



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT

Nicole Lane

Festival Director

nicolealane@comcast.net

360.601.4298

FERTILE GROUND FESTIVAL OF NEW WORKS Announces Strategic Hiatus Planned for 2023 Festival

PORTLAND, OREGON – May 22, 2022 | After a consistent 13 years of production as an annual festival dedicated to supporting new “acts of creation” by Portland artists, Fertile Ground Festival of New Works, a program of the Portland Area Theatre Alliance (PATA), will take a strategic hiatus for the 2023 festival. During this hiatus, the PATA Board of Directors will work toward restructuring the funding and staffing required for a sustainable future of the Fertile Ground Festival.

This difficult decision comes after the program made a range of major pivots during the pandemic in order to offer artists the opportunity and the outlet to share new work on a digital platform, and to give audiences the opportunity to see their stories online. During the 2021 and 2022 festivals, not only were registration fees reduced to create access for artists, but the festival productions were offered on a donation-to-the-artist basis only, or a pay-to-view fee paid to producers by ticket-buyers. Fertile Ground felt this was important to support the artist community struggling during the pandemic, and in order to draw an audience to the works. This vision meant that Fertile Ground did not have access to the revenue-generating \$50 Festival Pass that had been essential in moderately funding the previous 11 years.

Since its inception in 2008 – the brainchild of founder Trisha Mead – and its first festival in January 2009, Fertile Ground has presented well-over 1300 “acts of creation” that represent the new work of thousands of Portland-area artists, creative teams and arts producers. Since the inaugural festival in 2009 far more than 70 Fertile Ground-originated works have gone on to further productions, locally, nationally and in festivals worldwide. The “extended life” of these past Fertile Ground productions was documented in 2018 for the 10th annual festival, [in this archive](#).

“I am deeply proud of the role of Fertile Ground in Portland’s artistic landscape over the past 13 years,” said Nicole Lane, Fertile Ground Festival Director (2010-present). “From the bottom of my heart, I’ve been grateful to support the artists of Portland over its many incarnations, all these years. It has taken a village of dedicated volunteers to make Fertile Ground happen and adapt each year to the needs of the festival. I believe now is the time to look back, and identify successes and improvements, in order to look forward. It is time to assess how the program can become sustainable, fiscally and from a human-powered perspective. I am glad PATA

plans to take this strategic hiatus to work on this important new works platform for the sake of Portland's creative community."

"I am excited for the future of Fertile Ground," said Dré Slaman, Fertile Ground Managing Director (2014-2022). "This strategic hiatus is a tremendous opportunity for PATA to fortify the foundation that has been built by a team of dedicated, passionate volunteers over the last 13 years. This moment in time offers a chance to make the festival stronger, so that it may continue to be an outlet for artists to share their work, and the Portland community to enjoy it for years to come."

"The Portland Area Theatre Alliance takes great pride in the fact that The Fertile Ground Festival of New Works is one of our programs, and we will be taking a much needed opportunity to create a robust strategic plan for its future," said Samson Syharath, PATA Board President. "This festival has provided an amazing, and invaluable, platform for local performers and creators for the past 13 years. We hope to expand upon the equitable practices already in place under the leadership of Nicole Lane and Dré Slaman, with more support from grant funding, and a sustainable staffing structure. There are so many possibilities for how this festival can grow, and we are excited to explore them thoroughly."

KEY LINKS

[Fertile Ground Festival](#) website

[GROW Award](#) information

[GROW Light Selection](#) information

[GROW Panel](#) information

[Portland Area Theatre Alliance](#) (PATA)

FERTILE GROUND HISTORY

Fertile Ground 2021

In 2021, in order to serve a wider range of artists and audiences in the community, and in response to the pandemic and racial reckoning, significant actions were taken to create an equity-infused process that prioritized inclusivity for the 12th annual new works festival. To accomplish these ambitious shifts, both the festival framework and decision-making structures were revised.

Ground's virtual festival presented pre-recorded "acts of creation," submitted by producing organizations and artist-producers. Recorded premieres were live-dropped at scheduled intervals over the course of the 11-day festival, and streamed on Fertile Ground's Facebook and YouTube channels.

Moving the festival to a virtual platform resulted in a limited number of available festival slots, therefore making Fertile Ground 2021 (FG21) a curated festival. While curating the festival was a departure from one of the key founding tenets of Fertile Ground, this shift offered an opportunity for the festival to evolve, to ensure representation of underserved communities, actively engage in pro-inclusivity and power-sharing practices, and present a Fertile Ground festival in 2021.

Intent on fostering a festival that was more inclusive of and conducive to the participation of underrepresented communities, Fertile Ground created a new community panel, the GROW Panel. Demonstrating Fertile Ground's commitment to broadening representative inclusion of local artists, a panel – composed of individuals whose identities encompass a spectrum of underrepresented voices, along with Fertile Ground and PATA representatives – was instituted.

This decision-making body curated FG21 with attention to the inclusion of underrepresented communities,* artistically interesting and culturally relevant “acts of creation,” and projects with an innovative concept for a recorded piece intended for a digital media platform. Fertile Ground sought submissions from a wide range of artists on a variety of topics and welcomed an array of artistic genres and disciplines.

For FG21, Fertile Ground was awarded Regional Arts & Culture Council Arts Equity & Access funding. These funds were intended to formalize and expand the organization’s initiatives to address equity and access barriers to participation in the festival that exist for underrepresented artists. The grant allowed Fertile Ground to distribute funds to artists/producers through the GROW AWARD program, which was supplemented by community donors. Five artist/producers received a \$500 GROW Award with the RACC funding, and four more were awarded funds from the community donors to the program. The GROW Panel in 2021 both curated the festival and adjudicated applications for the GROW AWARD.

“At this time, in our local and national landscape, our community needs artists’ voices more than ever,” said Dre Slaman, Fertile Ground Managing Director, about the 2021 festival plans. “This re-imagined virtual Fertile Ground is about innovation, inclusion, and, most of all, the resilience of our local artistic community.”

“I believe we have a pivotal, vital opportunity to meaningfully invite new artistic voices into the festival while challenging all artists to innovate their work for this new kind of digital performance, and in doing that evolve Fertile Ground,” said Nicole Lane, Fertile Ground Festival Director about the 2021 festival plans. “We are working on these changes intentionally and swiftly with more pieces falling into place daily. It has been inspiring to work with an incredible group of people to redesign Fertile Ground with our sights set on bringing a vibrant festival of new work to at-home audiences that features inventive ‘acts of creation’ from an array of local artists who are emphatically representational of our entire community.”

**BIPOC, LGBTQ2IA+, Disabled*

Fertile Ground 2022

The 2022 Fertile Ground (FG22) was again a virtual festival due to the pandemic, but returned to its uncurated roots and offered the new works showcase to all Portland area artists. Given the unknowns of the pandemic and the burden of space rental, additionally, instead of presenting Fertile Ground projects via their online distribution platforms as accomplished for Fertile Ground 2021 (FG21), the festival directed audiences to producers’ (virtual) productions.

The online and uncurated Fertile Ground 2022 were presented differently than in the 2021 where the festival released selected (curated) projects on a set schedule for public consumption on a donation-only basis via the festival’s Facebook and YouTube channels. For FG22, Fertile Ground returned to functioning as the marketing platform for projects of new works. FG22 producers produced/premiered their work on their own platforms, at the times and dates of their choosing. Producers set their own pricing and box office, and determined how they plan to distribute their work to audiences for online consumption.

Fertile Ground organizers continued to be intent on fostering a festival that is more inclusive of and conducive to the participation of underrepresented communities and continuing work from 2021 efforts to address equity and access barriers to participation in the festival that exist for underrepresented artists. Fertile Ground’s GROW Panel selected five GROW Award recipients to receive \$500 to be used in production of their Fertile Ground project. 2022 funding comes from prioritizing funds for this program in the Fertile Ground budget, and from The Think System Foundation.

For FG22 festival, the 2021-formed GROW Panel was a 15-person community panel led by Samson Syharath. The GROW Panel adjudicated the 2022 GROW Awards. New for the 2022 festival, the group also designated FG22 projects as “GROW Light” selections, works that met 2022 group’s intention to highlight underrepresented communities, artistically interesting and culturally relevant “acts of creation,” and projects with an innovative concept for a recorded piece intended for a digital media platform. The aim of this endeavor was to inform festival-goers of key projects that involve aligned artists and stories, and encourage typically underrepresented artists* to be a part of Fertile Ground and elevate that work.

**BIPOC, LGBTQ2IA+, Disabled*

ABOUT FERTILE GROUND

Fertile Ground Festival of New Works, a program of the Portland Area Theatre Alliance (PATA), is an 11-day arts festival that is held every January/February in Portland, Oregon. The Fertile Ground Festival of New Works, serves our community’s artists and audiences by offering a new works festival that features a myriad of artistic endeavors by local artists.

The festival provides art-makers and producers a marketing umbrella and professional development opportunities. The annual festival offers a platform that fosters relationships between artists, producers and arts patrons, and deepens an appreciation for the abundant “acts of creation” in our community. Fertile Ground is committed to the continued examination and expansion of efforts toward equity, inclusion, diversity and accessibility at every level. The festival works toward creating an inclusive, welcoming festival platform shared by intersectional identities and underrepresented voices across race, ethnicity, color, age, gender identity and sexual orientation (*LGBTQ2IA+*), and physical or intellectual ability.

A program of the [Portland Area Theatre Alliance](#), whose goal is to increase the quality, quantity and professionalism of theatre produced in Portland and the surrounding areas, Fertile Ground was launched in 2009 to provide a platform for Portland theatre companies to showcase their commitment to new work. Today, the festival encourages all artists, of every background and discipline, to jump in to elevate a wide swath of voices and generate an exciting array of arts-centric offerings. Fertile Ground establishes for both artists and arts patrons that Portland is truly fertile ground for creativity, innovation and daring acts of performance.

The Fertile Ground Festival of New Works is a program of the Portland Area Theatre Alliance.

fertilegroundpdx.org

###