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DIRECTOR ELENA VELASCO TO RECEIVE THE 2023 BARBARA WHITMAN AWARD FROM STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS FOUNDATION

DIRECTORS CARLTON V. BELL, KIMILLE HOWARD, SARAH HUGHES, SB TENNENT, AND EMMA ROSA WENT ANNOUNCED AS FINALISTS

(April 25, 2023— New York, NY) Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation (SDCF), the not-for-profit foundation of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), today announced the recipient and five finalists for the **2023 Barbara Whitman Award**. Established by theatrical producer Barbara Whitman in 2021, the award recognizes a female, trans, or non-binary early-career director who has demonstrated a unique vision in their work with an unrestricted \$10,000 cash prize.

Elena Velasco has been chosen to receive the **2023 Barbara Whitman Award**. Velasco said of her selection, "For first and second generation artists of migrant communities, performance has urgency - it is inherently activist as it counters xenophobic narratives through belonging, resilient joy, *y orgulla cultural*. I became a director because I believe that theater can shift power by challenging and recentering the narrative to move our society towards greater intersection and equity through radical representation. My energy and spirit remain devoted to stories and languages that are not often heard, particularly from Spanish-speaking communities where my identity is rooted. It is my hope that the diversity and complexity of Latinidad can be celebrated, from its rich syncretically spiritual stories to *viajes que cambiaron la vida*."

I am blessed to have the support of my family and artistic collaborators across the country. My deepest thanks to Barbara Whitman, the selection committee, and my nominator Lee Mikeska Gardner, Artistic Director of Central Square Theater in Cambridge, MA. SDCF's Barbara Whitman Award arrives at a pivotal time as I expand my reach in our field, cultivating performances that are created by and available to those who are the cultural caretakers who embody those narratives."

Directors Carlton V. Bell, Kimille Howard, Sarah Hughes, SB Tennent, and Emma Rosa Went were all recognized as finalists for the award. All finalists will receive a \$1,000 unrestricted award as well this year.

Velasco was selected for this honor through a multi-round committee process. The first-round committee was included Christopher Burney, Jade King Carroll, Elizabeth Carter, Luis Castro, Sheryl Keller, Dan Knechtges, Tara Moses, and Leigh Silverman. The second-round committee included Christopher Burney, Sharon Ott, Barbara Whitman, Tamilla Woodard, and NJ Agwuna, who was the Barbara Whitman Awardee in 2022.

Says Whitman, "I'm thrilled that Elena has been named the winner of this year's award, and I'm equally excited that we were able to name five other exceptional directors as finalists. As is the case each and every

year, the strength of the applicants was outstanding, and it was very difficult to pick just one winner. I'm honored to help lift up the work of these exceptional artists."

About Elena Velasco

Elena Velasco (she/ella) is a theatre artist whose work encompasses performance, education, and activism, predominantly serving the Washington, DC and Greater Boston regions. An associate member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, her directing and choreography aesthetic is grounded in visceral, kinesthetic language, engaging narratives that range from poetic text to musicals to devised theatre, notably focusing on the Latiné voice. Her directing and choreography credits include Central Square Theater, Convergence Theatre, GALA Hispanic, 1st Stage, NextStop Theatre, Synetic Theater, Adventure Theatre, Keegan Theatre, and Kennedy Center's New Visions New Voices Festival. A member of SAG/AFTRA, Ms. Velasco has appeared in several films and commercials, and she has been a long-time company member with Synetic Theater, DC's premier physical theater ensemble.

Ms. Velasco's work as Artistic Director and Co-founder of Convergence Theatre, a DC-based nomadic performance collective centered on social justice, engages audiences through immersive experiences which intersect verbatim text, spoken word, and dance fusion to promote civic action. Her background in EDIA informs processes at Convergence and has been service to other organizations, including the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, Southeastern Theatre Conference, Women's Theatre Festival, and TheatreWashington.

A dedicated educator, Ms. Velasco teaches theatre through the lens of community engagement in higher ed and bilingual community arts programs. She has been a featured speaker for Boston Conservatory at Berklee, George Mason University, Hollins University, and TheatreWashington. Ms. Velasco is a theatre professor at Bowie State University. MFA in Directing, Catholic University. www.elenavelasco.net

About the Finalists:

Carlton V Bell (Associate Member SDC) is a Black queer cultural movement worker utilizing theatre as a medium to facilitate liberation strategies within social ecosystems. Carlton's work centers uplifting stories about those living within the margins of the margins through Theatre for Young Audiences, Contemporary Plays, & Musical Theatre. Carlton hopes to challenge, decolonize, invigorate American theatre spaces. Recent Recipient of the Sara Spencer Award for Child Drama (South Eastern Theatre Conference). Carlton currently serves as the Director Development & Co-Founder of the award-winning Birmingham Black Repertory Theatre Collective. Represented by Gill Talent Agency - carltonvbell.com | thebbtrc.com

Kimille Howard is a director, deviser, writer and filmmaker. She's an Assistant Stage Director at the Metropolitan Opera and Artistic Director of the Lucille Lortel Theatre's NYC Public High School Playwriting Fellowship. Recent directing credits: *The Passion of Mary Cardwell Dawson* (Glimmerglass/Washington National Opera), *Songs in Flight* (Sparks and Wiry Cries/Met Live) *The Italian Girl* (Tulsa Opera), *American Apollo* (DMMO), *B.R.O.K.E.N Code B.I.R.D Switching* (Berkshire Theatre Group), *Quamino's Map* (Chicago Opera Theater). Her work has also been seen at Playwrights' Horizons, 59E59, Wolf Trap Opera, Cherry Lane Theatre, among others. Broadway: *Ain't Too Proud* (Assistant Director) Met Opera: *Champion*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Porgy And Bess*, *Tosca* (Assistant Stage Director) Recent Fellowships: NYTW 2050 Fellowship, MTC Jonathan Alper Directing Fellowship, New York Stage and Film's inaugural NYSAF NEXUS project. She is a recipient of OPERA America's 2023 Robert L. B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize.

Sarah Hughes is a New York-based director and creator of new plays, radical adaptations, and devised work, with a focus on highly collaborative, genre-expanding, innately theatrical projects. Recent work includes the site-specific premiere of *Galatea* by MJ Kaufman in Brooklyn Bridge Park and the audioplay *His Chest Is Only Skeleton* by Julia Izumi for Playwrights Horizons. Sarah is an Affiliated Artist of New Georges and Target Margin Theater, was a longtime ensemble member of Elevator Repair Service, and has held residencies and fellowships with Mercury Store, WP Theater, Clubbed Thumb, The Civilians, The Drama League and the NNPN/O'Neill/SDC National Directors Fellowship. As Director of Artistic Programming at Theatre Row, she created and led the Kitchen Sink Residency for new work development. She has taught at Purchase College, Dartmouth College, and NYU. Upcoming: *#Graced* by Vanessa Garcia (Miami's Zoetic Stage), *A Woman Among Women* by Julia May Jonas (The Bushwick Starr/New Georges). www.sarahcameronhughes.com

SB Tennent is an Iranian-American writer & director of new works, musicals, and classics. Described as having a “deft directorial touch” (Culturebot), she has developed work nationally and internationally at Mercury Store, New York Theatre Workshop, Ars Nova, BRIC, Bushwick Starr, Mabou Mines, New Georges, Bulgaria's Red House Center for Culture & Debate, and others. Recent Productions: *BLUESTOCKINGS* by Jessica Swale (AADA), *DANCE NATION* by Clare Barron (Fordham), *CABARET* (Hangar Theatre) & *AS YOU LIKE IT* (NYU Grad Acting). Before that, she developed and directed *DANGER SIGNALS*, a unique collaboration with British playwright Nina Segal and pop musician Jen Goma. It received its world premiere in NYC through the Archive Residency program (New Ohio Theatre/IRT). Proud faculty member at Playwrights Horizons Theatre School, NYU. Co-Founder of the award-winning collective Built4Collapse with whom she devised *NUCLEAR LOVE AFFAIR*, which played to sold out houses in NYC, Prague, Rome and Krakow. NYTW Usual Suspect.

Emma Rosa Went is a New York based freelance theatre director who makes new and classic-text plays. Recent work includes: *Romeo and Juliet* (Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Spring Tour '23); *An Oxford Man* (Ted Snowdon Reading Series, MTC); *Kit Marlowe* (Revelation Reading, Red Bull @ TFANA); *Degenerates* (Out Loud Reading, Ars Nova); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Opera House Arts); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Connecticut Shakespeare Festival, 2021 Regional Broadway World Award for Best Direction of a Play); and other readings or workshops with NYTW, Mercury Store, Red Bull, Hunter College, and other venues. Upcoming: *Initiative*, in the Spotlight Series at The Public, May 8th & 9th. Emma is currently under commission from HVSF, working on *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Drama League Classical Directing Fellow 2020, Drama League First Stage Residency 2019. SDC Associate Member. More at www.emmawent.com

Barbara Whitman is a theatrical producer who made her Broadway debut producing *A Raisin in the Sun*, starring Sean Combs, Phylicia Rashad, Audra McDonald, and Sanaa Lathan. Other Broadway credits include *Good Night, Oscar* starring Sean Hayes, *A Strange Loop* (Tony and Drama Desk Awards, Best Musical; Pulitzer Prize) *Diana – The Musical*, *Burn This* starring Adam Driver and Keri Russell, *Angels in America* (Tony and Drama Desk Award, Best Play Revival), *1984*, *The Glass Menagerie* starring Sally Fields, *War Paint* starring Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole, *The Humans* (Tony Award, Best Play), *Oh, Hello* starring Nick Kroll and John Mulaney, *Fully Committed* starring Jesse Tyler Ferguson, *Fun Home* (Tony Award, Best Musical), *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (Tony and Drama Desk Award, Best Musical Revival), *Of Mice and Men* starring James Franco, *If/Then* starring Idina Menzel, *Hands on a Hardbody, Red* (Tony and Drama Desk Awards, Best Play), *Next to Normal* (Pulitzer Prize), *Hamlet* starring Jude Law, *33 Variations* starring Jane Fonda, *Mary Stuart*, *Legally Blonde - The Musical*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. National tours include *Fun Home*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, *If/Then*, *Murder for Two*, *Next to Normal*, *Legally Blonde – The Musical*, ...*Spelling Bee*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* and *Frost/Nixon*. A native New

Yorker, Barbara attended NYU's Gallatin School and received an MFA in Theatre Management and Producing from Columbia University. She's a member of the Board of Governors and the Executive Committee of the Broadway League. She's also on the Columbia University School of the Arts Dean's Council. Upcoming productions include *A Strange Loop* at the Barbican Theatre in London.

Founded in 1965, **Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation (SDCF)** celebrates, develops, and supports professional stage directors and choreographers throughout every phase of their careers. SDCF works to build a theatrical community that reflects the cultural, racial, and gender diversity of our nation by creating opportunities for artists of all backgrounds to bring their full, authentic selves to their work as creative leaders in the theatre. SDCF's goals are to provide opportunities to practice the crafts of directing and choreography; to gather and disseminate craft and career information; to promote the profession to emerging talent; to provide opportunities for exchange of knowledge among directors and choreographers; to increase the awareness of the value of directors' and choreographers' work; and to convene around issues affecting theatre artists. sdcfoundation.org

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