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DATE: October 3, 2018

LIA ROMEO'S *THE FOREST* GROWS AT FST

(Sarasota, FL) – Florida Studio Theatre (FST) presents a new play workshop of Lia Romeo's *The Forest*, a touching new dark comedy about a mother and daughter who experience extreme change in their lives. Romeo will collaborate with FST's Artistic staff on furthering the work from October 22-26, culminating in a staged reading of the play on Friday, October 26 at 3 PM in FST's Bowne's Lab Theatre. This event is presented as part of FST's expanding New Play Development program, and is free and open to the public, however, reservations are required. Reservations can be made online at www.floridastudiotheatre.org, by phone at (941) 366-9000, or by visiting the FST Box Office.

The Forest centers on main character Juliet, who is in the process of losing her marriage. At the same time, her mother Pam is losing her memory, and a mysterious forest is beginning to grow in their living room. *The Forest* explores untraditional love and what to do when it seems like there are no right answers. "I've always been interested in the question of how people manage to endure things that feel unendurable," explained Lia Romeo. "I don't know the answer, because I don't really think there is one. A lot of the play is just about people doing the next thing –not even the 'next right thing,' because a lot of times it's the wrong thing –but the next thing, and being really sad and just doing it anyway."

Called "An exciting new writer who has her collaborators straining to keep up" by *Theatermania*, Lia Romeo is one of New York's biggest up-and-coming female playwrights. In addition to *The Forest*, Romeo has written nine other full-length plays, including *Green Whales*, *Connected*, *Hungry*, and *Right Place, Right Time*, dealing with issues of technology, eating disorders, alcoholism, and the nature of love.

As Sarasota's Contemporary Theatre, FST is at the forefront of presenting the best new plays written in America today. FST's New Play Development Program is dedicated to providing a forum for new works in all stages of development to be heard, discussed, and workshopped.

The Forest was last presented in July at the 2018 Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference, one of the country's leading programs dedicated to the development of new work. This October at FST, the play will undergo development with support from FST's team of professional artists, and will have an opportunity to receive input from a socially and politically diverse audience.

Directing *The Forest* is FST Associate Artist Catherine Randazzo. "In *The Forest*, Lia Romeo's exploration of the human spirit spans a palpable mother-daughter relationship, devastating early-onset dementia, and examines questions of love in the face of loss – and does so with unflinching humor and dignity," shared Randazzo. "Everything about *The Forest*, and Lia's voice itself, is nuanced, from the strong female narrative to the explosive deconstruction of morality: is there such a thing as good love? As bad love? Who decides?"

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FST's workshop presentation of Lia Romeo's *The Forest* is presented as part of FST's expanding New Play Development program. The work in progress will undergo one week in script development with FST's Artistic team, culminating in a staged public reading on Friday, October 26 at 3 PM in FST's Bowne's Lab Theatre. This event is free and open to the public, however, reservations are required. Reservations can be made online at www.floridastudiotheatre.org, by phone at (941) 366-9000, or by visiting the FST Box Office.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Lia Romeo's play *The Forest* was developed at the 2018 O'Neill Playwrights' Conference. Other plays 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 and 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. She is the author of a novel, *Dating the Devil* (Amazon bestseller, optioned by ABC Family), and a humor book, *11,002 Things to Be Miserable About* (sold over 35,000 copies worldwide). Her plays are published by Playscripts, Broadway Play Publishing, Dramatists Play Service, and Smith & Kraus. She earned her B.A. from Princeton University and her M.F.A. in playwriting from Rutgers/MGSA, and she teaches in the graduate creative writing program at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

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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