

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **SOULPEPPER IS COMMISSIONING SIX NEW WORKS FROM SIX FEMALE PLAYWRIGHTS**

### **SOULPEPPER SUPPORTING TOP WOMEN CAMPAIGN TO FURTHER ELEVATE FEMALE VOICES AND STORIES**

**Toronto, ON – October 1, 2020: Soulpepper Theatre Company** today announced the launch of **Six Women Writing**, an exciting commissioning project engaging a diverse assembly of six of Canada's top voices, **Trey Anthony, Sandra Caldwell, Falen Johnson, Hannah Moscovitch, Kat Sandler, and Erin Shields** with incredible stories to write. Together, Soulpepper Artistic Director **Weyni Mengesha** and Executive Director **Emma Stenning** are deeply committed to championing female voices on Soulpepper's stages. The commissioning project is a vital step in ensuring women's voice and stories get produced at Soulpepper, and in making a necessary change for the future of the industry.

To further support the playwrights and the eventual development of the six new plays, the Company is pleased to be launching the 2020 **Soulpepper Supporting Top Women** campaign, an inclusive campaign inviting male, female and non-binary allies to help support and celebrate women in creative roles at Soulpepper and within the sector. The Soulpepper Supporting Top Women campaign has been bringing like-minded allies together for over 10 years, and in 2019, \$50K was raised to support female leadership and creativity. To learn more and donate visit: [www.soulpepper.ca/topwomen](http://www.soulpepper.ca/topwomen).

*"We're commissioning new plays from these six women who have been working hard in our industry for years and made incredible names for themselves. They each have incredible stories to tell and I could not be more thrilled about what they are working on. My hope is that by aligning the Soulpepper Supporting Top Women campaign with this project, we are creating a space to bring these powerhouse playwrights together, have them experience each other's work, and to show audiences what the industry could look like when women's voices are invested in and prioritized,"* said **Weyni Mengesha**, Artistic Director.

The world has shifted, shedding light on significant inequities in the theatre industry and beyond. While important discussions about intersectionality and gender parity are being had, statistics show that female playwrights continue to be underrepresented throughout the national cultural cannon of produced works. Only 31% of Canadian staged productions were written by women in the 2018/19 theatre season, and less than 0.5% by trans and non-binary artists.

This commissioning project is ensuring that women's voices get heard and elevated. It serves as a creative space to bring these playwrights together to share ideas, to continue to explore and expand on their works, to mentor emerging artists, and be mentored themselves. In addition, they will have the chance to hold development workshops which will ensure the plays have the potential to be brought to the stage in the coming years. Production of plays from the **Six Women Writing** project will also present new opportunities for female directors, actors, and production professionals ensuring that women's work is represented and celebrated on our stages.

The **Six Women Writing** project has also provided an exciting opportunity to form new artistic relationships and engage in the Company's first international co-commission. **Trey Anthony's** *Two People Almost In Love* is co-commissioned by Soulpepper and [True Colors Theatre Company](http://www.truecolorstheatre.com) in Atlanta, Georgia, led by Artistic Director **Jamil Jude**.

"Soulpepper's Top Women program champions women in leadership roles at Soulpepper, and we energized by this empowering opportunity to support this diverse compliment of six extraordinary playwrights. The Six Women Writing commissioning project will initiate a wave of new stories that we can't wait to see on the Soulpepper stage and beyond," said Co-Chairs, **Denise Donlon** and **Sanjay Nakra**.

**Six Women Writing** is an initiative within Project imagiNation which is supported by Kevin and Roger Garland and BMO Financial Group. By generously joining the **Soulpepper Supporting Top Women** campaign, donors are making a clear commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. For details and to donate to the Soulpepper Supporting Top Women fundraising campaign visit [www.soulpepper.ca/topwomen](http://www.soulpepper.ca/topwomen).

## SIX WOMEN WRITING COMMISSIONS

### TREY ANTHONY

*Two People Almost In Love*

A co-commission with True Colors Theatre Company, Atlanta

Madeline and Dwight have been in an interracial, off and on- relationship. When Dwight leaves Atlanta to attend an HBUC, he comes back to Atlanta, waving his new militant black and proud identity. He also comes back engaged to his "Black queen Jala." But temptation gets the best of him and a one-night stand with Madeline, who ends up pregnant. Dwight does the right thing and marries Madeline, but he still can't get over the feelings he has for Jala. Yet, Madeline and Dwight are thrown into marriage and parenthood and neither of them can quite figure out how to negotiate their relationship. Both of them are unsure if they are in love with each other or just making the best of it because of their son, Micah. When an unthinkable tragedy occurs, Dwight stands by Madeline's side. But in the aftermath, he learns difficult truths about her that cause him to question everything. *Two People Almost in Love* examines how race, class and love take center stage amidst grief.

### SANDRA CALDWELL

*The Sandra Caldwell Project*

Hiding in plain sight for the majority of her life, Sandra Caldwell has danced at the Moulin Rouge, been a Sears fashion model, and performed on stages around the world. All the while, hiding a very big secret – who she was. At the age of 19, Sandra transitioned from an uncomfortable young man into the glorious woman that she is. Through stories and song, the *Sandra Caldwell Project* follows her journey from a pickpocket in D.C. to a star of stage and screen.

### FALEN JOHNSON

TITLE TBC

As a young girl of 6, Shirley Horn was dropped off by her father on the steps of the Shingwauk Residential School in Sault Ste. Marie. Today, Shirley walks up those same steps every day to get to her office as the Chancellor of Algoma University. Award-winning playwright Falen Johnson explores the heartbreaks and triumphs of the little girl who grew up to be a leading voice for a whole Nation.

## HANNAH MOSCOVITCH

TITLE TBC

A hipster feminist brainy riff on a Harlequin romance. Who is the woman on the cover of all Harlequin romances, having her bodice ripped off by some tall, dark, and handsome man? As a young girl of 13, while boys were stealing their dad's porn collections, Hannah Moscovitch and her friends would go to the Shoppers Drug Mart and buy Harlequins and candy with their allowances, and read them on her bed together. For them, it was hot and taboo, like pornography. In her story, Hannah will deconstruct the woman on the cover, slipping in and out of staging a Harlequin romance, adoring and satirizing the form at the same time.

## KAT SANDLER

*WILD WOMAN*

A re-imagining of the real historical relationship between the “wild man” of the 15th century Medici court, Petrus Gonsalvus, and his courtier wife, Catherine. This story is allegedly the inspiration for the original “Beauty and the Beast”. Gonsalvus was originally presented to King Henry II as a caged oddity, a “wild man”, half-man, half-animal. In reality he was a 10-year old boy with a rare inherited condition called Congenital Hypertrichosis (‘too much hair’). *WILD WOMAN* follows the story of Catherine, a woman who is forced to marry Gonsalvus as a science experiment, not aware of who he is until their wedding ceremony. Told as a dark comedy, *WILD WOMAN* uses an historical lens to examine the shifting notions of marriage, celebrity, class, freedom, and how we treat those who are different than us.

## ERIN SHIELDS

*Queen Goneril*

*Queen Goneril* is a prequel to *King Lear*. Set seven years before Shakespeare's masterpiece, Shields focuses on Lear's three daughters as they try to survive in their father's unruly home. Goneril is a natural-born leader in a man's world trying to prove that she is ready to govern. Regan pushes at the limits of her freedom. Cordelia is fed up with trying to keep the peace. Throughout, the sisters struggle to care for one another and carve out a future for themselves in a patriarchal system that was not built for them. In placing the sisters at the centre of this story, Shields works to challenge the authority and dominance of the original play and deconstruct notions of patriarchy and power. She wants to complicate these dismissible characters in order to stake out a place for the silent women of the past so that we might draw a line from those stories to our lived experiences today

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Located in its multi-venue home, the Young Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto's Distillery Historic District, Soulpepper is Toronto's largest not-for-profit theatre company. Founded and guided by artists, Soulpepper has an integrated mission which includes: industry-leading youth and community outreach initiatives; artist training and mentorship programs; and a year-round diverse repertory season which is grounded in the classics and committed to the creation of new works, new forms, and innovative practices.

The artists and staff of Soulpepper and the Young Centre for the Performing Arts acknowledge the original caretakers and storytellers of this land - the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the

Anishinaabe, and the Wendat First Nations. We commit to honouring and celebrating their past, present and future. Soulpepper believes all people have a right to express their individuality, to experience creative freedom, to feel safe at all times, and to be treated with dignity and respect.

Tickets for Soulpepper Productions and Concerts start at \$25. Tickets are available by calling the Young Centre Box Office at 416.866.8666 or by visiting [soulpepper.ca](http://soulpepper.ca). All ticket prices include a Young Centre facility fee, service charge and HST. Pricing is subject to change.

Soulpepper gratefully acknowledges annual operating support from the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts. Soulpepper is pleased to recognize the donors of transformational gifts to its Creative Capital Campaign: The Slight Family; The Government of Ontario; Kevin and Roger Garland.

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