

Crowded Fire Theater

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Press Page: www.crowdedfire.org/press/

**Crowded Fire Theater presents the Bay Area Premiere of
Young Jean Lee's
CHURCH**

Lose, gain, and question your faith, all in one night

September 13-October 6, 2018

at the POTRERO STAGE

1695 18th St, San Francisco

(press opening Monday, September 17)

San Francisco - Crowded Fire Theater (CFT) Young Jean Lee (author of 2016's THE SHIPMENT) returns to Crowded Fire with CHURCH, the second revolutionary production in Crowded Fire's 20th Anniversary Season of new and contemporary plays. Praised by the *New York Times* as "slyly subversive" and "earnest and surprisingly moving," this new production of CHURCH will feature an inspiring cast directed by the theater company's Artistic Director, Mina Morita.

In CHURCH, Young Jean Lee transforms her lifelong struggle with Christianity into an exuberant church service. A traveling group of earnest reverends testify through narrative, song, and dance, testing the expectations of religious and non-religious alike. Young Jean Lee strips faith free of recognizable institutional baggage, choosing instead to examine where faith truly lies in the modern world. In the process, she breaks through our isolation and provides a space to reach out in celebration to others. In its New York City premiere, *Time Out New York* described CHURCH as "no cheap satire of piety. Instead, it is an earnestly warped attempt to explore what gives religion its insidious appeal."

Crowded Fire's Artistic Director Mina Morita chose CHURCH as a perfect complement to the show that opened Crowded Fire's 20th Anniversary season, REVOLT. SHE SAID. REVOLT AGAIN. "While this production builds off the incendiary and rage-filled intensity of REVOLT," she stated, "it also brings us back to a place of wonder, and inspires us to battle within ourselves to find faith in new and questionable places. Young Jean Lee insists on complexity and the existence of two possibly competing truths."

Immediately following the production's closing, a unique partnership with the School of Theatre at Oakland School for the Arts (OSA) will result in CHURCH being presented at historic Sweet's Ballroom in downtown Oakland, staged by OSA's Artistic Director Matthew Travisano. OSA students will have a chance to learn alongside Crowded Fire's professional artists, while bringing their own artistic vision to their performances. "We're thrilled and honored to partner with Crowded Fire," stated Travisano, "and create authentic learning experiences for our students, giving them a window into the profession they're working to enter into."

Director Morita will lead a cast that includes Jordan María Don, Nkechi Emeruwa, Lawrence Radecker, and Alison Whismore. Designers and the creative team include James Ard (sound), Mark Allen Davis (choreographer), Sonia Fernandez (dramaturg), Min Kahng (music director), Nailah Harper-Malveaux (assistant director), Rachel Mogan (stage manager), Alice Ruiz (costume), and Randy Wong-Westbrooke (scenic).

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CHURCH runs at the Potrero Stage, 1695 18th Street in San Francisco September 13 through October 6 (press opening Monday, September 17). Cast photos available at <http://www.crowdedfire.org/press/>

BIOS:

Young Jean Lee (playwright) 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 play *Straight White Men* is premiering on Broadway at Second Stage Theatre in summer 2018. Her plays have been published by Dramatists Play Service (*Straight White Men* and *Church*), 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. In 2013, 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 PEN Literary Award, 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, and the New England Foundation for the Arts: National Theater Project Award.

Mina Morita (director) is the Artistic Director of Crowded Fire Theater. Previously, she served as the Artistic Associate at Berkeley Repertory Theatre—and a founding member of its Ground Floor program; as Board President of Shotgun Players; as a 2014 Lincoln Center Director’s Lab participant; as one of the founding members of Bay Area Children’s Theatre; as Community Arts Panelist with the Zellerbach Family Foundation; and Guest Artist at UC Berkeley and Stanford University. She is a recipient of Theatre Bay Area’s 2014 award for Best Director of a Musical: Tier II and TBA’s 2016, 40@40 award for her impact on Bay Area Theater. In 2015, Mina was honored to share her story on TEDx, and in 2016, she was chosen as one of the YBCA100, for “asking questions and making provocations that will shape the future of culture.” She has had the privilege of directing the following plays among many: *Aulis: An Act Of Nihilism In One Long Act* by Christopher Chen @ Zellerbach Playhouse, *Sisters Matsumoto* by Philip Kan Gotanda @ CenterRep (Shellie nominated for best direction), *By And By* by Lauren Gunderson & *The Great Divide* by Adam Chanitz @ Shotgun Players, and co-directed *The Shipment* by Young Jean Lee (TBA nominated for best direction, and award winner for best ensemble), *Blackademics* by Idris Goodwin, and *A Tale of Autumn* by Christopher Chen @ Crowded Fire. Special assistant directing credits include Tony Kushner’s *The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide...* and Sarah Ruhl’s Tony-nominated *In The Next Room...* @ Berkeley Rep. In 2012, Mina worked with Anna Deavere Smith as the artistic coordinator for *On Grace*.

CAST:

Jordan María Don (Reverend Karrine) is a charismatic actor, performer, director and theatre maker based in the Bay Area. She has worked both on and off stage with San Francisco Playhouse, TheatreFIRST, Berkeley Playhouse, American Conservatory Theatre and New Conservatory Theatre Center. Her acting credits include Persephone in *Polaroid Stories*, Manazar in *Chavez Ravine* and dynamic ensemble roles in socially conscious pieces such as *PARTICIPANTS* and *Crack, Rumble, Fly: The Bayview Stories Project*. Jordan holds a B.A. in Sociology and Theatre from UC Berkeley and trained with American Conservatory Theatre in their Summer Training Congress. She was in the inaugural cohort of womxn of color artists in the Las Hocienas Theatre Residency Lab under the mentorship of Sarita Ocón. She is a proud Chicana

originally from East Los Angeles where her heart remains with her parents, brothers, and Kali.

Nkechi Emeruwa (Reverend Katie) is an actor, singer-songwriter, performance artist and church goer who is delighted to be back at Crowded Fire for *Church* and working with Mina! Nkechi is a proud member of Theatre Bay Area and SAG-AFTRA and has an MFA in theatre-performance making from Chichester/CIIS. Film credits include *About Cherry* (Stephen Elliott, director), *99%* (Celik Kayalar, director) and *Jujuluv* (Lisbon Okafor, director). Nkechi has enjoyed performing on Bay Area stages in *Belleville* (Custom Made Theater), *The Shipment* (Crowded Fire Theater), *Rose in America* (Alter Theater), *The Call and Walk Like a Man* (Theatre Rhinoceros), *The Untamed Stage* (Thrillpeddlers), *Baden Powell Wars* and *Unheard of World* (foolsFURY) and *The BFG* and *Seussical, The Musical* (Berkeley Playhouse). Other projects include *Abigail*, *The Rock Opera*, *Metamorphoses*, *Trucker Rhapsody*, *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*, improvisational theater and sketch comedy, co-writing the title song, *Anyway*, for Emily's Entourage's *Anyway Campaign* as well as a solo show she wrote and performed, *Licensed to Drive While Black*, which debuted at Z Space and is currently under round two of development. www.nkechi.com Rom 8:28!

Lawrence Radecker (Reverend Jose) is a resident artist with Crowded Fire Theater where he has developed and debuted numerous roles including *A Tale of Autumn*, *The Late Wedding*, *The Bereaved*, *Invasion* and *The Listener* among others. He has worked with Magic Theatre, Aurora, San Jose Stage, Marin Theatre Company, and Brava! to name a few. Lawrence is also a resident artist with Golden Thread Productions where he has performed for over 15 years.

Alison Whismore (Reverend Weena) is grateful to work with Crowded Fire Theater for the first time. She is honoured to be in Young Jean Lee's *Church* and looks forward to the pertinent discussions the play provokes. Before immigrating to the U.S. in 2010, Alison toured extensively in France, specializing in interactive theatre. Some Bay Area credits include *Measure for Measure* with Theatre Lunatico, *The Tempest* and *Persuasion* at Livermore Shakespeare Festival, *Cinderella* with African American Shakespeare Company, *Boeing, Boeing* at Ross Valley Players, *Pear Slices* at The Pear Theater, and *Romeo & Juliet* and *Hamlet*, both with SF Shakespeare Festival's tours. Her work as a Teaching Artist includes SF Shakespeare Festival, CalShakes, B Street Theatre, and Sacramento Parks and Recreation. Alison holds a BA Honours in Drama from Manchester University, UK, and trained at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, London. www.alisonwhismore.com

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For Calendar Editors:

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directed by Mina Morita

September 13-October 6 (Press Opening September 17)

Potrero Stage, 1695 18th Street, San Francisco

PERFORMANCES:

Thurs-Sat 8 PM with Special Opening Night Performance on Monday, September 17, 8PM and Sunday Matinees at 2pm on September 23 and 30.

(no performance Thursday, September 20; additional performance on Wednesday, October 3)

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 for more information and to purchase tickets.

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

www.crowdedfire.org or (415) 523-0034 ext 0

Cast photos available at <http://www.crowdedfire.org/press/>