

# Crowded Fire Theater

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**Contact: Tiffany Cothran (415) 523-0034**  
**tiffany@crowdedfire.org**

**Crowded Fire Theater presents Young Jean Lee's**  
**THE SHIPMENT**

An Incisive Comedy That Upends Black American Stereotypes  
In Media and American Entertainment

**September 22-October 15, 2016**  
**at the THICK HOUSE**  
1695 18th St, San Francisco  
(press opening Monday, September 26)

**San Francisco - Crowded Fire Theater (CFT)** Closing out Crowded Fire's 2016 season of new and contemporary plays is the Bay Area premiere of Young Jean Lee's *THE SHIPMENT* co-directed by Artistic Director Mina Morita and Resident Artist Lisa Marie Rollins. *THE SHIPMENT*, which took New York by storm in 2009 caused *Time Out New York* to call her "one of the best experimental playwrights in America." As characterized by *The New Yorker*, Young Jean Lee "does whatever she can to get under our skin—with laughs and with raw, brutal talk that at times feels gratuitous, and is meant to."

In *THE SHIPMENT*, Lee uses her razor-sharp and unsettling humor to upend the surface stereotypes and tropes of African Americans that permeate our media, entertainment industry, and the dominant culture (aka White-framed) narrative. Audiences are confronted with clichés, distortions, and brilliant sleights of hand that force us to go beyond the lampoon and shift the lens through which we perceive race in order to confront our own bias. Of this selection, Morita states "At Crowded Fire, we are unafraid of tackling big issues. We commit ourselves to true experimentation of form and content to question, disrupt, or complicate comfortable notions of cultural hierarchy. *THE SHIPMENT* epitomizes our vision of what theater could and should be doing. We have assembled a fierce and talented team of local artists to wrestle with this deeply provocative and momentous piece of art."

A 2009 *New York Times* article about the development of *THE SHIPMENT* recounts Lee's eagerness to present the play in the early months of President Obama's first term. As reported by *The Times*, Lee said, "I got an e-mail from someone who basically wrote, 'Now in the age of Obama, do we really need to talk about this "race stuff" anymore?,' and that statement really blew me away." Co-director Rollins commented on *THE SHIPMENT*'s continued relevance as we enter a new presidential race. "I think it is clear that nothing in the tenor of our society has changed. In fact, the violent conservative

backlash now being revealed at the end of Obama's terms speaks to how thin the veil of colorblindness really is. I've been fascinated by how theater is positioned as representing the ideal diverse world in false opposition to the lack of people of color and lack of complex, fully human stories in television and film. What does interrogation really mean when it comes to exploring how people of color are represented in media? Are theaters actually producing plays that repeat the same racist caricatures or are they finding playwrights who offer us a new vision of what blackness is, what the black diasporic body is, what the black community is. This is what I'm interested in, this vision that doesn't throw away history, yet doesn't stay weighed down by its constructions. THE SHIPMENT is the space of this hard, sweaty wrestling."

The cast, as assembled by Morita and Rollins, includes local actors Nkechi Emeruwa, William Hartfield., Howard Johnson Jr., Nican Robinson, and Michael Wayne Turner III, all new to Crowded Fire's stage. Designers include Deanna L. Zibello (scenic), Heather Basarab (lighting), Keiko Shimosato Carreiro (costume), Hannah Birch Carl (sound), and Devon LaBelle (props).

This will be Crowded Fire's second foray into Lee's work, following its tremendous production of SONGS OF THE DRAGONS FLYING TO HEAVEN in 2011. Lee's work was last seen in the Bay Area when she toured her UNTITLED FEMINIST SHOW in 2014.

THE SHIPMENT runs at the Thick House, 1695 18th Street in San Francisco September 22 through October 15 (press opening Monday, September 26).

**Young Jean Lee (playwright, THE SHIPMENT)** is a writer, director and filmmaker who has been called "the most adventurous downtown playwright of her generation" by the *New York Times* and "one of the best experimental playwrights in America" by *Time Out New York*. She has written and directed ten shows in New York with Young Jean Lee's Theater Company, and toured her work to over thirty cities around the world. Her plays have been published by Theatre Communications Group (SONGS OF THE DRAGONS FLYING TO HEAVEN and OTHER PLAYS; THE SHIPMENT and LEAR; and WE'RE GONNA DIE) and by Samuel French (THREE PLAYS by Young Jean Lee). She is currently under commission from Lincoln Center Theater and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and has written a screenplay commission for Plan B/Paramount Pictures. Her first short film, *Here Come the Girls*, was presented at The Locarno International Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, and BAMcinemaFest. She is currently a resident artist with The Wooster Group and is completing her second short film, A MEANING FULL LIFE, starring Paul Lazar, Wallace Shawn and Kate Valk. Last year, she released her debut album, *We're Gonna Die*, with her band, Future Wife. Lee is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, two OBIE Awards, a Prize in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a Doris Duke Artist Residency, a Foundation for Contemporary Arts grant, and the ZKB Patronage Prize of the Zürcher Theater Spektakel. She has also received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Rockefeller MAP

Fund, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, Creative Capital, the Greenwall Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Arts Presenters/Ford Foundation Creative Capacity Grant, the Barbara Bell Cumming Foundation, the New England Foundation for the Arts: National Theater Project Award.

[www.youngjeanlee.org](http://www.youngjeanlee.org)

**Mina Morita (CFT Artistic Director and co-director, THE SHIPMENT)** previously served as the Artistic Associate at Berkeley Rep and its center for the creation and development of new work, The Ground Floor. During her time at Berkeley Rep, Mina artistically coordinated the Fireworks Festival, directed CRAZY WISDOM SAVES THE WORLD AGAIN, and directed a staged reading of THE LARAMIE PROJECT: 10 YEARS LATER. As assistant director there, she worked with a number of directors including Tony Taccone for Tony Kushner's THE INTELLIGENT HOMOSEXUAL'S GUIDE TO CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM WITH A KEY TO THE SCRIPTURES, and with Les Waters for Sarah Ruhl's IN THE NEXT ROOM, OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY (which received a Tony nomination). In 2012, Mina worked with Anna Deavere Smith as the artistic coordinator for her play ON GRACE.

As a freelance director, she has worked at Shotgun Players (BY AND BY, THE GREAT DIVIDE, and THE NORMAN CONQUESTS: ROUND AND ROUND THE GARDEN), UC Berkeley (Christopher Chen's AULIS: AN ACT OF NIHILISM IN ONE LONG ACT), Just Theater (UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL), TheatreFIRST (FIRE WORK), Sleepwalkers Theatre (THE NATURE LINE), Aurora Theatre Company's Global Age Project, Playwrights' Foundation, Impact Theatre, Berkeley Playhouse, and Bay Area Children's Theatre [BACT], among others. In 2014, Mina won the Theatre Bay Area Award for Outstanding Direction of a Musical (WHERE THE MOUNTAIN MEETS THE MOON at BACT).

Beyond Mina's work as a director, she is a member of the Zellerbach Family Foundation's Community Arts Panel. Previously, Mina served as Board President of Shotgun Players and was one of the original founders of Bay Area Children's Theatre where she served as interim Executive Director in 2011. Mina holds a degree in directing from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, was awarded the Bret C. Harte Fellowship at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, received the National Arts Strategies Future Leadership Fellowship, and participated in the 2014 Lincoln Center Director's Lab. She has recently been chosen as one of the YBCA100, asking questions and making the provocations that will shape the future of culture.

**Lisa Marie Rollins (co-director, THE SHIPMENT)** is a playwright, freelance director and dramaturg. Most recently she Directed a staged reading of Tarrance Chisholm's BR'ER COTTON and was Assistant Director / Dramaturg for BLACKADEMICS by Idris Goodwin. She has worked with Playwright Foundation as a Director and a Dramaturg. She has been a panelist for TBA Ca\$h Grant and City of Oakland Youth Poet Laureate guest judge. She is Director of ALL ATHEISTS ARE MUSLIM by Zahra Noorbakhsh and co-produced A HISTORY OF THE BODY by Aimee Suzara. Lisa Marie performed her

acclaimed solo play, *UNGRATEFUL DAUGHTER: ONE BLACK GIRL'S STORY OF BEING ADOPTED BY A WHITE FAMILY... THAT AREN'T CELEBRITIES*" (awarded James Irvine New Works, Zellerbach Family Foundation and City of Oakland Cultural Arts grants) in the New York International Fringe Theater Festival, Los Angeles Women's Theater Festival, The Atlanta Black Theater Festival, San Francisco Theater Festival, StageWerx Theater, Tell it on Tuesday, The Marsh Theater Berkeley & SF and universities and academic conferences across the United States. She was Poet in Residence at June Jordan's Poetry for the People at U.C. Berkeley, is a CALLALOO Journal London Writing Fellow and an alumni in Poetry of VONA Writing Workshop. Her writing is published in *Eye to the Telescope*, *Other Tongues: Mixed-Race Women Speak Out*, *River, Blood, Corn Literary Journal*, *Line/Break*, *As/Us Literary Journal*, *The Pacific Review*, *The Lost Daughters*, *Huffington Post* and others. Currently, she is finishing her new manuscript of poems, "Anchoring the Compass" and obsessing about her new play "TOKEN" in development with *Just Theater's New Play Lab*. She is Adjunct Professor in the Race and Resistance Studies Dept in SFSU's School of Ethnic Studies.

###

**For Calendar Editors:**

**THE SHIPMENT by Young Jean Lee**

*An Incisive Comedy That Upends Black American Stereotypes in Media and American Entertainment*

directed by Mina Morita and Lisa Marie Rollins

September 22-October 15 (Press Opening September 26)

Thick House, 1695 18<sup>th</sup> St., SF

**PERFORMANCES:**

Wed-Saturdays 8 PM with Special Opening Night Performance on Mondays, 8PM

Tickets: Prices range from \$10-\$35 progressively during the course of the run.

We offer Pay-What-You-Can Preview performances and student/senior/group rates.

Tickets: Visit [www.crowdedfire.org](http://www.crowdedfire.org) for more information and to purchase tickets.

Box Office by phone (415) 523-0034 ext 1

[www.crowdedfire.org](http://www.crowdedfire.org) or (415) 523-0034 ext 0