

Chicago non-profit 3Arts increases individual 3Arts Awards

Chicago nonprofit **3Arts** has increased the amount of its annual unrestricted awards for women artists, artists of color, and artists with disabilities to **\$25,000**, effective with the 7th annual 3Arts Awards tonight, Oct. 6, 2014. Ten Chicago-area artists working in the performing, teaching, and visual arts will receive a total of **\$250,000** in a celebratory gathering at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Previously, 3Arts presented annual awards of \$15,000.

The amplified annual 3Arts Awards mark the beginning of a long-term increased commitment from 3Arts in support of Chicago's diverse artistic community. To date, 3Arts has awarded nearly \$1.5 million in direct support for Chicago artists. This year's 3Arts Award recipients are: dancer **Darrell Jones** and choreographer **Erica Mott**; circus choreographer **Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi** and playwright **Calamity West**; instrumentalists **Brandi Berry** and **Carlos Mejía**; visual artists **Irina Botea** and **Amanda Williams**; and teaching artists **Sophia Nahli Allison** and **Samuel Roberson**. Full bios for the honorees follow at the end of this release. Artist headshots are [available for download here](#).

"Over the past seven years, we've listened to what artists tell us they need and want to help them make their work and build sustainable careers. In response, we have deepened and expanded our programs so that in addition to the cash grant, our awardees are now offered residency fellowships, project support, professional development and promotion. The time has come to raise the bar again—to raise the amount of our award so that Chicago artists can gain that extra bit of freedom to pursue whatever really matters to them," said **3Arts Executive Director Esther Grisham Grimm**.

"Thanks to everyone who has stepped up in support of our efforts, from major funders to hundreds of individual contributors, we are confident our increased financial commitment is sustainable and will resonate throughout Chicago's artistic community for years to come," said **3Arts Board Chair Irene Siragusa Phelps**.

Driven by the belief that the vitality and creative spirit of Chicago is reliant upon a diverse spectrum of artistic voices, **3Arts** advocates for women artists, artists of color, and artists with disabilities working in the performing (dance, music and theater), teaching, and visual arts. For more information on 3Arts, please visit www.3arts.org.

The recipients of the 2014 3Arts Awards are:

Dance:

DARRELL JONES, *Dancer, Denise and Gary Gardner Artist*

Darrell Jones has performed in the United States and abroad with a variety of choreographers and companies such as Bebe Miller, Urban Bush Women, Ronald K. Brown, Min Tanaka, and Ralph Lemon.

Along with performing, Darrell is a choreographer and a tenured faculty member at The Dance Center of Columbia College who has choreographed for professional and student ensembles (The Seldoms, University of Colorado, University of Illinois). He received choreographic fellowships from Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography, Chicago Dancemakers Forum and is a two-time Bessie award recipient for his collaborative work with Bebe Miller Company and for his most recent research in (e)feminized ritual performance.

ERICA MOTT, *Choreographer, McCormick Family Foundation Artist*

Erica Mott is a performance/dance artist engaged in the conversation between movement, sound, video, and object.

She has been called “ingenious” by the Chicago Reader’s Laura Molzahn and referred to as “a vibrant performance-maker, object designer, and choreographer engaged with distinctive creative research and methodology, effectively complimented by articulate and generous teaching skills, mentoring, community and audience building, and public discussion about her work,” by CJ Mitchell, Deputy Director, Live Arts Development Agency, UK.

Erica’s recent performances were featured at Audio Art Festival (Krakow, Poland), Free Fall Festival (Toronto, Canada), NES (Skagastrond, Iceland), Museo del Ferrocarril and CASA (Oaxaca, Mexico), and CAD Special Exhibitions Space/Artopolis (Chicago). She works with Guillermo Gomez-Pena’s collective, La Pocha Nostra, as a core troupe member and teaches workshops for Lookingglass Theatre Company, Northeastern University, The Second City, and other independent venues and organizations. Additionally, she is an instructor in the performance department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is a recipient of several awards including Amnesty International’s Patrick Stewart Human Rights Fellowship (to teach performing arts in South Africa).

Theater:

SYLVIA HERNANDEZ-DISTASI, *Circus Choreographer*

Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi is a second-generation circus performer who grew up touring with various circuses across the country. Highlights of her performing career include a three-year tour with the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus and competing in the Circus World Championships in London, England. In 1990, Sylvia moved to Chicago where she began teaching and choreographing circus arts. She teamed up with Lookingglass Theatre Company and ultimately earned three Joseph

Jefferson Awards for her circus choreography in *The Baron in The Trees* (1999), *Hard Times* (2002), and *Lookingglass Alice* (2005).

To date, Sylvia has worked on 12 Lookingglass Theatre productions in Chicago and on tour across the country. Other theater credits include Marriot Theater Lincolnshire (where she won her fourth Jeff Award in 2007 for *All Night Strut*), The Mercury Theater, Chicago Children’s Theatre, and Steppenwolf Theatre. Sylvia is a Co-Founder and Co-Artistic Director of The Actors Gymnasium where she enjoys splitting her time as a circus teacher, act creator, and choreographer for circus productions such as *Lost and Found: A Recycled Circus*, *Skooped*, *The Magical Exploding Boy* and the *Invisible Circus*.

CALAMITY WEST, *Playwright, Merrill Lynch Artist*

Calamity West is a Chicago-based playwright. She received her BA in playwriting at Webster University in 2004 and earned her MFA in playwriting at California College of the Arts in San Francisco in 2007. She was born and raised in Missouri.

Most recent full-length productions of Calamity’s work include: *Ibsen is Dead*, *The Peacock* (Jackalope Theatre Company), *The Gacy Play* (Sideshow Theatre Company), and *Common Hatred* (The Ruckus). Calamity’s short plays have been produced by: Jackalope Theatre Company, Victory Gardens, The Inconvenience, Chicago Dramatists, The Anatomy Collective, Broken Nose Theatre, First Floor Theater, and *The Good Night Ladies*.

Music:

BRANDI BERRY, *Instrumentalist, Gertrude E. Grisham Artist*

Violinist Brandi Berry, whose “four-string acrobatics” and “indispensable skill” (TimeOut Chicago) have been praised as “alert [and] outstanding” (Chicago Classical Review), has also been noted for her “riffs...powered by a flashing blur of bow arm, [as they] rolled out with irresistible glee” (Washington Post).

In addition to her “baroque/classical” side, she has a long history of performing bluegrass and country with such groups from Texas (her home state) as Kat’s Kradle, the Bozarts, and Newgrass; and has fiddled at the Irish American Heritage Center and the Chicago Barn Dance Company. Brandi teaches fiddle at the Old Town School of Folk Music. She is also a member of the avante-world rock group, Kmang-Kmang. She holds degrees in violin performance from Indiana University and the University of North Texas.

She has appeared with numerous ensembles including Kings Noyse, Apollo’s Fire, Newberry Consort, Toronto’s Classical Music Consort, and Ensemble Phoenix Munich; and as soloist/concertmaster of Ars Antigua, Mountainside Baroque, and St. Louis’s Kingsbury Ensemble. Brandi has also performed on numerous series throughout the U.S. and Canada including at the Library of Congress. She serves on the faculty of DePaul University as co-director of their Baroque Ensemble program, and has guest coached ensembles at Northwestern University and Wheaton College.

CARLOS MEJÍA, *Instrumentalist*

Carlos Mejía is a master musician, a mentor of young musicians, and a cultural activist specializing in Mayan culture, the Guatemalan marimba, and other instruments. He was born in the Maya K’iche’ (or Quiché) community of Guatemala.

At the age of 12, Carlos joined a professional marimba ensemble at the Hotel Mayan Inn. While in high school, he enrolled in the music conservatory of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala and finished his studies in 1978. That same year, he joined Unión Ideal, one of the most popular marimba orchestras in Guatemala. He traveled in Central America and Mexico.

In the 1980s civil war was rampant in Guatemala. As he gained more notoriety as a Mayan musician, the military government increased its scrutiny on him. He became a paramedic to help his people during the war, and he was jailed twice for subversion and tortured physically and psychologically on repeated occasions. People very close to him were brutally tortured and killed. This experience broke his spirit. He left his country and was granted political refuge in the United States in 1987, where he has slowly tried to rebuild his life. He was not able to speak about this for many years for fear of retaliation against his family.

According to Carlos, teaching marimba music and culture to young people is what he desires most. He does not have a political agenda. He simply believes in the transformative power of music and wishes to transmit it to others. He currently works as a janitor, a handyman, and a day-laborer to make ends meet and devotes all his spare time to playing and teaching the Guatemalan marimba.

Teaching Arts:

SOPHIA NAHLI ALLISON, *Teaching Artist, Southwest Airlines Artist*

A native of South Central Los Angeles, Sophia Nahli Allison is a visual journalist at the community level and a media arts educator. Her work focuses on the documentation and authentic representation of black communities. She believes storytelling and community involvement is a tool for social change.

In 2014, Sophia completed a nine-month Photojournalism Fellowship with The Chicago Reporter, an award winning non-profit investigative news organization that focuses on race, poverty, and income inequality. Her work has been recognized by the Illinois Press Photographers Association and she was a participant of the 2nd Annual New York

Times Portfolio Review as well as the Student Multimedia Project fellowship with The National Association of Black Journalists.

She has been a teaching artist Fellow at Marwen, Street Level Youth Media, and Step Up Women's Network. She was selected for the 2013 Teaching Artist Development Studio Cohort with the Center for Community Arts Partnerships, and her social justice photography workshop was accepted for the 2013 "Free Minds, Free People Conference". She has blogged for the "Black Youth Project" and was a photographer and writer for "SIFC: The Chicago Arts, Archive and Collective Project" which documents Chicago art. Sophia is a graduate of Columbia College Chicago with a B.A. in Photojournalism.

SAMUEL ROBERSON, *Teaching Artist, Siragusa Foundation Artist*

Upon graduating from Howard University Samuel Roberson took a leap of faith and accepted an apprenticeship at The Children's Theatre of Minneapolis, where he spent the next three years defining his desires for acting, writing, directing, and social justice theater. For the past 12 years, he has been teaching art across the country and is proud to be the newly appointed Artistic Director of Congo Square. He has also taught in the city with Victory Gardens, Steppenwolf, American Theatre Company, Northlight Theatre, and 16th Street Theatre. His Chicago Stage credits include: Samuel J and K (Steppenwolf Theatre), Civil War Christmas (Northlight Theatre), The Colored Museum and Sanctified (Congo Square), Living Green and The Lost Boys of Sudan (Victory Gardens Theatre), and The Ballad of Emmett Till (Goodman Theatre).

Sam founded an Education and Outreach initiative with Congo Square Theatre Company called Y-BOOM (Young Brothers Owning Our Mission), a literacy-based leadership program that provides a safe environment for adolescent African American men. As a two-time leukemia survivor he has always had a passion for giving back and started a non-profit organization, called Make Me A Match Project, dedicated to saving the lives of patients in need of a bone marrow transplant. He uses theater as a means to raise awareness about leukemia, blood related diseases, and the need for more people to join the marrow donor registry.

Visual Arts:

AMANDA WILLIAMS, *Visual Artist, Stan Lipkin and Evelyn Appell Lipkin Artist*

For the better part of 20 years, Amanda Williams has been consumed with how combining art and architecture might help make all parts of Chicago thrive. Raised in Auburn Gresham, Williams studied architecture at Cornell University as a way to make sense of the spaces she experienced. Amanda practiced architecture for a number of years in the Oakland Bay Area before turning her full attention to visual art. Color is a central preoccupation in her work; her evolving palette derived largely from the urban landscapes she traversed as a child. Her most recent work focuses on deep explorations of the link between color and space.

Amanda has exhibited and lectured throughout the US, including at the Studio Museum in Harlem, Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, and the University of Michigan. Amanda is the recipient of many awards including a Joyce Foundation scholarship, the Eidlitz Travel Fellowship to Ethiopia, the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation's Heroes & Hearts Public Art Commission, and the Empress Award. She has been previously recognized as both a featured artist for Chicago Artist Month and an artist to watch by the Chicago Artists Coalition. Her works are held in several public and private collections including Cornell University and Wells Fargo Bank. Amanda currently serves as an Adjunct Professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology where she teaches Design and Color Theory. She and her husband are raising two very smart daughters.

IRINA BOTEVA, *Visual Artist, Chandler Family Artist*

Over the past ten years Irina Boteva has been engaged in an art practice that uses multiple media to inspect socio-political dynamics and the possibility of transformation. Currently, her focus is on the de centralization of cultural discourses and the possibility of sustaining creative differentiation that arguably exists outside of a dominant

hegemonic system of values and critique.

Botea's artistic methodology combines reenactment strategies, simulated auditions, elements of direct cinema, and cinéma vérité. She develops her works through a process of collaboration in which the performers are active participants in the process. "In her videos, Botea very often refers to modes of re-enactment and role-play, but her main target is not to create a fiction that is taken for reality. Her interest lies in the reality of the performance and the authentic individuality of the performers." (Oliver Kiehmayer). Her work has been featured in solo and group shows, including the 55th Venice Biennale, as well as at The New Museum, New York; National Gallery Jeu de Paume, Paris; Kunsthalle Winterthur; Reina Sofia National Museum, Madrid; MUSAC-Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain; and Kunstforum, Vienna. She was awarded the Impakt Film Festival Silver Award.