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**Contact: Leigh Rondon-Davis, (510) 816-9169**

**leighr@crowdedfire.org**

**CAMPO SANTO AND CROWDED FIRE THEATER ANNOUNCE  
A REVOLUTIONARY PARTNERSHIP: A THREE-YEAR RESIDENCY WITH  
AWARD-WINNING, BAY AREA WRITER STAR FINCH**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA; MAY 19, 2020 —**Campo Santo (CS)** and **Crowded Fire Theater (CFT)**, two leading Bay Area play creators known for developing always new and socially relevant works, centering people of color at the core of creation and process, are thrilled to announce that San Francisco native writer **Star Finch** will be hired as a full-time playwright-in-residence for three years as part of the **Mellon Foundation Playwright in Residence Program**. This significant partnership is made possible by the generous support of **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** in collaboration with the **HowlRound Theatre Commons**.

This ground-breaking residency will support Finch’s work for the next several years and includes an amazing array of activities. With Star established as a visionary partner with the companies, her work will include: leading writer labs, curating a Black Women Voices series, and being a key instigator and creative collaborator with the groups. Perhaps most tangible and exciting is that through this residency Star will be supported on staff as she develops new pieces, culminating with the premiere of at least two new plays to be produced at both companies between now and summer 2023, including **SHIPPING & HANDLING** with Crowded Fire, and **SIDE EFFECTS** for Campo Santo. While she focuses on her writing, Star will additionally co-facilitate two writing groups within the partnership, and lead the development of a Black-women-centered arts program co-produced by the organizations.

Star has been a core member of Campo Santo since she met the group. Starting with the development and the public readings of her first play “Gold Mountain”, Campo Santo has been captivated by the strength and uniqueness of her voice and has supported her works towards their world premiere productions. Campo Santo has championed Finch since 2013, having produced her first plays: **BABYLON IS BURNING**, a multi-disciplinary creation, inspired by Jeff Chang’s seminal book “Can’t Stop Won’t Stop,” her stunning full-length debut **H.O.M.E.** (Hookers on Mars Eventually), and her lead writing and curation on the ritual theatre piece **Ethos de Masquerade**, led by Rashad Pridgen. Additionally, Star has been principal facilitator of the ongoing Campo Santo Writing lab “Campo Santo Clika.”

Crowded Fire continues to be genetically changed by Star, starting in 2017 with our inaugural Resilience & Development (R&D) Lab, iterating to support a group of authors attempting to decolonize playwriting. It is within this R&D Lab that she began the development of her

revolutionary, experimental play SHIPPING & HANDLING which explores how our humanity will be measured within the soon to be robotic-reality on the horizon; intentionally rooting that interrogation in the Black Feminine gaze. The following year, she wrote the script for *Death Become Life: Banish Darkness*, an immersive, multi-disciplinary vision between Crowded Fire, Ensemble Mik Nawooj's orchestral Hip-hop ensemble, and AXIS Dance Company.

This partnership explores a new model that embeds playwrights in small, collaborative companies at this critical time. The groups are honored and emboldened by this prestigious and internationally recognized Mellon award and jointly state: "Inclusion of companies of our budget size by Mellon is a significant commitment to diversifying the American Theater and is an acknowledgment of the quality of work emanating from our part of the field. It is also a boost to future output for our groups. Mellon is leading the way in breaking down prohibitive structures in the theatre community and this philanthropy is deeply encouraging."

Many larger theatre institutions soak up the dividends of the countless, often unnamed groups who provide homes, community, and instinctual and invaluable support to writers and artists of color perceived as "outsiders." Funders catch the wave of that cultural momentum after it has been fearlessly and nakedly forged by our sector, and it is then that larger institutions garner access to fund work with those same artists. In that spirit -- Mellon created a threshold for eligibility that made it possible for groups of our small size to be able to apply and compete for the National New Play Residency; considered the collaborative approach of two smaller groups joining to support one writer, thus allowing us to apply together for something that may have not been considered singularly. This award makes it possible for us to more meaningfully, more fully support and deepen our commitment to the revolutionary voice of Star Finch inside the community that has supported her development; the strivers and grinders of the theatre world. We feel both humbled and gratified by this residency. Humbled to receive one of these residencies alongside many other fine groups and excellent writers, joining a growing roster of strong voices and exemplary theatres awarded. It is also gratifying to be honored. Our groups have never given up the drive to create stories for and by people of color. This residency both allows us to continue this mission, but is a resonant recognition of the soil tilled.

The COVID shelter-in-place is interrupting the income streams of thousands of artists in our region, a stark reminder that the traditional theater model provides few support systems in times of crisis. We hope this work will explore a new model for integrating artists as essential staff, year-round, and we are thrilled to be exploring that idea together. San José shares, "Crowded Fire and Campo Santo are excited by Star Finch's insistence that both organizations center the Black community in our work, as well as her unbending commitment to keep us operating with a deeper integrity in all our art-making."

"This residency will aim to light two fires: to keep a fire burning on telling stories of my City and to the Black experience within it, and two: to frame a clean space of potential and possibility in relation to how the Black experience might freely manifest itself in the future. My intention is to always approach topics and themes with a new aesthetic lens." says Star, "I feel at home both at Campo Santo and at Crowded Fire, and both Sean and Mina have offered amazing

collaborative partnerships as directors, even while being such different organizations and artists.”

“Star’s revolutionary and dynamic work will change the way we support her plays to production, how we approach new work development with other artists, and how we think about where and for whom theater is made,” says Morita. “Crowded Fire is eager to learn from the community-based, collaborative development that Campo Santo embodies...” and “Campo Santo is excited to learn from Crowded Fire’s rich history and model of new play development,” agrees San José. With this opportunity, along with the established commitment to Star’s work, we are tasking ourselves to place the Black Woman’s voice at the rightful center of our work.

### **More on Playwright, Star Finch:**

Star Finch is a native San Franciscan trying her best to hold ground amidst the erasure of gentrification. She’s a member of Campo Santo Theater Company and a resident playwright at Playwrights Foundation. Her plays include H.O.M.E. [Hookers on Mars Eventually] and BONDAGE (Princess Grace Award semifinalist, Relentless Award honorable mention). She was also the lead writer on the collaborative performance piece BABYLON IS BURNING, a loose adaptation of Jeff Chang’s “Can’t Stop Won’t Stop”; and on DEATH BECOME LIFE: BANISH DARKNESS, a collaboration with AXIS Dance, Ensemble Mik Nawooj, and Crowded Fire Theater. Finch has also contributed to various collaborative projects including TheaterFirst’s PARTICIPANTS and Campo Santo’s ETHOS DE MASQUERADE. She’s held residencies in Crowded Fire’s R&D LAB, AlterTheater’s Alter Lab, and Playwrights Foundation’s Resident Playwrights Initiative (RPI). In April 2020 Campo Santo will produce her play Side Effects. She is also a recipient of the San Francisco Arts Commission Individual Artist Commission in Theater.

### **More on the National Playwright Residency Program:**

The National Playwright Residency Program began in 2012, and is funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and administered in partnership with HowlRound Theatre Commons. The program aims to advance the state of playwrights in the American theatre by providing them with space, time, and resources; to influence the working environment of theatres by embedding playwrights in them; to help the field understand the value of embedding playwrights in theatres; and to work toward an ideal of having writers become salaried employees of all theatres.

“We are delighted to continue our partnership with the Mellon Foundation on this incredibly important program that supports playwrights so deeply, and seeks to create a more equitable partnership between the artist and the institution. We dream and work toward the day when these kinds of relationships are the norm in the American Theater,”—HowlRound Director Jamie Gahlon

### **About Campo Santo:**

Founded in 1996, Campo Santo is an award-winning group committed to developing new Performance and to nurturing People of Color centered new Audiences. We cultivate artists to work in intimate, interactive community based settings to create new theatrical experiences that reflect our society. We came to the theatre world because we saw how it could reflect the world

we live in. We saw theatre open our own worlds through writers of color who were re-creating the world with their words, ones that helped address society's most pressing issues. After almost 25 years and 80 premieres, we are grateful to be still creating in our city. Campo Santo has been able to work with many legends, heroes, poets and priestesses - which include artists: from Junot Diaz to Chinaka Hodge, Marcus Shelby to Ana Teresa Fernandez, and hundreds of artists who span the spectrum of art and activism, mediums and modalities. Beyond these incredible figures we seek out the exciting emerging creative forces who have the possibility of changing the way we see. While we are fortunate to have had playwrights-in-residence from Denis Johnson to Ntozake Shange; Jessica Hagedorn to Jimmy Santiago Baca; Roger Guenveur Smith to Richard Montoya - we've always been fiercely committed to developing the "next"- future leaders of performance. We've birthed the first plays by many writers - "unknown" at the time, and have seen them take their place as established visionaries in the field. Our cities are being lost, seemingly taken from us and rather than rant and shout - we're attempting to reclaim and reground. *Like the roots of our name, Campo Santo, we are a mix of cemetery, sacred ground and santos...*

**About Crowded Fire Theater Company:**

Crowded Fire Theater Company was founded in 1997 by a group of young artists interested in experimental contemporary theater. Known for developing and presenting innovative and provocative new plays, Crowded Fire contributes to the creation of a contemporary canon that reflects the diverse world in which we live. Winner of 2018 'Best of the Bay,' the company has been described in American Theatre Magazine as "instrumental in introducing the Bay Area to new writers who push the boundaries of what theatre can be" and "one of the most reliable local stops for high-quality new work by diverse voices."

In addition to two-three mainstage shows each season, CFT offers a robust new play development program. The Matchbox @ Crowded Fire actively supports the creation of high quality contemporary theater through commissions, in-house workshops, and an annual free public reading series. The company is composed of an ensemble of Resident Artists made up of top Bay Area actors, designers, and dramaturgs. This ensemble, with its multiplicity of interests and ideas, as well as the dedication and talent of its members, represents one of the company's most significant strengths. The company also supports our Mentorship Program, providing customized year-long mentoring for up to three artists, technicians, or arts administrators each year.

**PRESS CONTACT**

Leigh Rondon-Davis | Marketing Associate  
(510) 816-9169 | leighr@crowdedfire.org

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