



Media Contact: Isabel Siragusa, Associate Director of Digital Marketing and Communications  
[press@calshakes.org](mailto:press@calshakes.org)

## CALIFORNIA SHAKESPEARE THEATER ANNOUNCES THE ARTIST CIRCLE

**Launched in January the Artist Circle provides a \$500 monthly stipend to five artists and activists  
for a year**

**April 21, 2021— (Orinda, CA) California Shakespeare Theater (Cal Shakes)** announces the inaugural **Artist Circle**—a pilot program inspired by the principles of universal basic income (UBI) that provides a \$500 monthly stipend to five artist/activists for one year without the reciprocal programmatic deliverables often associated with institutional support. Intended as supplemental income to support the ongoing work of these individuals, the Artist Circle also offers an invitation to participate in Cal Shakes’ artistic vision across the organization.

The inaugural Artist Circle includes: **Tatiana Chaterji** (youth organizer, liberation arts educator, restorative justice practitioner), **Shannon R. Davis** (director, actor, teaching artist), **Mia Mingus** (writer, educator, organizer for disability justice & transformative justice), **Sarita Ocón** (actor, producing artist, community activist), and **Lauren Spencer** (actor, director, writer, teaching artist).

“The idea of our Artist Circle came out of a conversation I had with Mina Morita (Artistic Director, Crowded Fire) who has been a staunch proponent of UBI for artists,” says **Artistic Director Eric Ting**. “How could our institutions contribute more directly—and sustainably—to the dynamic arts ecosystem of the Bay Area, and help disrupt the transactional nature of artist relationships at the root of the project-to-project business model that has driven so much of our industry.”

“After a few months of receiving the UBI from Cal Shakes, I realized it covers my health and car insurance expenses,” says Artist Circle member Shannon R. Davis. “Knowing that these costs are paid for, in one of the most dangerous times to be uninsured, has given me a real sense of freedom. Freedom to fearlessly seek better employment, and to work towards the future I want to see in theatre. Partial UBI has opened

doors for me to think differently about my financial future, circumstances, and what I can achieve. That potential is worth infinitely more than the money alone.”

As part of the [Season of Shared Light](#) and an institutional commitment to be in sustained relationship with the local community, Cal Shakes launched the year long pilot program in January to further support individuals that have had a meaningful impact on Cal Shakes’ development. Cal Shakes commits to support these artists / activists as an artistic home—providing resources, space, and grant opportunities to support their continued work as cultural and social change agents.

“For my part, the gift has been the opportunity to recognize the impact that these five artist/activists have had on how Cal Shakes thinks of our responsibility as a cultural institution,” says Ting. “Since we launched, their presence has already proved invaluable as we imagine our return, not just to stage, but to a changed world.”

The Artist Circle was initiated with funds received through an NEA CARES Act grant and sustained with the generous support of The Tournesol Project.

## **Bios**

**TATIANA CHATERJI** is a participatory theater artist, restorative justice practitioner, youth organizer and educator. Grounded in knowledge of self and ancestors, she holds deep commitment to dismantling systemic oppression while tending to spiritual, psychic, and interpersonal wounds. She is a youth advocate around military recruitment/counter militarism, alternatives to incarceration, and ethnic studies. Tatiana learned theater in the streets of her community, inspired by Bengali performance protest traditions and liberatory possibilities of ritual and celebration. She develops cultural resistance strategies with leaders across people’s movements for justice and dignity. As a survivor of violence and traumatic brain injury, performance, for Tati, is a sacred act of being witnessed by community. Nourished by working class solidarity, anti-imperialist agitation, and queer feminist revolt, she loves to write plays and poetry. You can find her riding her bike, studying martial arts, and choreographing fight sequences to flip the social prescriptions of violence, reclaim power, and reach catharsis. <https://www.tatianachaterji.com/>

**SHANNON R. DAVIS** is a Bay Area-based Director, Actor, Educator, & Arts Leader, originally from her people’s ancestral homeland of Wisconsin. She brings passion to her intersectional work, directing projects that align with her experience in theatre for social dialogue and change. She practices active decolonization, Anti-racism, as well as healing and belonging in her artistic endeavors. She has an MFA in Directing & Acting from UW-Madison. She has studied with The Moscow Art Theatre, and is the Former Killian Directing Fellow at The Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She has worked with the following companies: New Native Theatre Company, American Conservatory Theatre, American Indian Community House, The American Repertory Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Theatre of Yugen, Berkeley Rep, Brava Theater, The Ashland New Play Festival, Forward Theatre Co, Shotgun Players, City Theatre,

CalShakes, Salvage Vanguard Theater, Theatre Bay Area, Children's Theatre of Madison, Playwrights Foundation, Moxie Arts NY, San Anselmo Playhouse, BACT, Vortex Rep, others.

[www.shannonrdavis.com](http://www.shannonrdavis.com)

**MIA MINGUS** is a writer, educator and trainer for transformative justice and disability justice. She is an abolitionist passionate about building the skills, relationships and structures that can transform violence, harm and abuse within our communities that do not rely on or replicate the punitive system we currently live in. For more, visit her blog, [Leaving Evidence](#).

**SARITA OCÓN** is an award winning actor, producer, and community activist. As a citizen artist, her work is guided by three principles: the belief in the power of the human spirit; art as a catalyst for social change; and art as a tool for civic engagement. Dedicated to amplifying the stories of marginalized, underrepresented communities, Sarita has produced: *Las Hociconas Lab* Residency, in partnership with Studio Grand Oakland, California Arts Council, Galería de la Raza, and Latino Arts Network; *Hidden Refuge :: Refugio Escondido* with SoundWave 8 and Grace Cathedral; *A Piece of Our Minds* with Jóvenes Líderes En Acción and El Centro Hispano NC. Awards: TCG Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellowship; Akonadi Foundation *Beloved Community Fund*; Center for Cultural Innovation *Investing In Artists* Award; California Arts Council Local Impact Award; RHE Charitable Foundation Artistic Fellowship. Theatrical credits include: American Conservatory Theater, Arizona Theatre Company, Berkeley Rep, BRAVA Theater Center, Cal Shakes, Center Theatre Group, Golden Thread Productions, Huntington Theatre Co., Los Angeles Theatre Center, Oakland Theater Project, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, PlayMakers Repertory, San Francisco Playhouse, ShadowLight Productions, Teatro Visión, among others. Sarita is an Associate Artist of Oakland Theater Project; Company Member of HERO Theatre.

<https://www.saritaoccon.com/>

**LAUREN SPENCER** is a San Francisco based theater artist focused on art that invites us to grow into right relationship with ourselves, each other, and the environment. She loves the act of bringing new stories to life and has performed with Campo Santo, Crowded Fire, American Conservatory Theater, Kansas City Repertory Theater, Berkeley Rep, San Francisco Playhouse, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival among others. As a director, Lauren is drawn to projects that highlight women and girls of color and provide opportunities for critical civic engagement from both the artists and the audience. She is a company member with the award-winning ensemble, Campo Santo, a founding member of The Coalition of Bay Area Black Women Theater Artists. a "Reimagining Political Power" Fellow with Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, a recipient of Cal Shakes Luminary Learn Award for her work applying theater arts in the classroom, and a member of the Seed Team for the Bay Area Theaters Accountability Workgroup. At present, she is turned on by flat leadership models, joy as an act of resistance, and the wisdom of trees.

<http://laurens pencer.weebly.com/>

## ABOUT CAL SHAKES

California Shakespeare Theater (Cal Shakes), under the leadership of Artistic Director Eric Ting and Managing Director Sarah Williams, is now in its 47 season as a nationally-recognized leader in drawing on the power of authentic, inclusive storytelling to create more vibrant communities. Serving more than 43,000 people annually, Cal Shakes invites people from all walks of life to make deeply-felt connections with our shared humanity through its work onstage, in schools, and with people in non-traditional settings throughout the Bay Area who have little or no access to theater. For more information, visit [www.calshakes.org](http://www.calshakes.org).

California Shakespeare Theater's 2021 season is supported in part by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, and The Sidney E. Frank Foundation.

###