



NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Christie Snyder, csnyder@ppt.org

Pittsburgh Public Theater to open new speaker series Making Art Work with radical hospitality *Industry expertise takes center stage in speaker series during 50th anniversary season*

Oct. 2, 2024 | Pittsburgh Public Theater today announced its newest programming initiative with [Making Art Work](#), a speaker series designed to inspire, connect, and transform the future of regional theater through the exchange of ideas and experiences in the industry. The series features acclaimed artistic directors, authors, government officials, and more from across the country who will share their innovative practices and proven expertise.

Making Art Work kicks off a five-session series Monday, Oct. 14, by welcoming **Mark Valdéz**, artistic director of Minneapolis' impact-driven [Mixed Blood Theatre](#), for a moderated discussion titled "[Belonging and Radical Hospitality](#)." Mixed Blood describes radical hospitality as being at the core of all it does and makes its intentions clear in its mission statement: "to use theatre to disrupt injustices, advance equity, and build community."

"We are so excited to welcome Mark Valdéz to The Public to start off this new series," **Sarah Ashley Cain**, the discussion's moderator and associate artistic director at Pittsburgh Public Theater, said. "Mark's career highlights his commitment to creating a culture of belonging, removing barriers of access, and using theater as a catalyst for equity and justice both at Mixed Blood and beyond."

Valdéz has helmed the 48-year-old theater since succeeding its founder Jack Reuler in 2022 and is a champion of his theater's philosophy on welcoming all audiences through his doors. He kicked off his inaugural season leading Mixed Blood by collaborating with theater and non-theater artists alike to produce 10 community-focused and two identity-focused plays, and Twin Cities cultural critics [describe](#) his commitment to equity and justice as "his artistic watermark."

"We can use the tools and skills of theatermaking—imagination, consensus building, meaning making—to support our communities and our peoples... This is the work I care most about and I'm lucky to have found a home in Mixed Blood that shares these priorities," Valdéz said in a [statement](#) to *American Theatre* magazine at the time of his appointment.

The series continues Nov. 4 with a session on "[Race and the Real American Theater Crisis](#)," featuring Executive Leaders of Color with Kelvin Dinkins, Jr. (A.R.T. at Harvard), Shannon A. Jones (TheatreSquared), and Meredith Suttles (Creative Consultant and Arts Strategist, previously of Marin Theatre Company). "[To Adapt or Not To Adapt: Shakespeare and Democracy](#)," in December features James S. Shapiro, author and Larry Miller Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and Making Art Work continues through the new year with "[Culture RX](#)" and "[The Creative Economy](#)."

"There is an ancient proverb that states 'If you want to go fast go alone. If you want to go far, go together,'" Pittsburgh Public Theater Managing Director Shaunda McDill said. "This series is meant to bring us together in a brave space, where we can ask the necessary questions, share, and shape the future of this industry. My first job out of graduate school was with Cornerstone Theater Company where Mark was serving as Associate Artistic Director. I am grateful that twenty years later, I have the



opportunity to welcome him to The Public. He is an accomplished practitioner and one of the most compassionate people I have ever met. What a gift and perfect way to launch this series.”

Tickets to Making Art Work are now available at PPT.org/Series or by calling the Box Office at 412.316.1600. Making Art Work tickets are general admission and available as a \$100 [subscription](#) package, with bonus gifts like an exclusive pin and a to-go cup from The Public, or for \$20 individually. Tickets are available at the door for students for \$5 with valid ID.

About Mark Valdéz

Mark Valdez is the artistic director of Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis, where he partners with communities, organizations, civic institutions, and others, using theater and creative tools to address community needs and lift community voices and stories.

His work has been seen at the Alliance Theatre, Cornerstone Theater Company, East West Players, La Peña Cultural Center, Mixed Blood, the Ricardo Montalban Theater/CTG, and Trinity Rep, among others. Recent projects include the animated short film *The Curious Cardinal, Detained* by France-Luce Benson, and *The Most Beautiful Home...Maybe*, an interactive performance about affordable housing that toured the U.S. Mark also wrote and directed the world premiere of *Into the Burrow: A Peter Rabbit Tale* for the Alliance Theater, based on the Beatrix Potter characters, to examine childhood grief. With Mixed Blood, he commissioned 12 artists to create new performances with/for 12 Twin Cities communities. The project, *12x12*, culminated in a day-long festival of all 12 performances. In June 2024, Mark directed *Full Range* by Alison Carey, a new play with/for/about people living in Minnesota’s Iron Range region.

Mark was the founding Executive Director of the Network of Ensemble Theaters (NET), a collective of artists committed to co-creation. With NET, Mark launched new funding programs, such as NET/TEN to support collaborations and relation building between ensembles. He also launched the MicroFest USA initiative, a series of hyper-local performance/think tank events that examined the role of arts in strengthening communities. Host cities included Detroit, Appalachia (Knoxville, TN and Harlan Country, KY), New Orleans, and Honolulu.

Mark’s work has been featured in the Los Angeles Times, Minneapolis Star Tribune, the Huffington Post, American Theater magazine, Next City, and FORWARD magazine, and others. He has been featured in and contributed to various books and publications, such as *Local Acts* by Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Chinua Thelwell’s Theater and Cultural Politics for a New World*, and *John Britton’s Encountering Ensemble*.

Valdez is the recipient of the Johnson Fellowship for Artists Transforming Communities, the Zelda Fichandler Award, and the California Arts Council’s Legacy Artist Fellowship.

About Sarah Ashley Cain

Sarah Ashley Cain (she/they) is a queer, non-binary theater artist and producer originally from Virginia. She is the Associate Artistic Director of Pittsburgh Public Theater and joined The Public’s team beginning with its 50th season. Previously, they were the Director of Artistic Producing at Baltimore Center Stage and lead producer on all mainstage productions including the acclaimed world-premiere of *MEXODUS*, by Brian Quijada and Nygel D. Robinson.



She graduated from the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale with an M.F.A. in Theater Management. Sarah was the Artistic Director of Yale Cabaret's 54th season and led the first public theater performance on Yale University campus after an 18-month closure due to COVID. While on their graduate fellowship with Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, D.C., Sarah organized the theater's strategic planning process and founded Woolly's first ever accessibility committee.

Prior to Yale, they were the Operations Manager for the Virginia Film Festival, a program of the University of Virginia (UVA). Sarah also produced large events for UVA Arts, including the National Geographic on Campus Festival, the President's Speaker for the Arts Series, and the Bicentennial Launch Celebration – the largest multidisciplinary arts event in the University's 200-year history. Sarah has worked at other theater companies large and small, including Yale Repertory Theatre, Virginia Theatre Festival, No Rules Theater Company, and UVA Drama.

They recently joined the Board of Directors for Live Arts, a community-driven volunteer theater in Charlottesville, VA. Through their time as a Company Member with Live Arts, they worked with hundreds of high-school students each year at the American High School Theater Festival (AHSTF) at Edinburgh Fringe in Scotland. She currently serves on the League of Resident Theater's (LORT) Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee.

ABOUT PITTSBURGH PUBLIC THEATER

Pittsburgh Public Theater strives to be a true public theater to the Pittsburgh region and welcomes more than 70,000 guests through the doors of the O'Reilly Theater every year. The Public is renowned for its exceptional mix of programming, featuring American classics, world premieres, new adaptations, and favorite musicals. Its commitment to education and engagement initiatives is a cornerstone of its mission and includes the signature Shakespeare Monologue & Scene Contest and innovative community partnerships. The O'Reilly Theater is a project of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust.

Pittsburgh Public Theater is under the leadership of Artistic Director Marya Sea Kaminski and Managing Director Shaunda McDill and celebrates its 50th season in 2024.