

CROWDED FIRE THEATER

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Crowded Fire Theater Announces 2021-23 Resilience & Development (R&D) Cohort

San Francisco, CA, December 14, 2021 – Crowded Fire Theater (CFT), known as a vital home for new play development and production on the West Coast, is thrilled to announce the third cohort of the **Resilience & Development (R&D) Lab**, supporting four playwrights in the development of new works. The playwrights selected for this cohort are **Star Finch, A-Ian Holt, Maria Jenson, and Lisa Marie Rollins**. Over the next year and a half, CFT is committed to offering support to these four visionary writers, bolstering the development of new and original pieces.

“Crowded Fire has always considered new plays central to our artistic vision, and the R&D Lab is one of the most exciting programs in our ongoing commitment to the development of new works by local writers. Over the next eighteen months, our playwright-led process will offer these writers the time and space to explore their creative goals—not only for their Crowded Fire commissions, but as whole artists,” shares Literary Associate Caro Asercion.

“Each of our Lab cohorts has emerged in a moment of political and cultural uncertainty, and this group is no exception. Our field continues to grapple with questions of racial equity, labor, and safety amid the ongoing pandemic. As these playwrights continue to navigate these questions, we hope that Crowded Fire’s R&D Lab will serve as a communal space for them to gather, share and receive support, and deepen their craft together. We are so excited to strengthen our relationships with these writers, and for them to strengthen their relationships with each other.”

CFT’s 2019-2021 R&D Lab cohort began meeting in December 2019, just before the world as we knew it changed irrevocably. This astounding group of artists continued to meet virtually throughout the pandemic, forming a community in which they held and supported one another through the year’s challenges, loss, and grief.

The first cohort of the Lab ran from autumn 2017 to spring 2019. With the third iteration of the R&D Lab, Crowded Fire will support a mix of familiar and new voices alike. We are thrilled to welcome back Star Finch and A-Ian Holt, who participated in previous cohorts. They will be joined by Maria Jenson, a newcomer to the Crowded Fire community. To round out the cohort, Lisa Marie Rollins, who guided the last two Labs as a facilitator, will be joining this round as a playwright.

Previous playwrights supported by the R&D Lab include Denmo Ibrahim, Nick Mwaluko, Eugenie Chan, Julius Rea, and Linda Maria Girón.

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A-lan Holt (she/they)

A-lan Holt's work imagines new worlds for intimate audiences across theater, poetry, experience and film—with an explicit eye toward racial justice and community transformation. She is director of the Institute for Diversity in the Arts at Stanford University, where she supports and develops curriculum and programs exploring art practice, spiritual practice and social justice. A-lan's creative work has been supported by Crowded Fire Theater Company, SFFILM, the Sundance Institute, BlackStar Film Festival, The Public Theater, The Rainin Foundation and so, so many friends in community. I am so thrilled to be joining the R&D Lab for another cycle.

Lisa Marie Rollins (she/her)

Lisa Marie Rollins is a freelance director, writer and new play developer. She has been a writing fellow with Hedgebrook, Djerassi, SF Writers Grotto, CALLALOO London, VONA, Just Theater Play Lab and Joshua Tree Highlands Artist Residency. She is currently continuing work on her new play LOVE IS ANOTHER COUNTRY. Her chapbook of poems, *Other Words for Grief* (2018, winner, Mary Tanenbaum Literary Award) is available from Finishing Line Press. She is a Sundance Institute Theatre Lab Fellow (Directing) and an Associate member of Stage Directors and Choreographers (SDC). Regional directing and dramaturg work include Hedgebrook Women's Play Festival, Crowded Fire Theater, American Conservatory Theatre MFA program (ACT), Playwright Foundation, TheatreFirst, Berkeley Repertory Theater (Ground Floor), Shotgun Players, Custom Made Theatre, Magic Theatre, San Francisco Playhouse, new plays by Star Finch, Lauren Gunderson, Geetha Reddy, Idris Goodwin, Terrance Arvelle Chisholm (and many more), and creative collaborations with comedic artists W. Kamau Bell and Zahra Noorbakash. She was honored with a "Bay Brilliant" artist award from San Francisco's KQED (2018) and recently received a Gerbode Special Award in the Arts in which she will be working with Crowded Fire Theater to write and develop a new play to premiere in Fall 2023. She holds graduate degrees from Claremont Graduate University and University of California, Berkeley. She was Literary Manager for Intiman Theater in Seattle, WA in 2020, and is currently a Community Arts Panelist for Zellerbach Family Foundation and Resident Artist with Crowded Fire Theater in San Francisco.

Maria Jenson (she/her)

Maria Jenson is excited to reconnect with theater as part of Crowded Fire's R&D cohort. She has been active in the arts her entire adult life. While living in Los Angeles, she studied dance, acting, and the theater arts in professional classes and workshops for over 15 years.

Jenson's professional dance training encompasses hip-hop, tap, flamenco, salsa, samba, West African dance, contemporary jazz, Russian and English ballet and more. She studied with LA's top instructors and worked with many well-known film and TV choreographers. She maintains a regular dance practice.

Jenson studied film acting with Howard Fine, and Shakespearean drama with Ron Burris. She was profoundly influenced by a series of Theater of the Oppressed workshops with drama theorist and political activist Augusto Boal, whose concepts are a central component in all of Jenson's subsequent work. After working with Boal she dove into playwriting focusing on satire. In LA she produced and directed two well-received comedies, *Yogi a Go Go* and *Shrinks*. Jenson also completed several spec screenplays.

In 2009, Maria and her family moved to the Bay Area so their son could mature in the political and social milieu here. She pivoted professionally, founding ArtPadSF, an independent art fair, then moved to SFMOMA. In 2016 Jenson accepted the Executive Director role at SOMArts, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting diverse artists. Jenson has received awards and press for her work in arts advocacy.

Maria remains strongly committed to social satire and social justice.

Star Finch (she/her)

Star Finch is a 2nd generation San Franciscan trying her best to hold ground amidst the Black-erasure of gentrification. She is currently the Mellon Foundation Playwright in Residence at Campo Santo and Crowded Fire Theater. She's also a resident playwright in Playwrights Foundation's RPI program. Her play BONDAGE is available via Broadway Play Publishing Inc.

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.

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