

## For Immediate Release

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### **One actor takes on many roles in *Seedfolks* at The Rose**

**One-woman show shares a message of kindness  
and understanding amid fantastic imagery**

(OMAHA, Nebr.) In a unique and inspiring play that some have called an “urban Secret Garden,” *Seedfolks* is filled with raw stories of understanding others and innovative imagery unlike anything seen before on The Rose Theater’s stage. *Seedfolks* opens Friday, February 23 and plays through March 11 at The Rose.

***Seedfolks*** is based on a book by Newbery Medal-winning Paul Fleischman about an immigrant neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio that is transformed by a community garden. Aided by video projection and a lively mix of recorded music, a dozen distinct and diverse characters are brilliantly brought to life by Ivey Award-winning actor Sonja Parks, named a featured artist by TIME Magazine and one of “Seven Artists You Must See” by American Theatre magazine.

The show was originally developed by the Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota under the direction of show director Peter C. Brosius, and The Rose is pleased to welcome the CTC production to its mainstage. The vibrant one-woman show features the artistry of Parks, who brings to life the many diverse characters living on Gibb Street -- immigrants living in inner-city Cleveland. When a young girl named Kim decides to plant some beans in memory of her father, a neighborhood-wide effort ensues as a neighborhood garden takes root. Parks dramatizes ethnically diverse characters throughout the story who tackle crime, and revitalize their street block through kindness, generosity, and tolerance.

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“**Seedfolks** is unflinchingly honest and unabashedly heartwarming,” says Rose Artistic Director Matthew Gutschick. “The show is filled with raw, inspiring stories you will never forget. It is a powerful way to teach children about the impact one person can have on a community and how important it is to sow seeds of both friendship and hope.”

**Seedfolks** begins when nine-year-old Kim plants the first seeds in the rat-infested, vacant lot next to her apartment building. They are six lima bean seeds, planted in honor of the father she never knew. He was a farmer who died before she was born. She decides to honor his memory by planting beans in the only soil she can find — the garbage lot near her building. She digs the frozen ground with the only tool she can find, a spoon. Unknown to Kim, neighbors watch her, wondering at her work.

“I was captured by the story’s beauty and message of hope, but what I love most is that it begins with one little girl . . . Slowly, each member of the neighborhood finds a reason to plant their own seeds and a derelict lot is resurrected, a fractured neighborhood united. **Seedfolks** celebrates the importance of every voice in the pursuit of a better world. Everyone here today can be a catalyst for social transformation in their communities,” says Brosius.

Slowly, each member of Kim’s neighborhood finds a reason to plant their own seeds, resurrecting a derelict lot and uniting a fractured neighborhood. The story consists of several different narratives around the shared experience of creating a true neighborhood jewel out of what was an eye-sore, all deftly portrayed by Parks.

Parks takes audiences on an extraordinary theatrical odyssey in which she transforms herself over and over, playing all of the characters in the play. The actor uses variations in her speech, posture and gestures to convincingly transform from one character to the next — from an 8-year-old Vietnamese girl, to an elderly Eastern European busybody, a street-wise bodybuilder, and many others.

Parks speaks on the challenging process of portraying so many characters: “With **Seedfolks**, the biggest challenge is the sheer number of characters that I need to play, coupled by the fact that some of them not only talk to each other, but interact with each other...And every single one of those characters [is] me!” She adds: “Several characters are from different countries and speak different languages. It was necessary for me to research the culture of each country to understand and honor their traditions, to work with a dialect coach every day getting each accent correct and, in some cases, to learn my lines in another language.”

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Jorge Cousineau brings the world of Cleveland's Gibb Street to life as the set and video projection designer with costumes by Sonja Berlovitz and lighting design by Paul Whitaker. Victor Zupanc is the composer with sound design by Sean Healey. D'Arcy Smith is the dialect coach and Joe Chvala choreographs.

"In short, **Seedfolks** demonstrates how every individual can be a powerful force for change," says Gutschick.

**Seedfolks** was developed by the Children's Theatre Company (CTC) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, as part of the company's new play development lab Threshold. CTC is the only theater focused on young audiences to win the Tony Award® for Outstanding Regional Theatre. In May 2017, its production of **Seedfolks** was selected from over 800 works worldwide to represent the United States at the prestigious ASSITEJ International (International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People) World Conference in Cape Town, South Africa.

"This piece that we are now presenting on The Rose stage represented our entire country at ASSITEJ – representing the very best of children's theater in America," says Gutschick.

Following its run on The Rose Theater mainstage, **Seedfolks** is headed to New York City, where it will play at the New Victory Theater off-Broadway.

**Seedfolks** runs at The Rose February 23 - March 11, 2018, with performances on Fridays at 7 pm, Saturdays at 2 pm and 7 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm. The 2 pm show of **Seedfolks** on Saturday, March 3 will be interpreted for people who are deaf or hard of hearing; this show will also include audio description services for audience members who are blind. The 7 pm show on Saturday, March 3 is designated as sensory-friendly, with special accommodations made for families attending with a child on the autism spectrum. Contact The Rose Box Office at (402) 345-4849 for more information.

Tickets for **Seedfolks** are \$20. Discount ticket vouchers are available for \$16 at area Hy-Vee stores. Members of The Rose receive four free tickets to the production.

**Seedfolks** is sponsored by Children's Hospital & Medical Center, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Kiewit Companies, the Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

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#### **About Sonja Parks, Actor**

An accomplished actor, Sonja has worked both regionally and Off-Broadway with/at many notable national and international venues including: The Public Theatre, Playwrights' Horizon, The Kennedy Center, The Boston Center for the Arts, The Guthrie Theatre, The Royal Shakespeare Company-London, Penumbra Theatre, The Children's Theatre of Minneapolis, The Walker Art Center, Links Hall-Chicago & The Playwrights' Center.

She has extensive television, commercial and film credits and has worked with some of the leading professionals in the industry including: Angelina Jolie, George Clooney, Martin Sheen, Faye Dunaway & Gloria Ruben.

A respected professional in her field, Sonja has served on many national panels with other distinguished artists, newsmakers & innovators including: Kerry Kennedy of The Kennedy Center, journalists Nicholas Kristof & Ann Curry; film producer Julius Tennon of JuVee Productions (a joint venture with his wife, Viola Davis); Swedish actor/director Josette Bushell-Mingo; British Theatre Historian, Nike Jonah & noted American Theatre Historian, Todd London.

She was an original member of Doris Duke Fellow and poet/playwright Sharon Bridgforth's celebrated root wy'mn theatre company, touring nationally with the company for 3 years and was the featured performer in two one-woman shows; one of which was nominated for an Osborn Award by The American Theatre Critics Association.

Sonja is the recipient of a 2000 National Endowment for the Arts Grant; a 2002 Minnesota State Arts Board Fellowship; a 2005 McKnight Artist Fellowship; was named "Best Actress in the Twin Cities-2004; has two Minneapolis Ivey awards (Acting-2009 & Directing-2010); a 2014 Minnesota State Arts Board Cultural Collaborations Grant; is a 2014-2016 TCG/Fox Distinguished Achievement Resident Acting Fellow; a McCarter Theatre Center-Princeton/Sallie B. Goodman Fellow; has been a featured artist in Time Magazine; and was named "One to Watch" and one of "Seven Artists You Must See" by American Theatre Magazine.

She studied at The University of Texas, The Dance Theatre of Harlem and The National Black Theatre under the direct tutelage of it's founder and artistic director, the late Dr. Barbara Ann Teer.

A committed Artist/Activist, her desire to improve society for all people(s) but especially those of the African Diaspora has led her to many parts of the world including: Lagos, Nigeria; Accra, Ghana; Berlin, Germany; Reykjavik, Iceland; Havana, Cuba and Cape Town, South Africa. Her panel, "Race, Colonization & Art: An Afro-Global Perspective", was featured as part of the Theatre Communications Group/Global Theatre Initiative's inaugural International Conference, a gathering of arts professionals from across the globe at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

A fierce believer in the power of art to encourage social change, Sonja also served for 6 years as the Advanced Acting & Voice Instructor for Penumbra Theatre's Summer Institute Program; a 2 month immersion intensive which encourages young artists to utilize theatre to effect social change.

She taught acting and theatre skills for 6 years at the University of Minnesota as a member of the Theatre Arts faculty where she also conceived and spear-headed the development of the BA Mentoring Program (also known as BAM) which is now an integral component of the Bachelor of Arts training. Also at the U of M, she piloted and taught a lawyer training course in conjunction with the Mondale School of Law. She further developed the program to assist licensed attorneys in improving their courtroom, interviewing and public speaking skills.

She has been a teaching artist-in-residence at Hampshire College, Amherst, MA; DePaul University, Chicago, IL and The University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Her book detailing her performance methodology based in the "Theatrical Jazz" aesthetic will be published in the Fall of 2018.

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#### **About Peter C. Brosius**

Peter C. Brosius joined the Children's Theatre Company (CTC) in 1997. Under his artistic leadership, CTC has received the 2003 Regional Tony Award and advanced a production to Broadway. His accomplishments at CTC also include the development of Threshold, CTC's new play development program and in 2005 he completed a \$30 million campaign to expand CTC'S facilities. Partnering with Jack Zipes, Peter launched Neighborhood Bridges, a nationally acclaimed critical literacy program that is now in 12 states and throughout the Twin Cities. Peter has directed numerous world premieres including *Buccaneers*, *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, *The Biggest Little House in the Forest*, *Iron Ring*, *Bert & Ernie*, *Goodnight!*, *Iqbal*, *Average Family*, *The Lost Boys of Sudan*, *Anon(ymous)*, *Reeling*, *The Monkey King*, *The Snow Queen* and *Mississippi Panorama*, all commissioned and workshopped in CTC's new play development lab. He has also directed numerous regional premieres such as *Dragonwings*, *A Village Fable* and *Boundless Grace*.

Previously, he was the Artistic Director of The Honolulu Theatre for Youth. During his tenure at HTY was invited to the Kennedy Center's New Voices/New Visions Festival and the Sundance Playwrights Laboratory and was the first professional U.S. theater company to perform in the Marshall Islands, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation. He directed world premiere productions by James Still and Velina Hasu Houston, as well as the American professional premieres of Dockteatern Tittut of Stockholm. He also produced American premieres of celebrated theater artists C.P. Taylor and Volker Ludwig, among others.

Previously, Brosius was the Artistic Director of the Improvisational Theatre Project of the Mark Taper Forum where he commissioned and directed numerous world premieres by authors such as Lisa Loomer, Erin Cressida Wilson, Peter Mattei, as well as the U.S. premieres of *One Thousand Cranes* by Colin Thomas, *Stamping Shouting and Singing Home* by Lisa Evans, and *Robinson and Crusoe* by Teatro Dell Angollo. At the Taper, he also directed numerous productions for the Taper's New Work Festival and for its main stage.

Additionally, he has directed at theaters across the country including South Coast Repertory, Arizona Theatre Company, South Street Theatre on Theatre Row, and Off Broadway for Pan Asian Repertory. He has also spent many years as a director-in-residence at the Sundance Playwrights Laboratory.

Brosius is the recipient of numerous awards including TCG's Alan Schneider Directors' Award and honors from the L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award and Dramalogue. He holds a B.A. from Hampshire College and an M.F.A. from New York University. Peter is married to playwright Rosanna Staffa and is the father of Daria and Gabriel.

#### **About Children's Theatre Company**

Children's Theatre Company (CTC) is the nation's largest and most acclaimed theatre for young people and serves a multigenerational audience. It creates theatre experiences that educate, challenge, and inspire for nearly 275,000 people annually. CTC is the only theatre focused on young audiences to win the coveted Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre and is the only theatre in Minnesota to receive three Tony nominations (for its production of *A Year with Frog and Toad*). CTC is committed to creating world class productions at the highest level and to developing new works, more than 200 to date, dramatically changing the canon of work for young audiences. CTC's engagement and learning programs annually serve more than 85,000 young people and their communities through Theatre Arts Training, student matinees, Neighborhood Bridges, and early childhood arts education programs. ACT One is CTC's comprehensive platform for access, diversity, and inclusion in our audiences, programs, staff, and board that strives to ensure the theatre is a home for all people, all families, reflective of our community. [www.childrenstheatre.org](http://www.childrenstheatre.org)

#### **About The Rose**

The Rose Theater is one of the largest and most accomplished children's theaters in the nation, with a reputation for enriching the lives of children and families through top-quality professional productions and arts education. In 2016, *American Theatre* magazine named The Rose one of the 20 top children's theaters in the United States. The Rose is committed to making the arts accessible to all children, providing opportunities for thousands of children throughout the community to attend shows and participate in classes each year. Over the course of a year, approximately 70,000 people attend the public performances held at the theater, and nearly 30,000 students attend field trip shows annually. The theater strives to introduce young people to a mix of both traditional favorites and ground-breaking original productions. A number of plays and musicals have made their world premiere on The Rose stage, including *Pete the Cat: The Musical*, *Sherlock Holmes & the First Baker Street Irregular*, *Zen Ties*, *Buffalo Bill's Cowboy Band*, and *The Grocer's Goblin & The Little Mermaid*. We take pride knowing that The Rose is the place where children of all ages experience theater for the first time, and we are dedicated to helping them appreciate theater for a lifetime.