

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

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**BAG &
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Artistic Director Scott Palmer

Meyer Memorial Trust Funds Bag&Baggage's "Problem Play Project" For First Three Years

Major Award Sets The Stage For At Least Three World Premiere Commissions of Shakespearean Plays By Oregon Playwrights Of Color

Hillsboro, OR – Bag&Baggage Productions, Hillsboro's resident professional theatre company, has received a major grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust to fund the first three years of an innovative play commissioning project called *The Problem Play Project*. The funds will be used to commission an emerging Oregon playwright of color to adapt one of Shakespeare's *problem plays* through a diversity and equity lens. The focus of *The Problem Play Project* is to create new, world premiere adaptations of that small group of Shakespearean plays considered by scholars to be neither comedies nor tragedies, adapted by local playwrights with an interest in exploring themes related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

"As has been true for the past 12 years, Bag&Baggage is turning to the classics as a way of addressing two very specific challenges for the company," said Scott Palmer, Founding Artistic Director of Bag&Baggage and creator of *The Problem Play Project*. "First, how do we bring Shakespeare's works to life in provocative and compelling ways for diverse audiences and, second, how do we increase diversity within our audiences and our artists."



Lawrence Siulagi as The Sayyid in *Romeo&Juliet (Layla&Majnun)*

The company's experience last summer with their world premiere adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* combined with the 12th century Persian tale *Layla and Majnun* indicates that a diversity-lens approach to Shakespeare's work can succeed both financially and in terms of attracting diverse audiences and artists.

"We truly weren't sure that *Romeo&Juliet (Layla&Majnun)* would work," said Palmer, who adapted the play for performance outdoors in Hillsboro in July of 2017. "Not only did we exceed our ticket sales targets, but we also saw increases in the number of Middle Eastern, and specifically Iranian/Persian-American audience members who attended. The play did exactly what we had hoped it would."

The Problem Play Project will provide a \$10,000 commissioning fee to an Oregon-based playwright who will select one of Shakespeare's problem plays as the basis of a major new adaptation. Interested playwrights will submit a proposal, including their chosen Shakespearean title along with an overview of how they might approach the adaptation process, which will be reviewed by B&B staff and a volunteer panel of theatre experts and representatives of diverse communities throughout Washington County.

"Adaptation means a lot of things," said Palmer. "It might mean incorporating original source materials, rewriting Shakespeare's language, modernizing the language, incorporating other literature from different writers, or a thousand other adaptive approaches; it all depends on the playwright and their interest. For example, a playwright of Japanese descent might approach *Measure For Measure* as a vehicle for exploring Oregon's history with Japanese internment camps, given the play's focus on unjust imprisonment as one of the themes. How the playwright does so is a huge part of the commissioning and workshopping process."

Among the titles defined as Shakespearean problem plays are *Measure For Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Merchant Of Venice*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Timon Of Athens*.

The first production of *The Problem Play Project* is scheduled for performance in March of 2019. Submission procedures for interested playwrights will be announced in January of 2018, with the playwright selected by March of the same year, giving the successful applicant 12 months to complete the work.

In addition to the commissioning fee, the Meyer Memorial Trust grant also provides B&B with funds for targeted marketing, audience research, and increased wages for actors and crew, enabling the company to offer up to six Actor's Equity Association union contracts for the production.

"We have always struggled with attracting artists of color to perform in Hillsboro," said Palmer. "One of the reasons for that is the travel distance and time required to rehearse and perform in the suburbs. By offering Equity union contracts, we hope to offer at least half of the roles in the production to actors of color, as well as attract more production crew and designers of color as well."

More information on *The Problem Play Project* can be found on the Bag&Baggage website at bagnbaggage.org or by contacting Scott Palmer at scott@bagnbaggage.org. More information on the award, and on the Meyer Memorial Trust, can be found at mmt.org.

About Bag&Baggage Productions:

Bag&Baggage (B&B) is Hillsboro, Oregon's only professional theatre and the largest non-profit arts organization in the city. B&B's mission is to crack open and explore the classics of world literature in new, innovative, and provocative ways, connecting these great works to contemporary audiences in surprising ways. In September of 2017, B&B took possession of their new, permanent home, The Vault Theater; a state of the art, flexible studio space in the heart of downtown Hillsboro.

About Meyer Memorial Trust:

Meyer Memorial Trust (MMT) was created by the late Fred G. Meyer, founder of a chain of retail stores bearing his name throughout the Pacific Northwest. Established in 1982, Meyer has awarded roughly \$700 million in grants and program-related investments to more than 3,200 organizations in Oregon and Southwest Washington. Since 2016, MMT has focused their grantmaking on ensuring a more flourishing and equitable Oregon.

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