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People's Light & Theatre Company and Longwood Gardens Begin Year Two of New Play Development

(Malvern, PA) – People's Light & Theatre Company, in partnership with Longwood Gardens, has selected six teams of artists to move into Year Two of its three-year new play commissioning and development project. Funded by a grant from the **Independence Foundation** through its New Theatre Works Initiative, this project will develop a series of new works over three years in partnership with Longwood Gardens.

In Year One of the project, twelve teams of playwrights and scenic designers were invited to create proposals for a series of new site-specific works, using Longwood Gardens as a source of inspiration and research. Last September, the artist teams visited People's Light and Longwood, and then prepared proposals for new theatrical works in response to what they experienced. Their proposals revolved around themes of sustainability, conservation, and botanical research.

The following teams of artists have been selected to move into Year Two (for the artists' bios, visit PeoplesLight.org):

Lisa D'Amour/Katie Pearl (playwrights) + Mimi Lien (designer)
Russell Davis (playwright) + James F. Pyne, Jr. (designer)
Rachel Dickstein (playwright) + Susan Zeeman Rogers (designer)
Susan Mosakaowski (playwright) + Marsha Ginsberg (designer)
Kathryn Petersen (playwright) + Tony Straiges (designer)
Kathryn Walat (playwright) + Wilson Chin (designer)

"The proposals we selected show tremendous creativity and innovation in their use of the diverse spaces at Longwood Gardens," says Resident Dramaturg Elizabeth Pool, who is the Project Manager. "In the next year teams will begin to develop their proposals into workable drafts. They may choose to involve additional collaborators, such as choreographers or sound designers. It will be a rigorous year of exploration as they expand their proposals into engaging theatrical pieces that can be performed with the highest level of excellence at Longwood Gardens."

"The playwrights and designers chosen to develop their proposals clearly have been inspired by the beauty and the history of Longwood Gardens," says Thomas Warner, who leads the performing arts activities at Longwood and is managing the effort on its behalf. "Longwood is excited to play its part in this next phase of the creative process in which concepts are further developed and unique locations in the Gardens are determined for the eventual productions."

“We are delighted with the exciting progress on this project,” says Susan Sherman, President and CEO of the Independence Foundation. “The Independence Foundation is proud to support new theatre work in the Philadelphia region that is created through multiple approaches to play-making.”

SELECTED PROPOSALS

Team: Susan Mosakowski (playwright) & Marsha Ginsberg (designer)

Project Title: *Finding Victoria*

Location: Pierce’s Woods, Flower Garden Walk to Rose Garden, Rose Garden, Topiary Garden, Water Lily Display

Brief Description:

This piece explores the amazing transformation of the Victoria Amazonica. The odyssey of this rare plant from the wilds of the Amazon to the civilized world is not only about the journey of an exotic species—during pollination Victoria changes sex and color—it is also about the lives of those who brought her into modern existence—the horticulturist, the curator, the gardener, and a monarchy. As the audience journeys through Longwood, they will discover the details of Victoria’s passage through different storytelling methods—narrative over ear phones, voices from the rose beds, an encounter with a gardener—which will track her journey to civilization. To explore her story is to hold a mirror on our own.

Team: Russell Davis (playwright) & James Pyne (designer)

Project Title: *The Evening & Morning Tiger*

Location: The Children’s Garden/East Conservatory

Brief Description:

An ensemble of nine performs a story inspired by animal characters featured as fountains in the Children's Garden, three of whom—a Tortoise, a Phoenix, and a Fish—stand on separate pedestals next to which is an empty fourth pedestal. In Asian mythology these three creatures are often thought of as being from one of the corners, or directions, of the world (north, south, east). The creature on the fourth corner (west) is missing and is often thought of as a tiger. An oppressive creature called the Tiger of Darkness has usurped this fourth corner of the world, while another creature, the Evening & Morning Tiger, has been forced into exile. This theatre piece recounts the return of the Evening & Morning Tiger using elements of composed music, moving light, video projection, puppetry, original glass and Lucite pieces, a circus aerialist, and choreography involving dance and juggling.

Team: Kathryn Petersen (playwright) & Tony Straiges (designer)

Project Title: *The Chrysalis Project*

Location: A circus tent on the cow field

Brief Description:

17th Century naturalist and scientific illustrator Maria Sybilla Merian is the central figure of this piece. Hard at work in Surinam, she is preparing specimens for a shipment back to Amsterdam when she falls ill with malaria. Her fevered dream erupts in front of her as a circus. She watches a younger version of herself learn how to observe the natural world and probe the mysteries of metamorphosis. This piece will use two aerial artists on silks, and a stilt walker to create the natural world of Maria’s dreams.

Team: Rachel Dickstein (playwright) & Susan Zeeman Rogers (designer)

Project Title: *Sylvan Wood*

Location: Pierce’s Woods

Brief Description:

Sylvan Wood is a collaboratively devised theatre piece by Rachel Dickstein and Susan Zeeman Rogers that leads its audience on an experiential audio-visual walking tour through the oldest portion of Longwood Gardens, Pierce's Wood. Inspired by Virginia Woolf's short story *Kew Gardens*, Ingmar Bergman's 1957 film *Wild Strawberries* and with a text based on interviews with guests, staff, volunteers and the diverse communities living and working near Longwood Gardens, Sylvan Wood offers a magical and moving exploration of the gardens at its most intimate and personal. Staged like a memory book, the piece invites its audience to walk through the densely-wooded pathways, listening to an intimately layered score of original music, sound, memories and questions. As the audience listens and travels, actors who inhabit these memories, emerge from behind trees, in dense thickets, and in faraway meadows. Audience members are led to discover objects hidden in the woods, objects that act like residues of memory and experience. Through story, sound, and image, Sylvan Wood immerses us in the experience of great love and loss in the presence of nature.

Team: Kathryn Walat (playwright) & Wilson Chin (designer)

Project Title: TBD

Location: Various sites within the Conservatory

Brief Description:

This piece aims to celebrate the intersection of human and natural diversity. Based on interviews conducted with a wide range of individuals around their personal connection to the plant world, the team will craft monologues to be performed at specific locations within the Conservatory. The performances will include physical action (planting of bulbs), spectacle (a woman sitting on a chair in the middle of the shallow pool), and music (a vocal/instrumental piece.)

Team: Lisa D'Amour (playwright), Katie Pearl (playwright) & Mimi Lien (designer)

Project Title: *Lost in the Meadow*

Location: The Meadow and the field next to it.

Brief Description:

The audience sits on the manicured grass near the meadow. They receive headphones which allow them to hear the conversations of the pairs of people set off in the distance of the Meadow. Each pair is talking about their own small and absurd problem and they are unaware of the beauty and vastness of the natural world around them. In addition to the pairs who are talking, there are pairs of people who are building. The talkers have walked to the manicured lawn and are now among the audience. The builders have constructed a radio tower and an oversized speaker contraption. The builders struggle to connect the radio tower to the speaker and when they do, we hear the voice of the Meadow.

ABOUT PEOPLE'S LIGHT

People's Light, a professional, not-for-profit theatre in Chester County, Pennsylvania, makes plays drawn from many sources to entertain, inspire, and engage our community. We extend our mission of making and experiencing theatre through arts education programs that excite curiosity about, and deepen understanding of, the world around us. These plays and programs bring people together and provide opportunities for reflection, discovery, and celebration. Founded in 1974, we produce seven to nine plays each season, in two black box theatres with 350 and 170 seats respectively, mixing world premieres, contemporary plays, and fresh approaches to classic texts for our 6-Play and Discovery Series.

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ABOUT LONGWOOD GARDENS

In 1906, industrialist Pierre S. du Pont (1870-1954) purchased a small farm near Kennett Square, PA, to save a collection of historic trees from being sold for lumber. Throughout his life, Mr. du Pont indulged his passion for gardening, turning his farm into a magnificent horticultural showplace. Today, Longwood Gardens is one of the world's great horticultural displays, encompassing 1,077 acres of gardens, woodlands, meadows, fountains, a 10,010-pipe Aeolian organ and a 4.5-acre conservatory.

From its origins, environmental stewardship and educating tomorrow's horticulture leaders has been a priority of Longwood. The garden settings of Longwood have also long-served as the backdrop for showcasing top performing artists. Since Pierre du Pont first welcomed his good friend John Philip Sousa to the Open Air Theatre stage in 1922, Longwood has hosted some of the finest artists from various performing genres. For more information, see LongwoodGardens.org.

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