SpeakEasy Stage Names Three Local Artists as its 2017-2018 Boston Project Playwrights

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(BOSTON) – Playwrights Phaedra Scott of Boston and Emily Schwend of Somerville have been selected from among 45 applicants to develop an original Boston-centric play as part of SpeakEasy Stage Company's returning new works initiative The Boston Project.

In addition, Obehi Janice, a 2016-2017 Boston Project Playwright, has been invited to return this season to continue development of her play **OLE WHITE SUGAH DADDY.**

Now in its third season, The Boston Project is a new works initiative that supports the creation and development of new plays set in Boston, which explore what it means to live in this city at this moment and tap into the full breadth of experiences and identities that make up life in the Hub.

The three Boston Project playwrights will each receive a commission and will have nine months to write and develop their proposed plays.

Ms. Scott will explore questions of created identity and biological fact in her play **DIASPORA**. Ms. Schwend, whose play is currently referred to as **UNTITLED TEENAGER PLAY,** will unpack the dangers, misogyny, and setbacks women face in a world where success and safety are not guaranteed. Ms. Janice will continue to consider race, gender, and the particularities of startup culture in her play **OLE WHITE SUGAH DADDY**.

Work on each play will build toward a two-week developmental workshop, culminating in invited staged readings in May 2018.

Throughout the process, SpeakEasy Stage will provide directors and dramaturgs dedicated to each project, research assistance, developmental readings, and other support as needed. The playwrights will also benefit from the input and support of SpeakEasy Producing Artistic Director Paul Daigneault.

Once again this year, The Boston Project has been made possible through funding from the Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust.

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"SpeakEasy has always been about Boston and Boston artists," said the company's Producing Artistic Director, Paul Daigneault. "The Boston Project offers us another way to support the theatre community around us and commit ourselves even further to the development and production of new works."

The first season of The Boston Project saw the development of two new plays set in Boston: **WARD NINE**, by Bill Doncaster, and **BORN NAKED**, by Nina Louise Morrison. Both plays were presented in staged readings in February 2016, and played to capacity crowds.

Last year, The Boston Project furthered the development of **WARD NINE**, while also helping to launch Rick Park's play **KNOCK DOWN DRAG OUT** and Obehi Janice's play **OLE WHITE SUGAH DADDY**. Mr. Park's and Ms. Janice's plays received staged readings in May 2017, and played to capacity crowds.

The 2017-2018 BOSTON PROJECT PLAYS

DIASPORA, by Boston's Phaedra Scott, explores the world of Sunny, a writer on the edge of success, whose life is shaken when she discovers where she came from. Janae, her niece, is a Black Studies major with a specific set of world views that Sunny does not fit into. Created identity and biological fact all come into question in their journey to find truth, acceptance, and selective honesty.

Phaedra Scott is a Boston based writer, dramaturg and director. An all-around Renaissance woman, Phaedra has been a part of the artistic departments of Cleveland Play House, Huntington Theatre Company, and Company One Theatre. Recent dramaturgy credits include *Homecoming Queen* and *Jass* (New Harmony Project), *Ole White Sugah Daddy* (The Boston Project), *How Soft the Lining* (Bad Habit Productions), and *Can You Forgive Her?* (Huntington Theatre Company). Directing credits Include: *SHE: A Choreoplay* (HERE Performing Arts), *weightless* (TC2), *I Don't Know* (Company One), and *Every 28 Hours* (Company One/MFA). Phaedra is a contributor for WBUR's The ARTery. She is also the recipient of the Bly Creative Capacity Grant, the Early Career Dramaturgs Grant, the Comegys Bight Fellowship and the Frederick Douglass Fellowship for her work on August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle. She also crochets, is a journalist, and enjoys obscure history.

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The 2017-2018 BOSTON PROJECT PLAYS (cont.)

UNTITLED TEENAGER PLAY, by Emily Schwend, follows a group of young women who work at a roadside coffee shop in a small Massachusetts town. The play is a coming-of-age story about women on the verge of independence, struggling to grow up in a country that gives them fewer and fewer options. The play unpacks the dangers, misogyny, and setbacks women face in a world where success and safety are not guaranteed.

Ms. Schwend is originally from Texas. Her plays include *Utility* (The Amoralists at Rattlestick Playwrights' Theater, NY); *The Other Thing* (Uptown Series at Second Stage Theatre, NY); *Take Me Back* (Walkerspace, NY; The Poor Theatre, Chicago); *South of Settling* (Next Up Rep at Steppenwolf, Chicago), and *Splinters* (CUDC Source Festival, DC). To date, her work has earned her a 2014 Tow Foundation playwriting residency at Second Stage Theatre, an EST/Sloan new play commission, the Lecomte du Nouy Prize, a MacDowell Fellowship, the 2013 Heideman Prize, the 2011 ACT New Play Award, and the 2009 David Calicchio Emerging American Playwrights Prize. Her plays have been developed at the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, PlayPenn, Lake George Theater Lab, Page 73, and the Old Vic/New Voices Festival, among others. She is a proud alumna of the playwriting programs at Juilliard and NYU, is a frequent contributor to Christine Jones's Theatre for One booth, and was a 2016-2017 Radcliffe Institute Fellow at Harvard. Her play *Utility* won the 2016 Yale Press Prize.

OLE WHITE SUGAH DADDY, written by Obehi Janice, tells the story of Lynn, a Dorchester native who is a rising star in the startup industries of Boston and Cambridge. The play centers on Lynn's attempts to court a new Angel Investor, and looks at how race, class, and color collide in her private life, public persona, and cyber footprint as she attempts to build her legacy. Obstacles arise in many different guises in **OLE WHITE SUGAH DADDY**, a play about love, identity, and the tension between striving and thriving.

Obehi Janice is an award-winning actress, writer and comedian. A graduate of Georgetown University, Obehi was named "Boston's Best Actress" by *The Improper Bostonian* in 2014. Her comedic short, *Black Girl Yoga*, won the Reel 13/AfroPunk Film Competition (WNET/New York Public Media). A leader in the millennial renaissance of socio-political arts and culture, Obehi works extensively on stage, screen and as a voice actress in video games, radio, and commercials. She has garnered esteem and recognition from *American Theatre Magazine*, *Bustle*, *WBUR*, *DigBoston*, *For Harriet*, and *The Boston Globe*. She is a Luminary Artist at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the recipient of a TCG Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellowship. Her plays have been developed or seen at the Gardner Museum, Off the Grid Theatre Company, SpeakEasy Stage Company, Bridge Repertory Theater, Company One, Boston Center for the Arts, Sleeping Weazel, Interim Writers, Our Voices Festival, Boston One-Minute Play Festival, Boston Theater Marathon, Berkshire Fringe Festival, MPAACT, ImprovBoston, GAN-e-meed Theatre Project, and 119 Gallery. She is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild and Actors' Equity Association.
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About SpeakEasy Stage

A Boston-based nonprofit professional theater company, SpeakEasy Stage Company is the Calderwood Pavilion Resident Theatre Company at the Boston Center for the Arts. The company currently produces 25-30 weeks of Boston Premiere plays and musicals each season at its home in the Nancy and Edward Roberts Studio Theatre in the Calderwood Pavilion. A mission-driven organization, the company exists to connect Boston audiences and artists by producing relevant, intimate, and surprising theatre. We are passionate about staging Boston premieres and championing local talent. We lead a courageous, compassionate and open-hearted theatre community, which develops local talent and reflects the vibrancy and diversity of our city. We value collaboration, excellence, responsibility, courage, respect, inclusion, and joy.

Founded in 1992, the company has emerged as a leader in Greater Boston's theatre community and a cornerstone of the arts and culture scene in Boston's South End neighborhood. Notable productions over the past 26 seasons include *The Scottsboro Boys*, *Dogfight*, *Next to Normal*; *Red*; *The History Boys*; *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*; *Bat Boy: The Musical*; *Caroline, or Change*; *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Tribes*, *Clybourne Park*, and *The Color Purple*.

For more information about the Boston Project, the public is invited to visit our website.

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