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MARK VALDEZ TO RECEIVE STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS FOUNDATION (SDCF)
ZELDA FICHANDLER AWARD

THE AWARD WILL BE PRESENTED IN A VIRTUAL CEREMONY OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
ON JANUARY 24, 2022

JENNIFER CHANG, LESLIE ISHII, AND ERIKA CHONG SHUCH ANNOUNCED AS FINALISTS

(November 16, 2021– New York, NY) Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation (SDCF), the not-for-profit foundation of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), announces the recipient and three finalists for its annual Zelda Fichandler Award. The Fichandler Award recognizes directors and choreographers who have demonstrated great accomplishment to date with singular creativity and deep investment in a particular community or region, and is named for Zelda Fichandler, the founding artistic director of Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. The award is presented annually, with a focus each year on a different region; all of nominees for this year's Fichandler Award were directors and choreographers from the western United States.

The 2021 Zelda Fichandler Award will be presented to **Mark Valdez**, an LA-based director, writer, and cultural organizer. He will receive an unrestricted award of \$5,000 from SDCF.

The **selection committee for the Fichandler Award** was chaired by director Tony Taccone and was joined on the committee by directors Christopher Acebo and Casey Stangl, and choreographer Donald Byrd.

Taccone said in a statement, "Mark Valdez has spent the entirety of his phenomenal career making work by, for, and with disparate and marginalized communities in the Los Angeles area and beyond. He has used the theatre to invite audiences and performers to engage with ideas they didn't think they could understand or embrace. All the while bringing his singular talent and imagination to create art that has the capacity to change lives. With the granting of this award, Zelda Fichandler is undoubtedly smiling down from her place in the firmament."

Mark's work has been seen at community venues and professional theatres across California, including a tomato field in Grayson, a de-commissioned Catholic cathedral in downtown LA, as well from the stages of La Peña Cultural Center in Berkeley to the stages of Ricardo Montalban Theatre in Hollywood for a Center Theatre Group produced production. Nationally, Mark has worked at theatres such as the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, where he created *A Road to a Dream*, a community collaboration along a 10-mile stretch of the Buford Highway, to shed light on the toll our nation's broken immigration policies have on families and communities; Arizona's Childsplay Theatre where he adapted and directed Gary Soto's book, *Chato's Kitchen*, about a low-rider *gato* from East LA; and Trinity Rep in Providence, where he directed *A Christmas Carol* that included 85 community choirs. His play *Highland Park is Here*,

won the Audience Award at the Highland Park Film Festival and will be featured in Re:Encuentro, the national Latina/o/x Theater Festival.

Mark is the recipient of various grants from organizations and foundations such as the MAP Fund, NEFA, The Ford Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and has received awards, including a Legacy Artist Fellowship from the California Arts Council, a Princess Grace Award, and the 2019 Johnson Fellowship for Artists Transforming Communities. He is a current Board member of Double Edge Theatre and Cornerstone Theater Company, and a former Board member of TCG. Mark is currently working on *The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe*, a multi-city project that aims to influence housing policy utilizing performance, cultural organizing, and creative community development strategies.

Jennifer Chang, Leslie Ishii, and Erika Chong Shuch, were all named as finalists for the Award.

Jennifer Chang is a multi-hyphenate storyteller and educator who won the LADCC Award in Direction for the LA premiere of *Vietgone* by Qui Nguyen. Currently: *The Great Leap* by Lauren Yee at The Round House Theatre. She is Head of Undergraduate Acting at UCSD's Department of Theatre and Dance and is an inaugural member of the Drama League Director's Council. Founding Member, Co-Artistic Producing Director Chalk Rep. Upcoming: *On Gold Mountain* with LA Opera at the Huntington Library. Play Development: O'Neill Playwrights Conference, Geffen Playhouse, New Harmony Project, CTG, Sông Collective, Black and Latino Playwrights' Conference, Chance Theater, Boston Court, Ashland New Plays Festival, PlayOn! Shakespeare and others. She is a proud member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA), and Actors' Equity Association (AEA). BFA NYU, MFA UCSD. Director's Lab West, Drama League NY Fellow. APAFT Advisory Board. More info: www.changinator.com.

Leslie Ishii (Perseverance Theatre, AD) debuted in Northwest Asian American Theater's *Breaking the Silence* to raise legal defense funds for WWII US Concentration Camp Resister, Gordon Hirabayashi's Supreme Court Case. This ignited Leslie's passion for justice, directing, working cross-racially and cross-culturally deep in community. She developed anti-racism/liberation actor/director training based in decolonizing/liberation theory and praxis. *Directing/Acting/Dramaturgy*: Co-Pro Penumbra Theatre & Theatre Mu; East West Players, Native Voices, El Teatro Campesino; Oregon Shakespeare Festival; FAIR, APII 2x2 New Work Lab, Founder/Producer; South Coast Repertory Theatre, and other regional theatres; Broadway, TV and Film. *Service*: CAATA: Board President, National BIPOC/BITOC Coalition/Commons, Founder; artEquity: National Faculty; Tsuru For Solidarity; National New Play Network: Board Member, Membership Committee; National Theatre Conference; Non-Profit Theater Coalition: Co-Lead, Coalition/Website Subcommittee. *Awards*: Teachers Making a Difference; Los Angeles Women's Theatre Festival Integrity Award; SDC 2016, 2017 National Standout Recognition for championing equity/inclusion.

Erika Chong Shuch is a performance maker, choreographer and director interested in expanding ideas around how performance is created and shared. Shuch co-founded For You, a performance collective that brings diverse strangers together and makes performances as gifts. As a response to COVID, they launched a series of projects that brings artists and elders together for creative exchange. For You has been commissioned by Court Theatre (Chicago), The Momentary (AK), Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The Guthrie and Theater Mu (MN) with support from Creative Capital, NEFA's National Theater Project, and Berkeley Rep's Groundfloor. Erika has worked as a choreographer for theatres across the country including the Arena, OSF, Theatre for a New Audience, Pittsburg Public, Portland Center Stage, American Conservatory Theater, Kennedy Center, Cal Shakes. Directing credits include *Iron Shoes* with Kitka and *Lily's Revenge*, *Love Act* by Taylor Mac at the Magic Theatre. Erika is a Bay Area Fellow at the Headlands Center for the Arts.

Established in 2009, the Zelda Fichandler Award is SDCF's first award devoted to regional theatre. With this award, SDCF acknowledges the profound impact directors and choreographers of regional theatre have on the field, transforming the national arts landscape with their unique, creative work and deep investment in local communities. The Fichandler Award is given regionally on a rotating basis. In 2021, the award focused on artists who have made, and who will continue to make, a significant contribution to their community through extraordinary work in theatre in the Western region of the United States, defined by SDCF as Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Zelda Fichandler (1924-2016) dedicated her early career to the establishment of America's regional theatre movement. In 1950, she founded Washington D.C.'s Arena Stage and in 1968 she produced *The Great White Hope*, which became the first production to transfer from a regional theatre to Broadway, winning the Tony and the Pulitzer Prize, and launching the careers of James Earl Jones and Jane Alexander. Her production of *Inherit the Wind* toured Soviet St. Petersburg and Moscow; Arena Stage was the first American theatre company sponsored by the State Department to do so. Like many other regional theatres afterward, Arena Stage cultivated an evolving but resident company over the decades that included some of America's best actors: Robert Prosky, Frances Sternhagen, George Grizzard, Philip Bosco, Ned Beatty, Roy Scheider, Robert Foxworth, Jane Alexander, James Earl Jones, Melinda Dillon, Dianne Wiest, Max Wright, Marilyn Caskey, Harriet Harris, and Tom Hewitt. In 1975 it was the first regional theatre to be recognized by the American Theatre Wing and the Broadway League with the Regional Theatre Tony Award for outstanding achievement. When Ms. Fichandler retired as producing artistic director of Arena Stage in 1990, she had achieved the longest tenure of any non-commercial producer in the annals of theatre in the U.S. Before her passing in July of 2016, Ms. Fichandler was chair emeritus of New York University's acclaimed Graduate Acting Program where she personally taught, guided, and inspired more than 500 acting students, including Marcia Gay Harden, Rainn Wilson, Billy Crudup, Debra Messing, Peter Krause, and Michael C. Hall. Her honors include SDCF's "Mr. Abbott" Award, The Acting Company's John Houseman Award, the Margo Jones Award, and the National Medal of Arts, and in 1999 she became the first artistic leader outside of New York to be inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.

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. www.sdcfoundation.org.

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