

For immediate release: April 1, 2019



**18 years of staging young and emerging radical voices in Toronto**

### **Paprika Festival announces 2019 programming**

**Toronto, ON – Paprika Festival**, recognized as one of the most critical launching pads in Toronto’s theatre ecology for young and emerging artists, is thrilled to announce its lineup for the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Festival opening **May 20<sup>th</sup>** at **Native Earth Performing Arts**. Featuring over 20 young and emerging artists, Paprika Festival continues to offer an unparalleled look into the future of Toronto theatre with this year’s artists staging works of resilience and protest.

As the home of the emerging artist, Paprika is more committed than ever to building professional development opportunities that allow young and emerging artists to flourish and succeed in the theatre industry. Just in the past year, several Paprika alumni have continued to find success on Toronto stages: ***A Perfect Bowl of Pho*** by **Nam Nguyen** (Productions 17/18) had an extraordinary remount presented by fu-GEN Theatre and Factory Theatre; ***The Heels of Our Grandfathers*** by **Cole Forrest** (Productions 17/18) was presented in North Bay’s On The Edge Fringe; and the inaugural **Indigenous Arts Program** project, ***S.O.S. Saving Our Sovereignty*** by **Out of Sync Collective** (Theresa Cutknife, Pesch Nepoose, and Jesse Wabegijig) was presented as part of the 31<sup>st</sup> Weesageechak Festival at Native Earth Performing Arts.

***“Paprika, the organization as a whole, has contributed immensely to the Toronto theatre ecology, consistently creating vital space for young artists to collaborate, explore and be seen. I am consistently blown away by the passion of performances and the innovation in ideas.”*** (Marjorie Chan, Artistic Director - Cahoots Theatre)

We are thrilled that over 20 core participants plus over 40 artists will be taking the stage at Native Earth Performing Arts’ Aki Studio. Paprika’s **six free programs** (which, for the first time this year, include **participant honorariums**) offer a flexible, personalized alternative to traditional theatre training and allow young and emerging artists to express themselves through performance. Paprika is dedicated to drawing a new generation of artists into the

theatre community through (in the words of **Andy McKim**, Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille) “outreach work that is so exemplary, it serves as a model for our theatre industry.”

With this year’s Paprika cohort celebrating resilience and protest through storytelling, multi-lingual performance, physical theatre, devised creation, and music, there is a lot to be excited about. Some of the highlights at this year’s Festival include:

Under the guidance of mentors **Audrey Dwyer** and **Julie Tepperman**, our **Productions Program** offers two new plays providing insight into mental health in Black communities, and one woman’s fight against the corruption of the Catholic Church.

- **Rais Clarke-Mendes’ *How We Breathe*** is a collectively created piece that aims to build conversation around the intersectionality of mental health, specifically focusing on the ways Black communities approach and talk about their mental wellness. Presented with **Obsidian Theatre Company**, **Workman Arts**, and **Little Black Afro Theatre Company**.
- ***Heresy*** is a new bilingual musical by **Dharma Bizier** and **Kelsi James** that centres around two women, the legendary Jeanne d’Arc and her mother, Isabelle Romée, and their rebellion against the religious corruption of the Catholic Church. Presented with **Nightwood Theatre**, **Théâtre français de Toronto**, and **The Musical Stage Company**.

The **Directors Lab**, mentored by **Courtney Ch’ng Lancaster**, delved deep into the role of directors and women in leadership positions - timely for the recent changes in leadership at some of Toronto’s most celebrated theatres. Coincidentally, this year’s Directors Lab projects explore women in power and the trials and triumphs of taking charge:

- ***Session***, directed by **Laura Meadows**, tells the story of Delilah, an out-of-work actress embracing an unexpected new career as a dominatrix. During one of her sessions, her client turns out to be a familiar face, which hurls them into an awkward and heartbreaking confrontation about adulthood.
- **Rinchen Dolma** directs སྲིལ་ལོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ **DOLMA**, a story set in India about a woman’s decision to stand her ground on the same day that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is assassinated.

Paprika alum **Bilal Baig** returns as this year’s **TD Creators Unit** facilitator. With mentorship and guidance from Bilal, **Naomi Bachan**, **Betty Lai**, **Kendra Michel** and **Cynthia Su** have collectively created ***Did You Miss Me?***, a piece exploring self-purpose, dependency, restraint, and the afterlife.

Returning Paprika artists **Cole Forrest**, **Joelle Peters**, **Theresa Cutknife** and **Jesse Wabegijig** are now in the second year of the Indigenous Arts Program, facilitated by **Michaela Washburn** (with mentors **Falen Johnson** and **Veronica Johnny**), and supported through new partnerships with **IndigenEd** and **TO Live**. This year's Indigenous Arts Program sheds new light on decolonizing our understanding of love and community through environmentalism, language, and comedy.

- **Cole Forrest** takes on environmental issues impacting Northern Ontario in ***Firestarter***, an epic story about two Indigenous teenagers from the same reserve who endanger their community and those they love when their fiery powers set a forest ablaze.
- In ***Kisâkhitin/Gizaagin***, **Theresa Cutknife** and **Jesse Wabegijig** team up again to answer the question: What is Indigenous love? Through poetry and performance, Cutknife and Wabegijig reimagine love in colonial spaces.
- **Joelle Peters** ***Niish*** follows two new friends, Sam or Lenna. Neither were expecting much from another summer on the rez but sometimes, life has other plans. Told with heart, humour, and rez nicknames, ***Niish*** explores themes of love, loss and healing within a family, a community, and oneself.

Join us for the Indigenous Arts Program Showcase on **Saturday May 25th**, curated by mixed-race non-binary Indigenous 2-Spirit artist **Ty Sloane**. Alongside the three Indigenous Arts Program shows, the day will include a panel discussion on Indigenous love and how it informs art-making (with **Falen Johnson**, **Jeff D'Hondt**, and other artists) and a cabaret-style soiree of music, dance, drag, poetry, and performance featuring **Ashley Bombay**, **Rhinestone Chickadee**, **Sophie Dow**, **Brendan Chandler**, **Jay Northcott**, **Olivia Shortt**, and **Ravyn Wngz**.

Rounding out the Festival's programming is **Carving Home: Paprika's Playwrights Unit Reading Series**, facilitated by **Jeff Ho** and **Polly Phokeev** (with guest mentors **Erin Brubacher**, **Guillermo Verdecchia**, **Nina Lee Aquino**, **Bilal Baig**, and **Charlotte Corbeil-Coleman**). Experience four new plays from rising voices in our industry:

- ***Maryam's Hijrah*** by **Laith Al-Kinani** is set in the midst of the 1991 Shi'a rebellion in Iraq where a mother and daughter narrowly escape a massacre. 20 years later, in a new country, they must reckon with whether to keep the past in the past, or confront the worst parts of their truth.

- ***Fear of Men*** by **Merlin Simard** features multilingual monologues exploring the pervasiveness of sexism across genders, particularly within trans and gender non-conforming communities. The piece urges us to examine the ways in which we perpetuate oppression and how we can move forward.
- ***Made in China*** by **Ciana Henderson** brings to life the voices of four girls affected by China's One Child Policy. All abandoned at birth but with stories as unique as their DNA, each girl must chase answers to questions she never knew she had.
- ***Uncharted*** by **Kathy Martinez** is a modern reimagining of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* about two children in hospital. The play charts their personal journeys, resilience, and the profound bond that grows between them.

***"We've created a Festival where you can look into the hearts and minds of 22 passionate young artists"***, says **Ali Joy Richardson**, Paprika's Artistic Producer. ***"Whether you're a leader seeking compelling new voices for your company or programming, or someone who just wants to know what the next generation is fired up about - you'll find innovation, honesty, and unforgettable stories here."***

Paprika Festival runs May 20th to May 26th, 2019 at Native Earth Performing Arts' Aki Studio.

**Pay What You Can Afford:** To ensure audiences have as much access to this year's programming as possible, Paprika is offering **Pay-What-You-Can-Afford** prices (\$5, \$10, or \$20) online and at-the-door, in addition to **Pay-What-You-Can** at the door. New this year are **Pay-It-Forward** tickets, which allow patrons to buy a ticket for someone else to attend the Festival at no cost.

**Accessibility:** Aki Studio is a physically accessible venue. We welcome entry/re-entry at any time during performances and are offering two Relaxed Performances. Assistive hearing devices are available at the theatre (please request when booking tickets) and a visual guide to the venue will be available on our website. Sage will be available at all performances for patrons and artists.

#### **Get Social:**

Website: [www.paprikafestival.com](http://www.paprikafestival.com)

Twitter: @PaprikaFestival

Facebook: @PaprikaFestival

Instagram: @PaprikaFestival

#Paprika2019

**SCHEDULE** | Complete line-up is available at:

<http://paprikafestival.com/festival/festival-2019/festival-schedule/>

**TICKETS** | Ticket information is available online at:

<http://paprikafestival.com/festival/festival-2019/tickets/>

**MEDIA** | For images of this year's Festival visit:

<http://paprikafestival.com/media/festival-2019/>

**Paprika Festival** runs year-round professional training and mentorship programs that culminate in a performing arts festival of new work by young artists. Paprika Festival is a proud Company-in-Residence at Theatre Passe Muraille. Paprika Festival gratefully acknowledges the support from the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and Toronto Arts Council. Paprika Festival is also made possible by RBC Foundation, TD Bank, Rogers Community Fund, and our 2019 Presenting Partners: Obsidian Theatre, Workman Arts, Musical Stage Company, Théâtre français de Toronto, and Little Black Afro Theatre Company.

**Native Earth Performing Arts** is Canada's oldest professional Indigenous theatre company. Currently in their 36th year, they are dedicated to creating, developing and producing professional artistic expressions of the Indigenous experience in Canada.

[www.nativeearth.ca](http://www.nativeearth.ca)

**Theatre Passe Muraille** is Canada's original alternative theatre company, currently developing and producing new Canadian plays, striving to articulate a distinct Canadian voice that reflects the complexity of our intercultural society.

[www.passemuraille.ca](http://www.passemuraille.ca)

**For more information, please contact:**

John Wamsley, Communications Manager, [john@paprikafestival.com](mailto:john@paprikafestival.com), 519.590.4625



***SESSION*** (DIRECTORS LAB)



**ལ་མ་** ***DOLMA*** (DIRECTORS LAB)



***FIRESTARTER*** (INDIGENOUS ARTS PROGRAM)



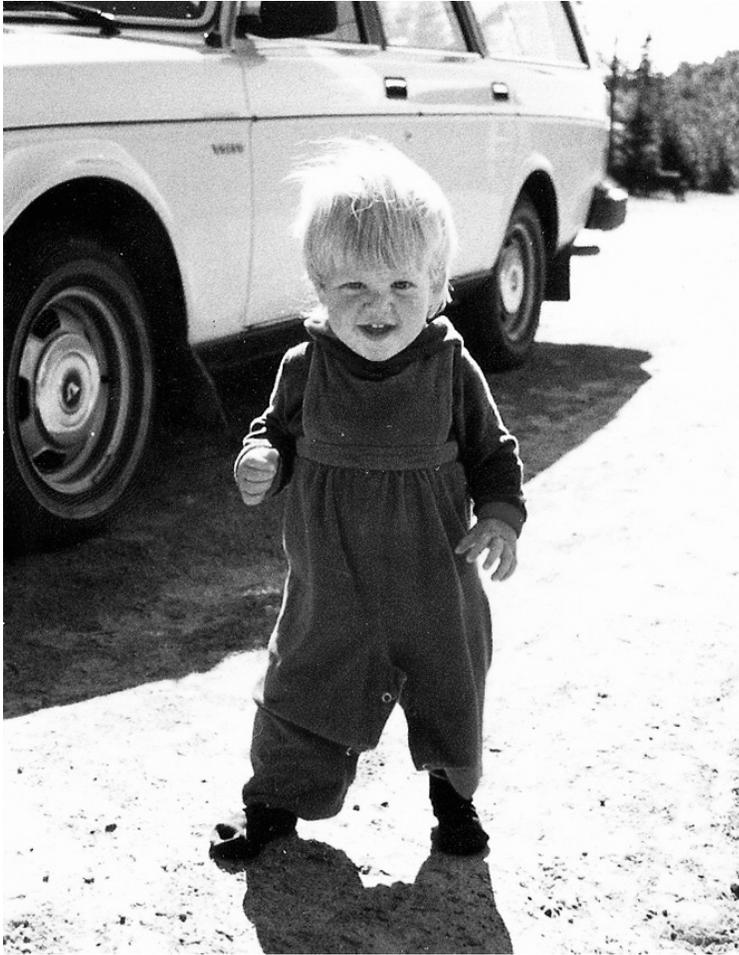
***KISAKIHITIN/GIZAAGIN*** (INDIGENOUS ARTS PROGRAM)



***NIISH*** (INDIGENOUS ARTS PROGRAM)



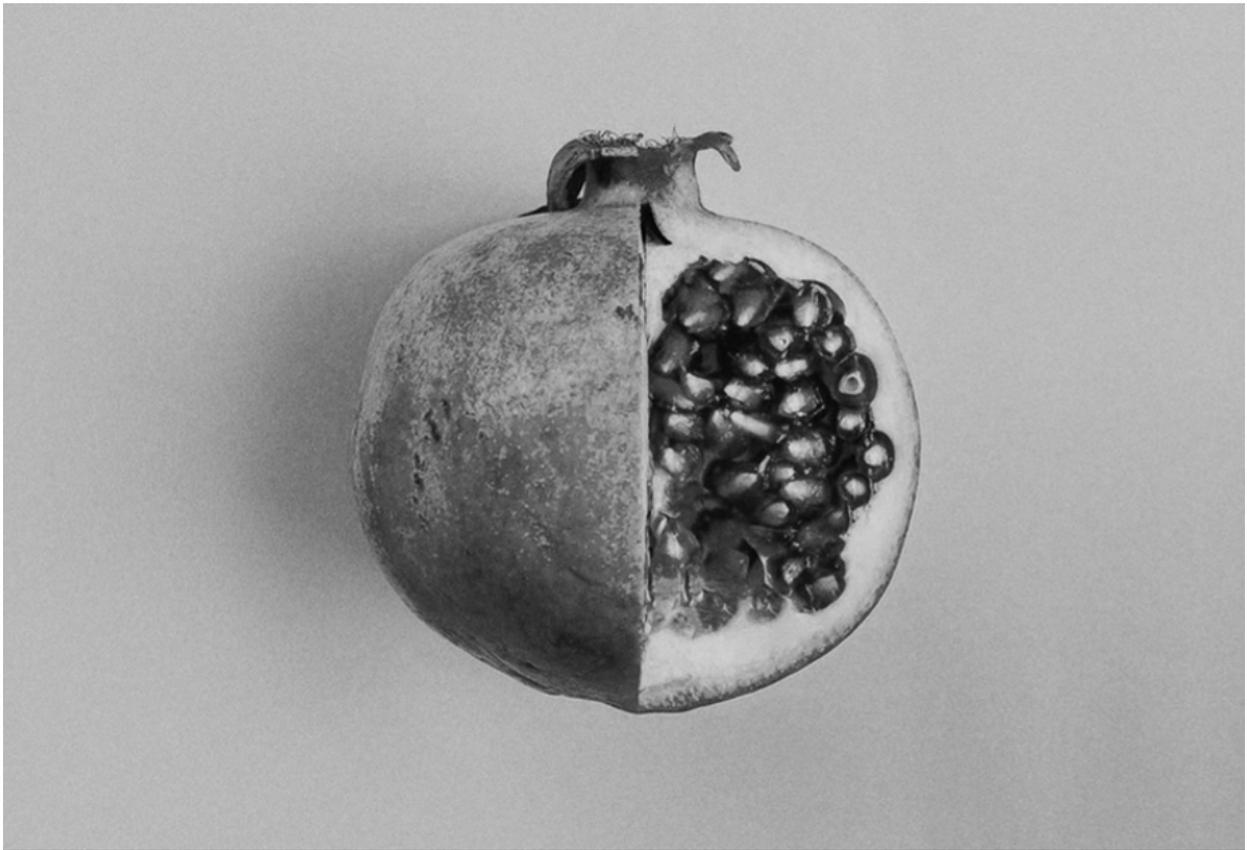
***UNCHARTED*** (PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT)



***FEAR OF MEN***  
**(PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT)**



***MADE IN CHINA*** (PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT)



***MARYAM'S HIJRAH*** (PLAYWRIGHTS UNIT)



***HERESY*** (PRODUCTIONS PROGRAM)



***HOW WE BREATHE*** (PRODUCTIONS UNIT)



***DID YOU MISS ME?***  
(TD CREATORS UNIT)