work to help me better create worlds and dialogues.”

As for emerging playwright and screenwriter Katie Rein, her application to the Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Circle brought up three pivotal moments in her life: Theater Mu’s 2016 production of Charles Francis Chan Jr.’s Exotic Oriental Murder Mystery and the films Crazy Rich Asians and Minari. She cried at all three. “All tears aside,” she writes, “these three experiences of Asian representation opened my mind to so many possibilities and fostered even more passion to try my hand at storytelling.”
“When I moved here during the pandemic,” she continues, “I started to remember that even though we were bearing witness to cruel acts of violence against our community as COVID raged on, the world was and is still transforming for the better in other heartening ways. Theater Mu inspired me just a few short years earlier, and recently so many other works have come to do the same.”

Please contact Lianna McLernon at 612-709-3324 or lianna@theatermu.org with any press requests. You can find individual bios for the Mu Emerging Playwrights’ Circle on our website page.

THEATER MU (pronounced MOO) is the second largest Asian American theater company in the nation. Founded in 1992, Mu tells stories from the heart of the Asian American experience, presenting a fusion of traditional and contemporary artistic influences, which range from classics to up-and-coming voices in our community. Theater Mu’s continuing goal to celebrate and empower the Asian American community through theater is achieved through mainstage productions, emerging artist support, and educational outreach programs. Theater Mu is a member of the Consortium of Asian American Theaters & Artists as well as a member of the Twin Cities Theatres of Color Coalition, proudly standing alongside New Native Theatre, Pangea World Theater, Penumbra Theatre, and Teatro Del Pueblo. | theatermu.org

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