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FST PRESENTS THE NNPN WOMEN IN PLAYWRITING FESTIVAL

(Sarasota, FL) –Florida Studio Theatre announces that, in association with the National New Play Network (NNPN), it will produce and host the NNPN Women in Playwriting Festival this spring. Part of FST’s Sarasota Festival of New Plays, this three-week Festival will take place throughout April and May, with staged readings of the featured plays in FST’s Keating Theatre on April 26, May 3, and May 10, and in FST’s Bowne’s Lab Theatre on April 24. The series of staged readings is free and open to the public, but reservations are required. Reservations can be made online at floridastudiotheatre.org, by phone at (941) 366-9000, or by visiting the FST Box Office.

As Sarasota’s Contemporary Theatre, new play development is at the core of FST’s programming. FST’s New Play Development Program is dedicated to providing a forum for new works to be heard, discussed, and workshopped. The four playwrights featured in this Festival—Sarah Bierstock, Minita Gandhi, Jacqueline Goldfinger, and Lia Romeo—will each come to Sarasota for a week of rehearsals and development sessions with FST’s artistic staff. At the end of each week, a staged reading of their play will be performed, followed by a talkback session in which the playwrights will receive feedback from Sarasota’s socially and politically diverse audiences. These sessions are essential to the development and creation of new plays, and enable playwrights to view their piece from new perspectives.

In order to commemorate the bicentennial celebration of women’s suffrage in America, which is taking place in August 2020, FST has designated this year’s Richard and Betty Burdick New Play Reading Series to be the NNPN Women in Playwriting Festival. This Festival is just one of many events and programs that are part of FST’s 18-month long arts and community initiative, *The Suffragist Project: Celebrating 100 Years of the Woman’s Right to Vote*.

“Now more than ever, it’s so important for arts organizations to support women and amplify women’s voices,” shared Lia Romeo, one of the playwrights featured in the Festival. “This festival of women playwrights will give each of us the chance to develop our own plays, with the support of a theater full of amazing artists, and will also give us the chance to network and connect with other women writers. Community is the lifeblood of theater, and while every theater is a community in itself, NNPN allows theaters and playwrights from across the country to be in community with each other.”

The Festival begins the week of April 22 with an untitled work in progress by Sarah Bierstock, whose first play, *Honor Killing*, received its WORLD PREMIERE production at FST last spring. Bierstock’s next project focuses on the Ehrlichs, an all-female family that gathers together for the Christmas holiday following the death of the family matriarch. Daughters Sadie, Becca, and Stephanie do their best to manage their mother’s erratic ways while also navigating their own struggles with infertility, infidelity, and health. FST will be the first theatre to workshop this new play, which will receive a staged reading on April 24 in FST’s Bowne’s Lab Theatre.

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The Festival continues with *Babel* by Jacqueline Goldfinger, which will receive a staged reading on Friday, April 26. In *Babel*, prospective parents in a near-future society learn within the first weeks of conception which traits their child will have and what behaviors he or she is likely to exhibit. Based on these test results, the parents are either issued a PRE certification, which legally guarantees the baby will be a "good" person, or not. Without the certification, the child will be limited in what s/he is allowed to do. The play focuses on two couples, both early in their pregnancies, as they collide over what to do with their PRE certification test results. *Babel* asks, with the rapid advances in reproductive technology that exist, how far will we go when playing God?

Following *Babel* is Lia Romeo's *The Forest* on May 3, which was developed at the 2018 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. *The Forest* follows the journeys of Juliet, who is in the process of losing her marriage, and her mother Pam, who is losing her memory. Meanwhile, a mysterious forest starts to grow in the family's living room. *The Forest* explores unconventional love and how to proceed when there appears to be no right answers.

Concluding the NNPN Women in Playwriting Festival is *MUTHALAND* by Minita Gandhi on May 10, which has been called "A funny, brash, and truthful portrait of embracing one's past without being smothered by it" by the *Chicago Tribune*. Inspired by conversations with her parents about their life journeys, *MUTHALAND* tells of a young woman's trip to India for her brother's arranged marriage. During the trip, she unearths family secrets, encounters a prophet, and ultimately discovers her voice within a culture of silence. In this dark comedy about identity, spirituality, and sexuality, the distinction between familiar and foreign becomes blurred.

Public readings of select plays by female playwrights presented through the NNPN Women in Playwriting Festival will take place in FST's Bowne's Lab and Keating Theatres on April 24, April 26, May 3, and May 10 at 3PM each day. This series is free of cost and open to the public, but reservations are required. Reservations can be made online at floridastudiotheatre.org, by phone at (941) 366-9000, or by visiting the FST Box Office.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

Honor Killing is actress **Sarah Bierstock's** first play, and its WORLD PREMIERE ran for 8 weeks last spring at Florida Studio Theatre (FST) to full capacity audiences and received its second production this past September at Athena Project in Denver, CO. *Honor Killing* was read June (2018) at WAM Theater in West Stockbridge, CT, as part of the Fresh Takes Series. In 2017, it was one of three plays featured in the New Works Reading Series at the Athena Theater, the New Play Festival at FST, and the PROJECT W Festival at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City (InProximity Theater). Sarah received an award for 2nd Runner up for The Woodward International Playwriting Prize at the University of New Hampshire earlier in 2017, where two readings of *Honor Killing* were conducted both at the University of New Hampshire and the 3S Artspace in Portsmouth, NH. *Honor Killing* received Honorable Mention for the Bridge Initiative Playwriting Contest: Playwright of the Year Award, was a Finalist for the 2017 Ashland New Play Festival, a Semi-Finalist for the Bay Area Playwrights Festival (2017), a Semi-Finalist for the Premier Stages 2017 Play Festival, a Semi-Finalist for the Id Theaters 2017 Playwriting Conference, a Finalist for the Hudson River Artists Playwriting Award (2017), 1 of 29 in final consideration for the PlayPenn New Play Development Conference (2017), a Semi-Finalist for 2016 Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, a Semi-Finalist for Stage Left Theatre's Playwriting Residency (Chicago, 2017) and was part of The John Drew Theater Lab at Guild Hall (East Hampton, NY). Sarah was honored to be commissioned by Center Stage (Baltimore) to participate in the "My America: She" project. She is currently working on her second play, and was honored to have the opportunity to workshop the piece as part of Florida Studio Theatre's Playwrights Collective in the Fall 2018. She is heading back down to

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FST this April (2019) to join FST's Women's Playwriting Festival and will return in the spring of 2020 for FST's Suffragists Project.

Minita Gandhi is a playwright/actress who was born in Mumbai, India. Raised in the Bay Area, Minita cultivated an artistic home for herself in Chicago for over a decade before moving to Los Angeles, where she currently resides. *MUTHALAND* recently finished a West Coast run at PCPA Theaterfest in October 2018, following the sold-out run of its WORLD PREMIERE production at 16th Street Theater (Chicago), where it was extended twice before it closed at the end of October 2017.

MUTHALAND was workshopped and developed in Chicago at Silk Road Rising Theater and was an official selection of the Ignition Festival of New Plays at Victory Gardens (2016), the CAATA Festival at Oregon Shakespeare Festival (2016), the Statera Foundation for Women in the Arts Conference at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts (2016), the Age and Gender Equity in the Arts Symposium (2017), and has been performed at colleges and universities around the country. It was also selected for the Anne Frank Social Justice Festival at SUNY in Buffalo, NY (2017) and for The Great Performances Series at Hope College in Holland, MI (2019).

Jacqueline Goldfinger is a playwright, storyteller, and poet. She teaches playwriting at the University of Pennsylvania.

Goldfinger won the Yale-Horn Drama Prize for Emerging Playwright, Smith Prize for Political Theater, Virginia Brown Martin Award for Social Justice, Barrymore Award for Outstanding New Play, and Philadelphia Critics Award for Best New Play. She has been nominated for the Weissberger Award, Blackburn Prize, and Foote Prize. Her plays include *Babel* (NNPN/Florida Studio Theatre Residency), *Bottle Fly* (The National Theatre's New Work Studio/London, Wilma Theatre's HotHouse, PlayPenn New Play Conference), *The Arsonists* (Kennedy Center Page-to-Stage, La MaMa, National New Play Showcase, Sewanee Writers Conference, Disquiet/Lisbon, Kenyon Playwrights Conference, Perseverance Theatre, Azuka Theatre, Capital Stage, Know Theatre, Benchmark Theatre, Thrown Stone Theatre), *Click* (Theatre Exile's X-hibition Series, Emerson Stage Residency, Drama League Residency, Westport Playhouse New Works, Kansas City Rep OriginKC New Works), *Skin & Bone* (Azuka Theatre, Bloomsberg Theatre Ensemble, Orlando Shakespeare PlayFest, Arden Theatre Writer's Room), *Slip/Shot* (Seattle Public, Flashpoint Theatre, PlayPenn New Play Conference, The Lark's Playwrights Week), *The Oath* (Manhattan Theatre Works, Acadiana Rep, Last Frontier Writers Conference), and *The Terrible Girls* (Azuka Theatre, NYC International Fringe Festival, San Diego Playwrights Collective).

Lia Romeo's (Playwright) play, *The Forest*, was developed at the 2018 O'Neill National Playwrights' Conference. Other plays she has written have been produced at 59E59, Project Y Theatre Company, Unicorn Theatre, HotCity Theatre, Stillwater Theatre, Renegade Theatre Experiment, Forward Flux Productions, West of 10th, New Origins Theatre Company, Jersey City Theater Center, Porch Light Productions, The Skeleton Rep, MCS Theater, Vermont Pride Theatre, and Xpressions Performing Arts Network, and have been developed at the Lark, San Francisco Playhouse, Orlando Shakespeare Theater's PlayFest, and elsewhere. She has been nominated for the ATCA/Steinberg Award for best new play, the NYIT Award for outstanding full-length play, and has been recognized by the Heideman Award (finalist) and the Kilroys List (honorable mention). She was a 2018 Individual Artist Fellowship winner in playwriting from the New Jersey State Council for the Arts, and was the National New Play Network Emerging Playwright-in-Residence at Writers Theatre of New Jersey. She is currently a member of the Project Y Playwrights Group and a company member with InViolet Theater. She is also the Associate Artistic Director at Project Y Theatre Company and the New Play Coordinator at Jersey City Theater Center.

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ABOUT THE SARASOTA FESTIVAL OF NEW PLAYS

The Sarasota Festival of New Plays seeks to provide a forum for playwrights of all ages to develop plays that can be fruitfully produced. From our young playwrights to our emerging adult playwrights and seasoned play-writing veterans, the Sarasota Festival of New Plays aims to broaden the breadth and depth of thought in American theatre by encouraging people of all ages and all perspectives to write plays. New Play Development is the lifeblood of FST. It is a year-round activity that is fully integrated into each of the theatre's other programs. FST's approach to new play development focuses on the continued life of the work. Aside from presenting world premieres, such as Sarah Bierstock's *Honor Killing* (2018), FST frequently provides plays with their second, third or fourth productions. Examples include *Black Pearl Sings!* (2009), which was given its third production at FST, and was one of the top produced plays nationally in 2010. The 2014 selection *Dancing Lessons* went on to rave reviews for FST. In addition, in partnership with the National New Play Network, FST has presented the rolling world premieres of *Shotgun* by John Biguenet (2010) and *Doublewide* by Stephen Spotswood (2017).

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Known as Sarasota's Contemporary Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre was founded in 1973 by artist, Jon Spelman. Starting out as a small touring company, FST traveled to places such as migrant camps and prisons. The company then acquired the former Woman's Club building, becoming the first permanent venue. Shortly after Producing Artistic Director, Richard Hopkins arrived, the building was purchased and renamed The Keating Theatre. In the years that followed, Florida Studio Theatre established itself as a major force in American Theatre, presenting contemporary theatre in its five theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Gompertz Theatre, the Parisian style Goldstein Cabaret and John C. Court Cabaret, and Bowne's Lab Theatre.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to a broad-based audience. FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. As FST grows and expands, it continues to provide audiences with challenging, contemporary drama and innovative programs.

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