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Ford's Theatre
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**Ford's Theatre Society Announces Works by
Pearl Cleage, Dominic Taylor and Rickerby Hinds
for *The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions:
A First Look Readings***



February 2-4, 2023

**Featuring New Work by Pearl Cleage,
Dominic Taylor and Rickerby Hinds**

***Something Moving: A Meditation on Maynard* by Pearl Cleage**

Thursday, February 2, 2023, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, February 4, 2023, at 7:30 p.m.

Directed by Seema Sueko

***Young and Just* by Dominic Taylor**

Friday, February 3, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.

Directed by Donald Douglass

***Blackbox* by Rickerby Hinds**

Saturday, February 4, 2023 at 2:30 p.m.

Directed by Thomas F. DeFrantz

[RSVP to Attend Readings](#); Tickets are Free and Open to the Public

Washington, D.C. – Ford's Theatre Society is proud to announce its lineup and directors of new works to receive premiere readings in February 2023 as a "First Look" of the Legacy Commissions. **Seema Sueko** (*Silent Sky*) will direct **Pearl Cleage's** meditation on the life and impact of Maynard Jackson, *Something Moving: A Meditation on Maynard*. **Dominic Taylor's** exploration of pioneer Black biologists Dr. Ernest Everett Just and Dr. Roger Arliner Young, *Young and Just*, will be directed by **Donald Douglass**. **Thomas F. DeFrantz** will direct *Blackbox*, **Rickerby Hinds's** magical hip-hop retelling of abolitionist Henry Box Brown's escape to freedom.

This free, three-day public festival of readings provides a preview of new plays in development with members of our first cohort of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) playwrights in The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions initiative. There will be opportunities for expanded conversations around the work. With *A First Look*, Ford's gives audiences an unparalleled inside peek at the process and voices that shaped these works. Reserve your tickets on the Ford's Theatre website at <https://fords.org/whats-happening/the-fords-theatre-legacy-commissions/>.

Playwrights **Pearl Cleage, Rickerby Hinds, Nambi E. Kelley, Dominic Taylor** and **Charlayne Woodard** comprise the inaugural writers of The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions. **Senior Artistic Advisor Sheldon Epps, Director of Artistic Programming José Carrasquillo** and **The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions Advisor Sydné Mahone** lead the initiative.

"Ford's is committed to uplifting the voices of BIPOC playwrights and is thrilled to be an incubator for our artists' development of powerful new work," said Ford's Theatre **Director Paul R. Tetreault**. "We are privileged to have nationally renowned playwrights writing works that, although historical in nature, deal with themes and issues that are pressing and relevant today."

The Commissions process provides extensive development for the artists, which may include first readings, developmental workshops and world-premiere productions in the next decade. These commissions seek to broaden the American theatre canon by fostering and developing playwrights, incubating stories about social justice and racial history, and exploring the varied experiences of underrepresented characters and lesser-known historical figures and their contributions to American life.

Ford's Theatre **Senior Artistic Advisor Sheldon Epps** shared his fascination with what he calls unsung heroes: "those men and women who are not well-known, but who should be celebrated and placed in the spotlight for their contributions to the growth and evolution of our country, either in big ways or small."

"We are elated to provide our audiences with a first look at the plays in development and share space with our artists at this stage in their process," said Ford's Theatre **Director of Artistic Programming José Carrasquillo**. "We also look forward to Nambi and Charlayne's work, and the promise of this initiative that is ushering in an exciting era for the artistic endeavors of all involved."

The Ford's Theatre 2022-2023 season is sponsored by **Chevron** and **Lockheed Martin Corporation**. The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions are generously supported by Lead Sponsor: **Boeing**, as well as Sponsor: **The Home Depot**.

The lineup for this festival includes:

***Something Moving: A Meditation on Maynard* by Pearl Cleage**

Thursday, February 2, 2023, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, February 4, 2023, at 7:30 p.m., followed by a post-show conversation with the director

Directed by Seema Sueko

Dramaturgy by Sheldon Epps

Run time: 90 minutes

Pearl Cleage's commission explores the legacy and election of Maynard Jackson, Atlanta's first Black mayor. In choosing to tell the story of the 1973 landmark election, we are introduced to everyday-life citizens of Atlanta as they recollect the significance of the election on its 50th anniversary. By paying homage to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, Cleage has turned the city of Atlanta into a full-blooded character. Cleage opens and closes the festival with this piece about collective memory and the personal stories within this "hero's tale."

Cleage says that her play "makes the case for the power of collective memory. Amiri Baraka wrote 'if the beautiful see themselves/they will love themselves.' I believe that too, so this play is a mirror as well as a meditation; a memory of a moment when our town was 'wholly human, and that was enough.'"

Seema Sueko (*Silent Sky*) will direct. **Sheldon Epps** serves as the dramaturg. **Brandon Prendergast** is the stage manager, with **Heather Ledamyen** as production assistant. **Sara Gehl** is the festival production assistant.

Panel: *Taking Center Stage: Under-Told Stories in the American Theatre*
Friday, February 3 at 6:30 p.m.

Join Ford's Theatre on **February 3 at 6:30 p.m.** prior to *Young and Just* for a conversation about expanding the lens through which we view and portray our history to reveal lesser-known stories that have had an impact on local, regional and national communities. We will discuss the value of adding more stories to our historical narrative, and the research, as well as creative investments required to honor the people and the movements behind them. The panel will feature **Dr. Edna Greene Medford**, professor of history emerita at Howard University, and **Denise J. Hart**, professor of playwriting and dramaturgy at Howard University.

***Young and Just* by Dominic Taylor**

Friday, February 3, 2023 at 7:30 p.m., followed by a post-show conversation with the playwright

Directed by Donald Douglas

Dramaturgy by Sydné Mahone

Run time: 90 minutes

Dominic Taylor's commission explores the life and work of African American pioneer biologist Dr. Ernest Everett Just and that of his lead researcher Dr. Roger Arliner Young. Taylor's investigation into the life and scientific achievements of Dr. Young – known as the Black Apollo of Science – led him to Dr. Young's association with another scientist, Dr. Just. This character-driven account highlights Taylor's revelatory and insightful storytelling.

"I discovered Dr. Ernest Everett Just because my sister went to Dartmouth College, and I knew he was the first Black graduate there. I also knew he was a scientist, underappreciated and on a postage stamp. I wanted to bring his story to light, and when I was researching Dr. Just, I found about Dr. Roger Arliner Young – a woman who went to Howard to study music and found her true calling with a microscope," Taylor said.

Donald Douglass will be the director. **Sydné Mahone** is the dramaturg. **Joan Foster McCarty** is the stage manager and **Jessica Hagy** is the production assistant.

***Blackbox* by Rickerby Hinds**

Saturday, February 4, 2023 at 2:30 p.m., followed by a post-show conversation with the playwright

Directed by Thomas F. DeFrantz

Dramaturgy by José Carrasquillo

Run time: 90 minutes

Magic, musicality and movement abound in **Rickerby Hinds'** commission, which explores the remarkable life of abolitionist Henry Box Brown, who was also a magician and an illusionist. In 1849, he arranged to have himself mailed in a wooden crate from Virginia to abolitionist contacts in Philadelphia. Later in his life, Henry Brown became a noted abolitionist speaker and went on to earn a living as a touring magician. Considered a theatre pioneer in merging hip-hop and theatre, Hinds transforms his story into an epic poem with hip-hop influence and magic to highlight the spectacular nature of Brown's journey to freedom.

"The story is told by a Magician and his Assistant/Spirit Presence whose magic show takes place in the see-through box that is the stage where he remains for the entirety of the performance until Henry 'magically' disappears from enslavement and reappears free: a re-envisioning of the box in which Henry

spent 27 hours on his way to freedom,” Hinds said. “This premise allows me to address some of the horrors of Henry’s life in a ‘spectacular’ way.”

Thomas F. DeFrantz directs this piece. **José Carrasquillo** will be the dramaturg. **Taylor Kiechlin** will serve as stage manager, with **Natasha Sanchez** as production assistant.

The play development of *Blackbox* by Rickerby Hinds has taken place with generous support from CalArts.

The Playwrights

Pearl Cleage is a playwright, novelist, poet and political activist. Cleage’s plays and novels deal with themes of racism, sexism and feminism. Her plays, novels, poems and essays have been anthologized and are the subject of scholarly analysis. Her best-known plays, *Flyin’ West* (1992) and *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (1995), have been performed in regional theatres across the United States. In 1996, *Blues for an Alabama Sky* was performed during the Atlanta Summer Olympic Games as part of the Cultural Olympiad. She is the Playwright in Residence at Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre.

Dominic Taylor is a scholar of African American theatre and a writer-director whose work has been seen across the country. His play *I Wish You Love* premiered at Penumbra Theatre and was produced at both The Kennedy Center and Hartford Stage in 2012. His play *Hype Hero* was developed at the Eugene O’Neill Theatre Center in Waterford, Connecticut, and was produced at Brown University in fall 2014. The Goodman Theatre Steppenwolf Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theatre and New York Theatre Workshop have all commissioned Taylor’s writing. He received his BA and MFA degrees from Brown University. Taylor is a professor at UCLA in both the Department of African American Studies and the Department of Theatre. He is former associate artistic director of Penumbra Theatre Company in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is an alumnus member of New Dramatists, a member of Stage Directors and Choreographers, a board member of the Givens Foundation for African American Literature and an associate artistic director of America-in-Play.

Rickerby Hinds is a pioneer of Hip-Hop Theatre. His work has been developed at the Mark Taper Forum, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, The Royal Court Theatre in London and The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where he presented *Blackballin’* (2008), the first hip-hop play in their history. His play *Dreamscape* (2016) became the recipient of multiple theatre accolades in the Los Angeles area. Hinds’ plays have toured Romania, Poland, Austria, Hungary and Turkey. Hinds completed a Fulbright Fellowship in his native Honduras in 2016. He serves as chair of the Department of Theater, Film and Digital Production at the University of California, Riverside, and he is the founding director of Riverside Studios.

The Directors

Seema Sueko’s work has been previously seen at Ford’s with her direction of Lauren Gunderson’s *Silent Sky*. She grew up in Honolulu, with a Pakistani father and a Japanese American mother. Conversations about the arts, politics and community wove through her upbringing, stitching the tapestry of her core belief: theater is transformative and can contribute to building successful communities when we intentionally activate this art form for the public benefit. Today, Seema directs stage, film, consensus organizing and R&D projects and productions for theaters, think tanks and the greater good. She previously served as Deputy Artistic Director of Arena Stage. She directed the film *Veterans Day 2020* in partnership with the Atlantic Council Think Tank, the world premiere of Sharyn Rothstein’s *Right to be Forgotten*, revivals of *The Heiress* and *The Price* and Lydia Diamond’s *Smart People*. Seema earned her M.A. in International Relations from the University of Chicago. She serves on the boards of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation.

Donald Douglass has explored all aspects of the theatre, film and theatre arts education as an actor, dancer, choreographer, writer, instructor, director and producer for over 30 years across the United States and internationally. He is the former Artistic Director of Free Street Theater. During his 18-year

tenure with Free Street, Douglass staged more than 50 musicals. He was choreographer for the Jeff Award-winning musical *Po'* at The Chicago Theater Company, the hit film *Hollywood Shuffle* where he played several characters and the PBS critically acclaimed feature film *The Killing Floor*. He was a principal dancer in the hit movie *The Blues Brothers*. Other directing credits include: *The Old Settler* and *Police Boys* for the Pittsburgh Public Theater; the world premiere of Dominic Taylor's *Wedding Dance* for Crossroads Theater; Thulani Davis' *Everybody Loves Ruby* at the Mark Taper Forum; and *Flyin' West* and *Spunk* at the Penumbra Theater. Off-Broadway credits include *Police Boys* at Playwrights Horizons, *Dates and Nuts* and *Freefall* (7 Audelco Awards nominations including Best Director) for the Weissberger Theater Group. Other regional directing credits include *I Am A Man* at the Arena Stage (Helen Hayes Best Director nomination), George C. Wolfe's *Spunk* at Chicago's Goodman Theater, (Jefferson Award for Best Director - making him the first African American to receive the award). August Wilson's *Fences* for Baltimore Center Stage, *The Piano Lesson* and *Fences* at Rockford's New American Theater and *That Serious He Man Ball* for the Chicago Theater Company.

Thomas F. DeFrantz directs SLIPPAGE: Performance | Culture | Technology: a group that explores emerging technology in live performance applications. He believes in our shared capacity to do better and engage creative spirit for a collective good that is anti-racist, proto-feminist and queer affirming. Creative projects include *Queer Theory! An Academic Travesty* commissioned by the Theater Offensive of Boston and the Flynn Center for the Arts; *fastDANCEpast*, created for the Detroit Institute for the Arts; *reVERSE-gesture-reVIEW* commissioned by the Nasher Museum in response to the work of Kara Walker, January, 2017. He convenes the Black Performance Theory working group, as well as the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance, a growing consortium of 325 researchers committed to exploring Black dance practices in writing. DeFrantz acted as a consultant for the Smithsonian Museum of African American Life and Culture, contributing concept and a voice-over for a permanent installation on Black Social Dance that opened with the museum in 2016. He has chaired the Program in Women's and Gender Studies at MIT; the concentration in Physical Imagination at MIT; the Department of African and African American Studies at Duke; and served as President of the Society of Dance History Scholars. He currently teaches at Northwestern University.

COVID-19 Health and Safety

Face coverings are strongly encouraged. Ford's Theatre COVID-19 guidance is developed in collaboration with the George Washington Medical Faculty Associates (GW MFA) and may change at any time. As one of the largest physician groups in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, GW MFA is recognized for excellence in clinical care, research and training of future care providers. The advice and expertise of the medical staff at the GW MFA, which is based on data and guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has helped Ford's Theatre Society strengthen its safety procedures to better serve and protect patrons, artists and staff as productions and daytime visits resume. For more information about Ford's Theatre health and safety protocols, visit www.fords.org/performance-safety.

Ford's Theatre Society

Ford's Theatre Society was founded under the guidance of executive producer **Frankie Hewitt**, who, during her 35-year tenure, established Ford's as a living, working theatre producing performances that highlighted the diversity of the American experience. Since the arrival of **Paul R. Tetreault** as Director, critics and the theatregoing public have recognized Ford's for the superior quality of its artistic programming. With works from the Tony-nominated *Come From Away* and the nationally acclaimed Big River, to the world premieres of *Meet John Doe*, *The Heavens Are Hung In Black*, *Liberty Smith*, *Necessary Sacrifices*, *The Widow Lincoln* and *The Guard*, Ford's Theatre is making its mark on the American theatre landscape. For its accomplishments, the organization was honored in 2008 with the National Medal of Arts. In the past decade, the mission of Ford's Theatre Society expanded to include education as a central pillar. This expansion led to the creation and construction of the Center for Education and Leadership, which opened in February 2012. Currently under the leadership of Board of Trustees Chairman **Phebe N. Novakovic** and through the lens of Lincoln's leadership and legacy, Ford's Theatre Society is advancing the "unfinished work" of Abraham Lincoln by creating a vibrant, accessible Ford's Theatre campus that cultivates civic discourse, supports our nation's educators and engages the

community with our history. For more information on Ford's Theatre and the Ford's Theatre Society, please visit www.fords.org.

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#FordsLegacyCommissions

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Ford's Education on Twitter: [@fordsedu](https://twitter.com/fordsedu)

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FACT SHEET: The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions Festival: A First Look
Plays by Pearl Cleage, Dominic Taylor and Rickerby Hinds
Directed by Seema Sueko, Donald Douglass and Thomas F. DeFrantz

Experience the power of The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions with a first look at staged readings of *Something Moving: A Meditation on Maynard* by Pearl Cleage, *Young and Just* by Dominic Taylor and *Blackbox* by Rickerby Hinds.

DATES: February 2-4, 2023

LOCATION: Ford's Theatre is located at 511 10th Street NW, between E and F Streets NW.

PLAY DESCRIPTIONS AND TIMES:

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PLAYWRIGHT BIOS:

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TICKETS: Free and available to the public now. [Reserve tickets here.](#)

COVID-19 SAFETY: Masks are strongly encouraged. The safety of our artists, crew and audience members is our top priority. Please [read our full COVID-19 policy](#) on our website.

PARKING: Paid parking is available at several independent neighborhood garages: the 24-hour QuickPark at the Grand Hyatt (entrance on 10th Street between G and H Streets NW), the Central Parking Garage (entrance on 11th Street between E and F Streets NW), and the One Parking garage below Ford's Theatre (at 511 10th Street, NW).

METRO: The Metro Center station (Red, Blue, Orange and Silver Lines) is two- and one-half blocks north of the theatre from the Eleventh Street exit. The Gallery Place-Chinatown station (Red, Yellow and Green Lines) is two- and one-half blocks north of the theatre from the G Street exit. For further information, call Metro at (202) 637-7000.

Tickets at www.fords.org

Information: (202) 347-4833 -- Toll Free: (888) 616-0270 -- Groups: (202) 638-2367

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Website: www.fords.org

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