

For Immediate Release. Please contact Daisy Blake for interviews or questions, on 801.604.7845, or daisyvalentineblake@hotmail.com. Photographs are available on request.

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah, Oct. 6, 2020 – Pygmalion Productions will be opening its 2020/21 season with the world premiere of 'White Savior' by internationally acclaimed playwright Catherine Filloux. The play will be filmed and will be available to view online before the election. Actors will not wear masks for the recording.

The playwright has received awards from the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays, the O'Neill, the MAP Fund, and the Asian Cultural Council. She was the winner of the 2017 Otto René Castillo Award for Political Theatre in New York City. She has been a Fulbright Senior Specialist in playwriting in Cambodia and Morocco.

Filloux described the play: "Politics collide during the 45th president's term, when two sisters -- a human rights researcher and an arch conservative mom clash. An African American professor/ journalist is thrown into their lives and they end up convening in Texas, at the Desert Cactus Motel."

She added: "My character Susan listens to a podcast: 'I Don't Want To Fight With You, But I Will.' Susan tells her sister Jean: 'It's about taking off the boxing gloves and trying to listen to each other.' You'll see how hard that ends up being in 'White Savior.' The struggle is definitely not without humor. I loved the way [director] Fran Pruyn and the two actors in my play 'Mary and Myra' (which was done at Pygmalion right before the last election) listened to my plea: 'It can be funny!' And the actors in 'White Savior' are also funny. A difficult and complex time we are living in, especially over discussions about painful and polarizing topics such as the themes in my plays. What we can do is listen and hope others will do the same."

Director Pruyn described how the production changed due to the advent of COVID-19.

"We agreed to workshop the show, give it readings, and then produce in the first slot of the year," Pruyn said. "That was way before pandemic times. Or at least U.S. pandemic times. Then, we postponed 'Body Awareness' to 2021 and used a tiny bit of that money to fund a Zoom workshop with four actors over a two-and-a-half week period of time in June. Cat made revisions. Meanwhile, we were still hoping for a live production -- but when it became clear that we had to restrict the number of audience members so severely, it just became economically unfeasible to do the show live -- and who knows if our audience would actually show up? They tend to be the more cautious and sometimes older people who are trying to put safety first. So, then, in order to fulfill our mission, what we feel is our obligations to our audience and to the playwright, we decided to film the show.

"This is not our first choice. There are people who make movies, and this is way different than a movie -- it is a live show edited for digital consumption. I think because it

is a new script with relevant themes that people will want to see it. Or I hope they do. Fortunately, we can air it to a wide audience and people outside of Utah that have been supporters of the company, who will have an opportunity to engage in new dramatic literature that has been staged. It is not a movie and it is not live theater -- it is pandemic theatre.”

The show features April Fossen, Liz Whittaker, Calbert Beck and Sydney Shoell.

Fossen spoke about how the show will be different because of the advent of COVID-19.

“There are so many things to think about right now, it's been difficult to find the focus for a theatre project, but as always happens, once we're in the room other thoughts tend to fall away,” she said. “There are definitely new challenges: not being able to engage with each other's ENTIRE faces or have physical touch as part of our language. Mask necessity in the world in general and in this process has definitely made me aware of how much I use my face to convey things.”

Whittaker added: “There are two big challenges to acting while safely observing COVID guidelines: number one, wearing masks means you only get to work with half of your face and half of your fellow actors' faces in rehearsal, and number two, you can't get close to each other. The last one is definitely the hardest. It feels natural to want to stand close to someone, or make some kind of physical contact, but we can't do that right now. Acting is so often about following your instincts, but in this case, you've got to actively ignore those instincts, or find a way to do the same thing but with distance.

“The technical elements are definitely easier for the actors with a filmed show -- we don't have to worry about doing quick costume changes, or quick set changes. And it's easy to adjust things in the moment.”

Whittaker also talked about embarking on a show in the midst of a pandemic.

“Doing a show in the middle of a pandemic feels as uncertain as everything else during a pandemic,” she said. “You don't know from one day to the next if someone will get sick, or if there will be some kind of delay, or what changes you may need to make. But it also feels very hopeful to be making art with other humans right now. Human connection is so important, and while we have to learn to connect with distance and masks, I feel really grateful to be able to do a show right now and have that connection with others, and to be making something to share with others.”

Beck spoke about how this show is particularly relevant in our current environment.

“This show happens to highlight one aspect of a much broader personal schema that I am sure most everybody has had to reexamine recently,” he said. “Some believe worldly issues are too far away from them to matter, yet this show happens to highlight how close they actually are, for many.”

Shoell added: “The play highlights the difficulties of our polarized societies and how difficult it can be to have a relationship with someone on the other side of the aisle.”

Whittaker also responded to that question: “At the heart of this story is the question of how we navigate our relationships with loved ones when we have fundamental disagreements about how the world should be. That question is relevant all the time, but it’s especially relevant in an election year during a global health crisis and an ongoing fight for racial justice. Many of us are facing some of the same questions as Susan and Theresa and Jean and Edward...how do I still love someone if I think their beliefs or actions are harmful? I don’t know that our show has all the answers, but I hope audiences are able to gain some insight and at least begin a conversation.”

And Pruyn added: “Families have been torn to shreds over politics during this period, and particularly during this administration. At its heart, this is what this show is really about – trying to find common ground with siblings on radically different sides of the political spectrum. Also, the key social issue is still a key social issue: illegal immigration and what is happening on the border with those immigrant families. There are no key resolutions in the show – and it is really often very funny. Sort of like where we all are in our current environment.”

Pruyn also spoke about the importance of theatre during this time: “There is nothing like the connection of words-actors-audience -- especially when tackling deeply personal and rampant social problems. If we don’t keep doing it, if people don’t keep seeing it, the art form can atrophy. It will probably have to metamorphose to remain healthy. And speaking for my community of artists -- because we have to continue to create and connect to feel hope and optimism.”

Who: Pygmalion Productions Theatre Company

What: “White Savior,” a world premier by Catherine Filloux

When: The show will be available to view early November