

ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE

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ANNOUNCING OREGON PLAY PRIZE WINNER

SIGNS by Steve Rathje

Awarded by Public Vote

Winner receives \$10,000 commission, development & production

PORTLAND, OREGON – September 21, 2016. Artists Repertory Theatre awards the Oregon Play Prize to Steve Rathje for his play SIGNS. Rathje is a 21-year-old student at Stanford University and a 2014 graduate of Lake Oswego High School. Rathje is the winner after three finalists were selected from 131 script submissions by 24 readers in a blind-reading format. The three scripts were then voted on by the public through a two-month blind, online voting process. The public cast 2,072 votes to express which play they'd most like to see produced at Artists Rep.

SIGNS is a surrealistic comedy about love, purpose and the little things that seem to matter so much to us. April reads horoscopes. Lydia writes horoscopes. April reads them devoutly, using them to guide her life choices. Lydia just makes them up, using the money she makes from them to support herself while she completes her novel. SIGNS follows the story of April who writes metaphors for a living — whenever an author is having trouble thinking of a creative, evocative metaphor, the metaphor is outsourced to her. One day, April discovers the “perfect metaphor” — a marvelous yet dangerous creation, a comparison so perfect that it renders other forms of communication meaningless. Eventually, April comes in contact with Lydia, an all-too-familiar force who has been transcribing April's fate through her horoscopes all along. After Lydia and April meet, the story turns upside down.

Praised by the National Eugene O'Neill Theatre Conference for its “imaginative whimsy and quick pace,” SIGNS is a magical, dreamlike and hilarious journey that explores determinism, memory and transcendence. It asks, “Where do forgotten memories go, after you forget them?” And it examines the little things — a piece of music, an image or a scent — that can transport us to a place where all memory and time exist. SIGNS has had two readings at Stanford University, one of which explored the use of olfactory design in the play. Audiences responded enthusiastically, lauding the play's delightful twists, poignant humanity, originality and humor.

STEVE RATHJE BIOGRAPHY

Steve Rathje's play SIGNS was recently named a Finalist in the 2016 National Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference. His other plays have been published by Samuel French Inc. and Dramatics Magazine and have been produced by Stanford University, the International Thespian Conference,

the Portland Fertile Ground Festival and more. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Proscenium Journal and co-producer of the Proscenium Live Festival of New Works. He has also acted with several Portland theaters including Artists Repertory Theatre, Northwest Classical Theatre and Coho Productions. Steve currently attends Stanford University, where he studies Symbolic Systems, Psychology, and Theatre and Performance Studies.

“We were thrilled by all three of the finalists' plays. It's exciting to know that Oregon is home to such excellent playwrights,” said Luan Schooler, Director of New Play Development and Dramaturgy. Luan leads T|R|S and the Oregon Play Prize project. “We are elated to be supporting Steve Rathje at the beginning of what we believe will be a remarkable career. It's especially exciting because our audience and extended community was a vital part of the selection process. Few commissions come with a guarantee of production, and we are excited to share SIGNS, a singular, buoyant piece of theatre, with our audiences in an upcoming season.”

ABOUT THE OREGON PLAY PRIZE

The Oregon Play Prize is a \$10,000 commission for a new play by an Oregonian playwright and is part of [Table|Room|Stage](#), the new play development program at Artists Rep. The play will be provided with development support and will receive a full production. The timeline to production will depend on the needs of the project. Between November 1, 2015 and January 31, 2016, 131 plays were submitted for the Oregon Play Prize. All the plays considered for the prize were written by residents of Oregon, with a few exceptions made for non-resident writers with strong ties to Oregon. The scripts were submitted at varying stages of completion, from a well-developed idea to a completed draft, and the play could not have received a prior production. Descriptions and writing samples of the finalists were posted on the [Oregon Play Prize](#) webpage July 20, 2016. A blind public vote took place from July 20, 2016 to September 15, 2016. Information about this process and the three finalist scripts are on posted on the website [here](#).

The Selection Process

Artists Rep received 131 scripts for consideration. A team of 24 readers, comprised of Artists Rep staff and volunteers from the community, evaluated the plays and advanced 33 of them to a second round. Submissions were provided to the readers using a blinded format with the playwrights' names removed from all submitted documents so that the reading committee did not know who wrote the plays they read. Between April 1 and June 30, these 33 plays were read and scored by the team of readers. Each play was read by at least four readers and evaluated on the basis of originality, dramatic action, language, characters, theatricality and appropriateness for Artists Rep.

FINALIST PLAYS

SIGNS by Steve Rathje – A surrealistic comedy about love, purpose, and the little things that seem to matter so much to us.

GOOD CITIZEN by George Taylor – an exploration of Oregon's role in the Japanese internment camps during World War II and one man's fight to be recognized. **George Taylor** has been a writer all his professional life and a theatre-lover since the age of eight, when he played the spoiled prince in a grade-school dramatization of a children's story, HOT AS SUMMER, COLD AS WINTER. GOOD CITIZEN was a finalist for the 2011 Oregon Book Awards and was short-listed for both the 2010 Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference and the Fratti-Newman Political Play competition in New York. It has had developmental readings at Artists Rep and OSF. His first completed work,

RENAISSANCE, was a 2008 Oregon Book Awards finalist and a semifinalist for the 2006-07 Julie Harris Playwright Award. His latest play, GHOSTS IN THE CANVAS was his third Oregon Book Awards finalist in 2015. Taylor is a member of the Dramatists Guild and has received playwriting fellowships from the Oregon Arts Commission and Oregon Literary Arts. A past board president of Profile Theatre, he now serves in that capacity with CoHo Productions. Read his full bio [here](#).

THE SNOWMAKER by Aleks Merilo – a psychological thriller in which a girl meets her estranged father and must figure out who – or what – he is running from. **Aleks Merilo** is a Pacific Northwest-based playwright and drama teacher. Merilo’s scripts include THE SNOWMAKER (Winner of the 2016 Playwrights First Award), THE WIDOW OF TOM’S HILL (Winner of the Julie Harris Playwriting Competition; produced Off Broadway at 59E59 in 2015), EXIT 27 (Winner of the CoHo Productions New by Northwest Playwriting Contest; performed at the Landing Theatre in Houston, The Sanguine Theatre Company in New York City and Southwest Theater Productions), and LITTLE MOSCOW (Winner of Dubuque Playwriting Contest; performed at the Labute New Play Festival, and the Arundel Festival, UK). His plays have been performed/developed with the aid of Furious Theater at Pasadena Playhouse, Old Globe Theater, Fertile Ground Festival of New Work, Pittsburgh New Works Festival, Ross Valley Players, Moving Arts Theater, The UCLA New Play Festival and Portland Readers Theater among others. Originally from Palo Alto, CA, he holds a BA in Theater, and an MFA in playwriting from The UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television. Read his full bio [here](#).

The full play description and a five-page writing sample of each of these finalist plays is [here](#).

ABOUT TABLE|ROOM|STAGE

In August 2014, Artists Rep was the recipient of a \$125,000 Oregon Community Foundation “Creative Heights” grant to establish a robust new play development program that will create opportunities for local and national playwrights, ensure that underrepresented voices are heard on stage and establish Artists Rep and Portland as an engine for new play development, nationally.

Artists Rep’s [T|R|S program](#) will commission a total of eight plays by 2017 – at least four of the eight commissions will go to writers of color, at least four will go to women, one play will be written for young adults and one is the Oregon Play Prize. With this prize now awarded, Artists Rep has extended five of the eight play commissions: Yussef El Guindi, Linda Alper, Larissa FastHorse, Andrea Stolowitz and Steve Rathje.

T|R|S program initiatives include eight playwright commissions, the Oregon Play Prize and a new public theatre investigation program, *Fresh Eyes*. A remarkable intention of T|R|S is to provide the public greater and unique access to the process of new work development through [blogs](#) and online videos that allow for audience engagement. Through these strategies audiences can learn about this little-known part of the theatre world by witnessing the process of play planning, selection and development, as well as learning from writers and artistic teams about their processes and their challenges in developing new work. Leading these wide-ranging programs with the support of the OCF grant is Director of New Play Development & Dramaturgy [Luan Schooler](#).

ABOUT ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE

[Artists Repertory Theatre](#)’s mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for artists of varied backgrounds to take creative risks. Artists Rep is Portland’s premiere mid-size regional theatre company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez and Managing Director

Sarah Horton. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artist Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in May 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).

[Artists Rep's 2016/17 season](#) offers a stylistically diverse season of seven imaginative and entertaining plays that grapple with family and the pursuit of happiness. The season features one World Premiere commissioned by Artists Rep's new play development program Table|Room|Stage, along with five Northwest Premieres (including a musical) by some of the best contemporary playwrights in the country, and one re-imagined classic featuring an all-female cast. The 2016/17 selections emphasize the aesthetic and scope of work Artists Rep has been committed to producing for almost 35 years as Portland's premiere mid-size regional theatre company.

Artists Rep has become a significant presence in American Regional Theatre with a legacy of world, national and regional premieres of provocative new work with the highest standards of stagecraft. The organization is committed to local artists and features a company of Resident Artists, 24 professionals of varied theatre disciplines, who are a driving force behind Artists Rep's creative output and identity. Artists Rep is committed to developing new work through the recently launched new play development program Table|Room|Stage. With T|R|S, Artists Rep strives to empower and support Oregon-based playwrights while also creating a Portland home for writers from around the country to develop their work. Additionally, this program will make a meaningful impact on equity in the arts by mandating opportunities for women writers and writers of color, and cultivating the next generation of theatre-goers by creating work specifically for young people (13 and up). Artists Rep makes a significant impact on the Portland arts community with its ArtsHub, creating space and offering a home to more than eight multidisciplinary arts organizations within its facility.

[RESIDENT ARTISTS](#) – Artists Rep productions feature the work of a core group of 27 multidisciplinary theatre professionals. Hailing from around the country, our Resident Artists are nationally renowned and award-winning actors, directors, writers, designers and educators who have chosen to make Portland and Artists Rep their artistic home. Working together and independently, they create inventive and theatrically rich experiences for our audiences while playing a major role in defining Portland's cultural landscape.

[TABLE|ROOM|STAGE](#) – Through T|R|S, Artists Rep is committed to becoming an engine for new play development. As a recipient of a \$125,000 Oregon Community Foundation Creative Heights grant to establish a robust new play development program, the company is creating opportunities for local and national playwrights to ensure that underrepresented voices are heard on stage. The T|R|S program will commission a total of eight plays by 2017 – at least four of the eight commissions will go to writers of color, at least four will go to women, one play will be written for young adults and one will be the [Oregon Play Prize](#), awarded to Oregon playwright Steve Rathje for his play SIGNS. Artists Rep has now extended five of the eight play commissions to Yussef El Guindi, Linda Alper, Larissa FastHorse and Andrea Stolowitz.

[ARTSHUB](#) – Artists Rep is also home to the ArtsHub, serving as a community arts center, where its performance venues and lobbies buzz with creative energy and Portland's arts-loving audiences can gather. Artists Rep offers a home within its facility to a diverse range of artists and arts organizations. They can thrive here with access to affordable administrative, performance and

rehearsal space, as well as a myriad of support services. Over the last year, hundreds of performances, events and happenings by Portlanders found a place in Artists Rep's building.

The 2016/17 Artists Repertory Theatre season is presented by sponsors Ronni Lacroute/WillaKenzie Estate and David & Christine Vernier and the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz and Renaissance Foundations. Other season support comes from the Collins Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, Theatre Communication Group and the Regional Arts and Culture Council and Work for Art.

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