PORTLAND, OR & MINNEAPOLIS, MN -- Network of Ensemble Theaters (NET) and Playwrights’ Center (PWC) are pleased to award the 2018 Ensemble/Playwright Collaboration Grant to Wonderlust Productions (Minneapolis, MN) and playwright Carlyle Brown (Minneapolis, MN). Together, the artistic directors of Wonderlust Productions (Alan Berks and Leah Cooper) will collaborate with Carlyle Brown to co-write a community-driven new play about the people in Minnesota’s incarceration system. The annual award is designed to support creative exchange and dialogue between ensembles and playwrights.

For the past seven years, NET and the Playwrights’ Center have partnered to support projects between NET ensemble members and members of the Playwrights’ Center’s Core Writer Program through the Ensemble/Playwright Collaboration Grant. One grant of $4,000 is awarded each year to support collaborative activities resulting in a final presentation. Past recipients include: Theater Grottesco and Andy Bragen (2011); Theatre Novi Most and Cory Hinkle (2012); Live Action Set and John Olive (2013); Team Sunshine Performance Corporation and Jenny Connell Davis (2014); The Satori Group and Susan Soon He Stanton (2015); SITI Company and Kate Tarker (2016); and One Year Lease and Jason Gray Platt (2017).

ABOUT THE COLLABORATION

Over the course of the next year, Wonderlust Productions will collaborate with playwright Carlyle Brown to create a new play about the people in Minnesota’s incarceration system – neither documentary nor adaptation, but a fictional journey with theatrical elements. The play will use stories gathered through community story circles with a diverse cross-section of stakeholders in the Minnesota corrections system, from current and past inmates to correctional officers, prosecutors, public defenders, probation officers, policy makers, administrators, people who provide re-entry support, and families of those who have been incarcerated.

Historically, all of Wonderlust’s projects have been co-authored and co-directed by artistic directors Alan Berks and Leah Cooper. This collaboration offers the opportunity for the ensemble to expand the ranks of generative artists and to vary the authorial voices of their projects. As much a historian as a playwright, Brown brings an interest in how systemic racism and oppression have impacted communities of color over time, and
experience working as an artist and mentor with people who have been incarcerated. He is particularly interested in Wonderlust’s aesthetic, methods, and values around community-driven and story-driven work that intentionally subverts the dominant culture and popular media narratives by gathering the contradicting and complex truths of real people’s stories. For all three artists, the collaboration will offer the opportunity to share the immense responsibility of honoring the stories collected, and to make an epic play that’s big enough to convey the topic’s complexity yet intimate and compassionate enough to expand understanding and shift narratives.

Ultimately, the play will be shared in various locations inside and outside the Minnesota corrections system for community feedback to inform revisions of the script for full production in Spring 2020. The show will dramatize the way in which our society attempts to “correct” anti-social behavior and protect itself from increasingly large portions of its fellow citizens—and how that affects all of us, especially when people move from the corrections system back into society.

GRANTEE BIOS:

Wonderlust Productions - [www.wonderlustproductions.org](http://www.wonderlustproductions.org)

Wonderlust Productions is a multicultural ensemble of professional artists who illuminate a community’s stories through live performance. They produce high-quality, transformative new works driven by community participation and collaboration. Together with community members across generations, ethnicities, experience, and power hierarchies, Wonderlust creates stories that combine high-quality artistry with authentic experiences, embracing the truth, conflict, and commonalities within diverse perspectives and inspiring cathartic experience through epic productions.

Past productions include the *Veterans Play Project* about military experience, produced at Fort Snelling in 2013; the *Adoption Play Project* about people affected by adoption, produced at Mixed Blood Theatre in 2016; and the *Capitol Play Project* about people who work behind-the-scenes in government performed throughout the Minnesota State Capitol building January 2018.
Carlyle Brown is a writer/performer and artistic director of Minneapolis-based Carlyle Brown & Company, which has produced *The Masks of Othello*, *The Fula From America*, *Talking Masks*, *Therapy and Resistance*, *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been...*, *Abe Lincoln and Uncle Tom in the White House* and *Acting Black*. His other plays have been produced at theatres across the country and he has received numerous commissions, fellowships and awards including: 2006 Black Theatre Network’s Winona Lee Fletcher Award for outstanding achievement and artistic excellence; 2009 Guggenheim Fellowship; 2010 Otto Rene Castillo Award for Political Theatre; and 2010 United States Artist Fellow.

Mr. Brown is a Core Writer at the Playwrights’ Center in Minneapolis and an alumnus of New Dramatists in New York. He has served on the board of directors of Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the non-profit professional theater. He is a member of the board of directors for the Playwrights’ Center and the Jerome Foundation, and a Trustee of the Camargo Foundation.

**ABOUT NETWORK OF ENSEMBLE THEATERS**

A national coalition of ensembles created by and for artists, the Network of Ensemble Theaters (NET) exists to propel ensemble theater practice to the forefront of culture and society. NET links a diverse array of ensembles and practitioners to one another and the performing arts field, encouraging collaborations and
knowledge building/dissemination. NET is committed to the advancement of the ensemble form and strives to bring about change in the world beyond ourselves through the transformative power of collaborative theater. We support bold artistic and civic experiments and aim to heighten the impact and excellence of ensemble theater. For more information: www.ensembletheaters.net

ABOUT PLAYWRIGHTS’ CENTER
The Playwrights’ Center champions playwrights and new plays to build upon a living theater that demands new and innovative works. In addition to awarding some of the most generous fellowships for playwrights and theater artists in the United States, the Center is an industry leader in playwright-led development of new work, theater partnerships with substance, and online and onsite resources serving 2,000 member playwrights around the world. For more information: pwcenter.org

CONTACTS:
Park Cofield
Field Resources Manager
Network of Ensemble Theaters
323-638-4870 / pcofield@ensembletheaters.net

Jessica Franken
Communications Director
Playwrights’ Center
612-332-7481 x118 / jessicaf@pwcenter.org

# # #