FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 30, 2019

Sundance Institute Theatre Lab Announces 2019 Fellows & Projects
Fifteen Globally-Focused Writers and Directors, Four Artists-in-Residence,
Evolving New Work for the Stage

New York, NY — Today, Sundance Institute’s Theatre Program announces the nineteen artists who represent the creative teams that will convene to develop new work at the annual Lab at the Sundance Mountain Resort in Utah July 8-28.

Eight genre-spanning pieces, encompassing plays, musicals, and interdisciplinary work for the stage, are among the works being developed by fifteen Fellows and four Artists-in-Residence. This year’s cohort was selected by Theatre Program Artistic Director Philip Himberg, with support of a six-member Advisory Committee and in partnership with Producing Director Christopher Hibma.

The Lab offers these emerging and established theatre makers the opportunity to evolve their work with the benefit of a full acting company, a robust group of experienced dramaturgs and advisors, and the context of an intimate artistic community. The Lab is the centerpiece of the Institute’s year-round work with the theatre community, and for nearly four decades has creatively supported artists including Jackie Sibblies Drury, Heidi Schreck and Lynn Nottage, and projects including Indecent, Appropriate, and Fun Home.

Himberg said: “Sundance founder and President Robert Redford has noted that “Sundance deepens the resolve of artists by bringing them together in a creative community, so that they know they are not alone.” Curating the 2019 Theatre Lab’s particular community has been among the most rewarding duties of my time at Sundance; this year’s fellows, and their projects, represent the beauty and originality of global creative work for the stage.”

As previously announced, Himberg leaves the Institute today to assume the Executive Director role at the MacDowell Colony. Christopher Hibma has been tapped to helm the Theatre Program as its Director through an interim year of examination and listening, and is joined by Ana Verde in her new capacity as Manager. This new team will work closely with Institute Executive Director Keri Putnam to envision and explore the future of the Theatre Program, a vital element of Sundance Institute’s work supporting storytellers since its founding. At the 2019 Lab, Hibma will collaborate with director and Theatre Lab alumna Lisa Peterson, who will serve as Guest Artistic Director and Jumana Al-Yasiri continues in her capacity as Manager for the Program’s Middle East / North Africa year-round initiatives.

Hibma said: “I’m excited to serve as interim Theatre Program Director, and to lead the team in our year round support of theatre artists during this reflective year. We’re celebrating and building on Philip’s legacy as we explore new pathways for 21st century storytellers to innovate their creative practice. It is our ambition that
Sundance remains a trusted resource for theatre-makers while we actively listen to the field and evolve our work to best support artists.”

This is one of 24 residency Labs the Institute hosts each year for independent artists in theatre, film, new media and episodic content. The Theatre Program’s international activity supports mentorship and cross-cultural exchange, focused on Arabic artists from the Middle East, North Africa and the diaspora, and has included programming in Lebanon, Germany, Morocco, France and the U.S.

Additional Lab participants, including the acting company, stage management, dramaturgs and creative advisors will be announced at a later date.

The Sundance Institute Theatre Program is supported by an endowment from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, with generous additional support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; Perry and Martin Granoff; Luma Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; Wendy vanden Heuvel; John and Marcia Price Family Foundation; The Shubert Foundation, Inc.; The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust; Wyncote Foundation—Leonard Haas; Richenthal Foundation; The Carrie Louise Hamilton Foundation; and Francena T. Harrison Foundation.

The 2019 Sundance Institute Theatre Lab Fellows and projects are:

**The Blind King**

By David Adjmi

Directed by Sarah Lunnie

A renowned male playwright has written a play about the ignominious downfall of a powerful business magnate. But when the lead actress meets with him to discuss a small problem with his writing of her character, the problem builds and magnifies and eventually unleashes a pandora’s box of issues plaguing America in this frightening and deeply precarious historical moment. *The Blind King* is a play about the nature of tragedy, and the nature of human nature.

**David Adjmi** is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, The Steinberg Prize, and the Whiting Award, among others. His memoir *Lot Six* is forthcoming from HarperCollins. His play *The Stumble* is a commission from LCT, and *Stereophonic* (with music by Will Butler/Arcade Fire) is a co-commission from Second Stage and CTG. Other plays include *Marie Antoinette, Elective Affinities, 3C, Stunning and The Evildoers*. *Stunning and Other Plays and Marie Antoinette/3C* are both published by TCG.

**Sarah Lunnie** is a dramaturg. Based in New York, she is the Associate Artistic Director of the Jungle Theater (Minneapolis) and a company member with The Mad Ones. Recent projects: *What The Constitution Means To Me* (Broadway, NYTW, Clubbed Thumb), *Hillary and Clinton* (Broadway), *Mrs. Murray’s Menagerie* (Ars Nova). Other work at Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Bushwick Starr, the Denver Center, The Kennedy Center, The Lark, Ma-Yi, New Dramatists, the O’Neill, and Playwrights Horizons.
Definition
Written & directed by Whitney White

*Definition* is a new musical that takes a surrealist look at a contemporary African American woman's monotonous, disconnected city-existence. A visit to the museum breathes life into her inner world, and she falls in love with a Magritte painting. A look at delusion and how we walk with our demons every day.


Don’t Eat The Mangos
By Ricardo Pérez González
Directed by David Mendizábal

*Don’t Eat the Mangos* tells the story of three sisters living outside of San Juan, Puerto Rico. The sisters are faced with the daunting task of caring for their cancer-stricken Mami and their wheelchair-bound Papi. Despite being paralyzed, Papi still rules his family through fear, intimidation, and the ringing of a small bell. Over the course of a hurricane ravaged night, family secrets surface, relationships are tested, and the sisters are forced to contend with a legacy of trauma.

**Ricardo Pérez González** is a queer Puerto Rican writer with bacalao on his breath and Salsa on his hips, recently finished writing on the third season of Netflix’s *Designated Survivor*. After developing *Don’t Eat the Mangos* at Sundance, his play *On the Grounds of Belonging* about racially segregated gay bars in 1950s Houston will premiere at Long Wharf this fall. Other upcoming projects include *Orlando*, a pilot with Nina Tassler about the Puerto Rican diaspora after Hurricane María.

**David Mendizábal** is a director/designer, a Producing Artistic Leader of The Movement Theatre Company, and Associate Artistic Director of The Sol Project. Select directing credits include: *iNegro* (Mentor Project), *And She Would Stand Like This* (TMTC), *On the Grounds of Belonging* (Public), & *Tell Hector I Miss Him* (Atlantic - Drama League Nomination). Former Artistic Associate at Atlantic Theater Company, current member of Latinx Theatre Commons, & Wingspace. Alumnus of Drama League, LCT Director’s Lab, NALAC, & artEquity. BFA NYU/Tisch.
Dreaming Zenzile
By Somi Kakoma
Directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz

Dreaming Zenzile is a play with music based on the extraordinary life of late South African singer and political activist Miriam Makeba. Dreaming Zenzile is set in Castel Volturno, Italy on the night of Makeba’s final performance and her death. Throughout the play, Makeba moves between the memory and evocation of real and dreamed experiences about her life journey while weaving through a musical landscape of modern jazz and South African musical traditions. ‘Zenzile’ is Makeba’s true first name. In her mother tongue Xhosa, it means "you have done it to yourself." In short, Dreaming Zenzile is an exposition of the burdens and freedoms that accompany the gift of song and a meditation on the lasting power of the disembodied voice.

Dreaming Zenzile is made with the permission and courtesy of Miriam Makeba Foundation, Miriam Makeba Estate, and Mama Africa Cultural & Social Trust.

Somi Kakoma was born in Illinois to immigrants from Uganda and Rwanda, and is an acclaimed vocalist-songwriter known simply as “Somi”. Her blend of modern jazz with African musics and the innate poetry of her songwriting often give voice to issues of social justice. Her latest recording, Petite Afrique (Sony/OKeh), is a song cycle about the dignity of immigrants and the gentrification of Harlem’s vibrant West African quarter. The album won the 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Album. Somi is a TED Senior Fellow, a Soros Equality Fellow, and a Doris Duke USA Fellow. Dreaming Zenzile is her first original play.

Lileana Blain-Cruz is a theater director. She won an Obie Award for her production of The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World at Signature Theater. Other recent projects include Faust (Opera Omaha), Marys Seacole (LCT3), Fabulation (Signature), Pipeline (Lincoln Center), Thunderbodies and Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again (Soho Rep), The House That Will Not Stand and Red Speedo (New York Theater Workshop), Henry IV Part One and Much Ado About Nothing (OSF), WAR (Yale Rep and LCT3), and The Bluest Eye (The Guthrie). She was awarded a 2018 United States Artist Fellowship. Upcoming is Branden Jacobs-Jenkins Girls at Yale Rep.

The Garden
By Charlayne Woodard
Directed by Liz Diamond

The Garden explores the relationship between an elderly African-American mother, Claire Rose, and her middle-aged daughter, Cassandra. Set in Claire Rose’s precious vegetable garden outside her tidy little house, the play runs in real time for an hour and a half of their lives. Claire Rose loves her daughter. With tough love and self sacrifice, she has prepared Cassandra, creating an achiever, an overcomer – a bulldog, in her own image. At the same time she’s at odds with Cassandra’s lifestyle, her life choices, and even her success as a film editor – all opportunities that Claire Rose never had. Two alpha women, who give as good as they get, take us on a rollercoaster ride full of humor and pain: Mother and daughter shine a light on their secrets and betrayals.
**Charlayne Woodard** is a two-time Obie Award winner & Tony Award nominee. Off-B'way: *DADDY; Hamlet* (Gertrude); *WAR* (Mother); *Substance of Fire* (Marge Hackett); *The Witch of Edmonton* (Witch); *In The Blood* (Hester); *Fabulation* (Undine); *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Grusha); *Twelfth Night* (Maria); *Stunning; Sorrows and Rejoicings*. Regional: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Titania); *The Taming of the Shrew* (Katherine); *The Good Person of Szechuan*. B'way: *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Original cast); *Hair* (revival). Film: *Glass; Unbreakable; The Crucible; Eye for an Eye; Sunshine State*. TV: *Pose* (series regular); recurring roles: *Sneaky Pete; Law and Order, Special Victims Unit; ER: The Leftovers; The Blacklist*. Playwright: *Pretty Fire, Neat, In Real Life, The Night Watcher, Flight*.

**Liz Diamond** serves as Resident Director at Yale Rep and Chair of Directing at Yale School of Drama. She has directed new and classical works at Yale Rep and at theatres across the US including A.R.T., Public Theater, American Conservatory Theatre, Arena Stage, Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She has won OBIE and Connecticut Critics Circle Awards for Outstanding Direction. Her translation and production of Stravinsky’s *l’Histoire du Soldat* recently premiered at Zankel Hall in New York.

**London-Jenin**
Devised and Performed by Faisal Abu Alhayjaa & Alaa Shehada
Written & Directed by Khawla Ibraheem

Large is the distance between the city of London and Jenin. Jenin is the small grey city, where every bit of a life is an endless Sisyphean battle, crowded streets cracked like wrinkles on an old skin, sieged by the gazes of paddlers that stopped wondering. Dark are the roads of Jenin. The distance between London and Jenin lies by the difference between the great city of fog, and the small city of dust. In an immigration office in East London, Faisal and Alaa, two actors from Jenin with big dreams for success in the City of theatre, wait to apply. They practice for their interview, asking all the bureaucratic questions, and they find themselves struggling with fear, love and longing.

**Faisal Abu Alhayjaa** is a Fellow at the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics at Georgetown University, and was born in the Jenin Refugee Camp in Palestine. When Juliano Mer-Khamis opened an acting school as a part of The Freedom Theatre in the Camp, Faisal was part of the inaugural class. After graduating, he was a resident artist of The Freedom Theatre for the next five years and taught the next generation of students. Faisal has performed with The Freedom Theatre throughout Palestine, as well as in Brazil, India, the UK, the US, and across Europe. As a member of Red Noses International and a graduate of their International School of Humour in Austria, he has performed as a clown in refugee camps across Greece with their Emergency Smile initiative, and in children’s hospitals in the West Bank. Faisal’s directing credits include *At-Tuwani* (Palestine), *A Skate Play* (Palestine) and *Hamesha Shamida* (India). He was a leading artist for *The Freedom Bus*, a project that toured Palestine to promote cultural resistance. Faisal toured the UK with celebrated British comedian, Mark Thomas, performing *Showtime from the Frontline*.
Khawla Ibraheem is a Syrian/Palestinian theatre artist considered an up-and-coming talent in Palestine. Khawla is a regular suspect in the National Palestinian Theatre where she has recently created two shows as writer director for the national main stage, *Story Keeper* and *Soon to be gone*. She is a long time collaborator of Amir Nizar Zuabi, and a part of the United Theatres of Europe project of International Super Objective Theatre.

Alaa Shehada is a theatre maker who was trained at The Freedom Theatre Acting School in Jenin camp, Palestine. He has performed all over the world: US, Europe, Turkey, Asia, and the UK. He is also a specialist in mask theatre, trained at Theatre Hotel Courage, Amsterdam. Alaa does clowning with Red Noses International. Recently, he won the Special Jury Award for Best Actor at the International Festival of Liberal Theatre in Jordan, and also won the Best Theatre Performance in 2018 for *Return to Palestine*.

**On That Day in Amsterdam**

By Clarence Coo
Directed by Kareem Fahmy

Two young men, an American backpacker and a Syrian refugee, meet in a gay club in Amsterdam and spend a day together knowing their paths will never cross again. As they visit the homes of Rembrandt, Van Gogh, and Anne Frank, they discover the meaning of love, art, and escape in the context of Europe’s migrant crisis.

Clarence Coo is a recipient of a 2017 Whiting Award and the 2012 Yale Drama Series Prize. His plays include *The Birds of Empathy, Beautiful Province (Belle Province), People Sitting in Darkness, and The God of Wine*. He is a resident playwright at New Dramatists, a member of the Ma-Yi Writers Lab, and the manager of academic administration of Columbia University’s MFA Writing Program.

**Untitled**
By Bassem Youssef
Director TBD

This is a one-man show that follows the unusual story of a heart surgeon turned satirist in the wake of the Arab Spring. Bassem Youssef takes the audience on a funny -- yet scary -- journey to show people the cost of laughing in the face of tyranny. The show follows Bassem as he escapes from Egypt to land in America at a very unwelcoming time for an immigrant. Through storytelling, standup, multimedia and music, Bassem tells a unique story in a unique style.

Bassem Youssef, dubbed the Jon Stewart of the Arab World and originally a heart surgeon, was the host of the popular TV show *Al-Bernameg*, which was the first-of-its-kind political satire show in the Middle East region. His show became the most watched show in the history of Egyptian TV with an average of 40 million viewers every week. After having to escape from Egypt, Youssef is now starting a third career as a comedian in the US.

**Artists-in-Residence**

**Ritesh Batra** was nominated for BAFTA for his first feature film *The Lunchbox* which he developed at the Sundance Feature Film Program, it starred Irrfan Khan and Nimrat Kaur. Since then he has worked on *The Sense of an Ending* based on the Booker Prize-winning book, *Our Souls at Night* with Robert Redford and Jane Fonda, based on the novel by Kent Haruf. His new movie *Photograph* was screened at the Sundance and Berlin Film Festivals in 2019. He lives and works in New York.

**Heather Christian** is an Obie Award winning composer/performer and Sundance Time Warner Fellow. She makes original performance work (*Animal Wisdom* Bushwick Starr, *Mission Drift* Nat’l Theater London, *The World Is Round* BAM,) as well as scores film (*The Shivering Truth* (Adult Swim), *Lemon*, *Gregory Go Boom*, Sundance Grand Jury Prize). She has released 8 records with her band, the Arbormats, owns and operates *The Arbor* recording studio in Beacon, NY, and can be seen all over the world avant-torching.

**Dima Mikhail Matta** is a university instructor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Balamand, a writer, and an actress. She received a Fulbright scholarship and completed her MFA in creative writing at Rutgers University. She has been acting for the stage since 2006. In 2014, she founded Clifhangers, the first bilingual storytelling platform in Lebanon. In 2018, she curated the first LGBTQ+ art exhibition in Lebanon. She is currently working on her first play.
**Fadi Toufiq** is a writer & artist, born in Beirut 1975. Fadi works with different mediums: books, videos, and performance art. His primary interest lies in deconstructing grand narratives by means of reassembling fragmented events, as close as possible to the way it unfolds and strikes who experiences it at firsthand. His performance and art installations have been shown in different art venues around the world, such as MUMOK in Vienna, the Centre chorégraphique de Rennes in France, and Performa Biennial in New York.

This year’s Theatre Lab Advisory Committee comprised Maria Goyanes, Janice Paran, Clint Ramos, Liesl Tommy, Stephen Wadsworth and Stephanie Ybarra.

**Sundance Institute**  
Founded in 1981 by Robert Redford, Sundance Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides and preserves the space for artists in film, theatre, and media to create and thrive. The Institute's signature Labs, granting, and mentorship programs, dedicated to developing new work, take place throughout the year in the U.S. and internationally. The Sundance Film Festival and other public programs connect audiences to artists in igniting new ideas, discovering original voices, and building a community dedicated to independent storytelling. Sundance Institute has supported such projects as *Sorry to Bother You, Eighth Grade, Won’t You Be My Neighbor?, Hereditary, RBG, Call Me By Your Name, Get Out, The Big Sick, Top of the Lake, Winter’s Bone, Dear White People, Brooklyn, Little Miss Sunshine, 20 Feet From Stardom, Beasts of the Southern Wild, Fruitvale Station, I’m Poppy, America to Me, Leimert Park, Spring Awakening, A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder and Fun Home*. Join [Sundance Institute](https://www.sundance.org) on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com).

###