

Nourish: The Flint Farmers' Market Site-specific Theatre Project

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Source: Grant Proposal Narrative

STATEMENT OF GOALS

With the pending transition of artistic leadership at Flint Youth Theatre (FYT), we are taking the opportunity to examine the organization's history and strengths, so that we might not only maintain our integrity but also grow in capacity and increase in excellence. FYT has a long history of producing socially conscientious original plays that seek to participate in ongoing dialogues on national significance. It is with this tradition in mind that we have entered into a partnership with the Flint Farmers' Market. This two-year venture will result in the production of a world-premiere play, culled from the interests of our community, but ultimately presenting topics that speak to concerns facing the nation as a whole. In this way, the play will serve as the artistic heir to such projects as *The Seventh Dream* and *My Soul To Take*.

With the departure of Executive Artistic Director and playwright-in-residence, William P. Ward, we are choosing to turn a loss into a gain by hiring for this project a playwright of national acclaim, Michael Rohd, Artistic Director of Sojourn Theatre Company, and Assistant Professor of Theatre at Northwestern University [Mr. Rohd's bio appears at the bottom of this document]. The project was both originally conceived and will be directed by UM-Flint Assistant Professor of Theatre, Janet Haley. Ms. Haley was the project creator and director of the recent multi-partner, site-specific play about Flint landmark, Glenwood Cemetery, *Glen-Wood: Restoration of Spirit*. This project was instrumental in securing for the UM-Flint campus the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification. In addition to Ms. Haley's many local contributions to the arts, she has worked across the country with theatres as diverse as LA's Cornerstone Theater Institute, Seattle Public Theatre, and was part of a company that served as the American ambassadors to the international festival ASSITEJ, in Rostov-on-Don, Russia.

By bringing together both nationally and internationally acclaimed artists, both long-time and newfound partners, FYT is seeking to build a bridge between our tradition of serious-minded original plays and our future of world-class live theatre.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Beginning in January 2012, FYT will enter into a partnership with the Flint Farmers' Market to explore such topics as: the urban farming movement; agricultural sustainability; our relationship to where our food comes from; the Market's history and evolving public mission; nourishment of body and soul through the intersection of good food and community interaction. **Phase One** of the project will consist of exploratory work and script development through a combination of community dialogue and theatrical devising techniques, and will take place over nine months. The resulting body of work from Phase One will serve as the working script to be taken into the next phase. **Phase Two** will be dedicated to a year-long process of script refinements to be achieved through a series of critique-oriented staged readings, and will result in a final, polished script. **Phase Three** will bring the project to a close with a fully-realized play, produced by FYT, and presented on-site at the Flint Farmers Market. This final production, tentatively scheduled for September 2013, will serve as part of FYT's 2013-2014 Signature Series.

PHASE ONE DETAILS

- I. In January-February 2012, FYT will employ a collective team to engage directly with project stake-holders and other interested parties to gather the building-block materials for the project. This collective will consist of a Production Director, Playwright, Project Manager, and a team of artist-activists who will conduct interviews with vendors and local citizens, research the site, and orchestrate historical research using archival photos and other printed documents. Working in coordination with project partner and manager of the Flint Farmers' Market, Dick Ramsdell, the team will first identify and then meet with a wide array of vendors, farmers, community gardeners, health and wellness experts, etc, to explore topics of interest to the aforementioned participants. What are their goals and methods? What are their concerns and obstacles? Above all, what are their stories, and how can those stories serve as lessons to our audience? This work will be done concurrently with, and will dovetail into, FYT's Signature Series production of *Amber Waves*, a play about a family of Michigan farmers struggling to stay afloat during challenging times.
- II. In March-May 2012, in coordination with FYT's Artistic Director Designate, the Production Director and Playwright will work together to fashion the collected materials into a framework for theatrical exploration.
- III. In May-August 2012, the Production Director and Playwright will work with a small group of actors to flesh out the ideas of the

framework. Using a process of improvisational character and scene development, writing sessions, rehearsals and revisions, this core team of artists, led by the director and filtered through the unifying voice of the playwright, will produce the working production script to be carried into Phase Two.

Michael Rohd Biography

Source: http://www.sojourntheatre.org/comm_adults.asp

“**Michael Rohd** is founding artistic director of Sojourn Theatre, an ensemble-based company centered in Portland, Oregon that has made 24 major works around the nation over the last eleven years and is a 2005 recipient of Americans for the Arts' Animating Democracy Exemplar Award. Rohd is a recipient of Theatre Communication Group's 2001 New Generations Grant, and their 2002 Extended Collaboration Grant with Atlanta's Alliance Theatre. He is on faculty at Northwestern University's Theater Department with a focus on Devising Performance, Directing & Civic Engagement. From 1991 through 2000, he founded and ran Hope Is Vital, an international theatre and community dialogue resource through which he trained and facilitated more than 100 ensembles of youth and adults in practices of performance and democracy within rural, suburban and urban communities. His widely translated book, [Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue](#) (Heinemann), chronicles that work. He has recently directed his own new play *Wilson Wants it All* at The House Theater in Chicago (Winner Chicago Jeff Award 2010 Best New Work) and Oregon Shakespeare Festival's *Willful* which he devised with their Acting Company over a three year period.. Residency, collaboration and/or consultancy work has included partnerships with UNC/Chapel Hill, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Boise Contemporary Theater, University of Maryland, Duke University, Black Ministerial Alliance of Lima, Ohio, Georgetown University, Nike, CUNY, the Orton Family Foundation, The City Council of Molalla, Oregon, The Mayor of Portland's Office, the Connecticut State Legislature and Health & Education departments across the country., His work has been supported by Americans for the Arts, Ford Foundation, the NEA, The MAP Fund, Boeing and local and state funding councils. Current work includes co-leading a collaboration between Sojourn Theatre and NYC's The TEAM called *Waiting for You (on the Corner of...)* that will premiere at Kansas City Rep in February 2013, **a commission from Flint Youth Theater about farm to food culture and economic change**, and leading the newly formed The Center for Performance and Civic Practice which he founded in 2011.”