

■ Somerville, Mass.-based **Megan Sandberg-Zakian** spent the end of 2015 helming a diverse production of *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* and workshopping a new play by **Eleanor Burgess**, a writer she has her eye on, at **Merrimack Repertory Theatre** in Lowell, Mass., where she's a Princess Grace Theatre Foundation Fellowship director-in-residence. Looking ahead, she pointed to another play by Burgess, *Start Down*, which will have its premiere at Atlanta's **Alliance Theatre**, Feb. 13–March 6. Sandberg-Zakian describes it as a “smart and engaging” play about “the role of technology in education.” She'll next helm a production of **Danai Gurira's** “heartwrenching Shavian epic about colonial Zimbabwe,” *The Convert* (AT, Sept. '13), at Cambridge's **Central Square Theater**, Jan. 28–Feb. 28. That will be a homecoming of sorts for the Brown-educated director: Central Square is where she worked some five years as a TCG Future Leaders fellow. After several acclaimed productions, as well as her growing community-building and advocacy résumé, we think we can place Sandberg-Zakian's leadership firmly in the present.

■ Los Angeles actor **Leon Russom** spent



Reginald Pierre, Sarah Porter, Sara Sapp, Steven Castelli, Sarah McKenney, Elizabeth Van Pelt in “This Is Not Funny.”

some of 2015 recovering from an illness (and vociferously opposing Equity's changes to the city's longstanding 99-Seat Plan), but he did make it to the stage for **Padraic Duffy's** *The Box: An Experiment in Random Narrative* at his home company, **Sacred Fools Theater**. Next he'll return to the Fools for the premiere of Duffy's *Past Time*, a metatheatrical romp slated to include “many, many, many painted unicorns,” as well as fellow L.A. stage veteran **French Stewart**. Russom says he'll then tackle a little something called *King Lear* for the downtown L.A.-based **Loft Ensemble**. Outside the Fools, he praises the pay-

what-you-want ensemble, **Courage Theatre Company**, “a young company that stepped immediately into the front rank of Los Angeles theatre.” Their next joint: Tennessee Williams's *Vieux Carré*.

■ It's all musicals, all the time at **New Line Theatre** in St. Louis (AT, July/Aug. '14). But these ain't your grandma's showtunes: Artistic director **Scott Miller** has packed the season, the theatre's 25th, with the usual edgy mix: In the fall was the murderous satire *Heathers*, and in March it's *American Idiot*, followed in June by *Atomic*, a brand-new rock musical about the Manhattan Project from Danny Ginges and Philip Foxman. Elsewhere in his city, Miller says, “My local hero is **Steve Woolf**,” artistic director of the **Repertory Theatre of St. Louis**. “The Rep is really, truly wonderful. It's incredibly rare that I see a show there that I don't like, and I see almost every show they produce.” Miller also gave a shoutout to his “other local hero,” **Mike Isaacson**, who took the reins of the popular St. Louis outdoor summer theatre **the Munny** in 2012. In Miller's view, Isaacson has “completely transformed” the organization, bringing in a roster of New York

NEWS IN BRIEF

CHICAGO: This year marks 400 years since Shakespeare's death. To commemorate it, Chicago Shakespeare Theater this month kicks off a yearlong interdisciplinary arts festival, Shakespeare 400, with 60 local and roughly a dozen international organizations, including Royal Shakespeare Company, the Shanghai Peking Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago, for a total of 100 productions and an estimated 500,000 patrons. Visit shakespeare400chicago.com.

NEW YORK CITY: Where are the women? Costuming and stage-managing, it seems. The League of Professional Theatre Women has released its second annual Women Count study, analyzing the status of women employed in 455 Off- and Off-

Off-Broadway productions in 22 theatre companies, for 5 seasons, from 2010 to 2015. The study found that female playwrights ranged from 28 percent to 36 percent (depending on the season), female directors from 22 to 40 percent, female set designers from 22 to 36 percent, female lighting designers from 8 to 16 percent, female costume designers from 61 to 79 percent, and female sound designers from 14 to 22 percent. Female stage managers, meanwhile, averaged 70 percent employment. The full report is online at theatrewomen.org/women-count-2015.

NYC: Show some appreciation: When the *New York Times* announced it would no longer run the names of design-

ers at the end of film and theatre reviews (restricting listings to cast, director, and creators), a large outcry and letter-writing campaign garnered 850 signatures from members of designer unions Local USA 829 and IATSE, and 80 signatures from playwrights. In response, the *Times* restored the credits. Activism works!

LOS ANGELES: It's never too late for revisions. In December, East West Players remounted its critically acclaimed production of *Chinglish* by David Henry Hwang. This time, though, they changed the ending. Or rather, Hwang did, citing the ways the U.S./China relationship has evolved since the play premiered on Broadway in 2011. Perhaps “world-premiere ending” can be a new

marketing gimmick? Visit: eastwestplayers.org/on-the-stage/chinglish-back-by-popular-demand

CINCINNATI: It was time to level up. Cincinnati Shakespeare Company has announced a \$17 million capital campaign to build a new theatre, with a 244-seat mainstage (an increase from the current 150 seats); a separate thrust stage; on-site scenic, costume design, and construction shops; a rehearsal and event space; and a classroom for educational programs. Nearly three quarters of the \$17 million had been raised at press time. The timeline for construction includes a groundbreaking in early 2016 and a completion date of summer 2017, with the first season in the new space in 2017–18.

—Diep Tran

BY THE OSCAR G. BROCKETT CENTER FOR
THEATRE HISTORY AND CRITICISM

170 YEARS AGO (1846)

Future U.S. president Ulysses S. Grant almost plays Desdemona in an adaptation of *Othello* in the inaugural performance at a theatre in Corpus Christie, Texas. In rehearsal, the lead actor finds Grant's performance inadequate and refuses to play opposite him. The company, made up of military personnel who paint the scenery and double as the cast, decides to hire a professional actress from New Orleans.

60 YEARS AGO (1956)

Florida's Coconut Grove Playhouse opens its doors with the U.S. premiere of *Waiting for Godot*. Starring comic actors Bert Lahr and Tom Ewell, the production defies the well-to-do first-nighters' expectations of a riotous comedy. According to the show's director, Alan Schneider, "By the intermission, at least a third of the house had left. Another third didn't come back afterward; they were too busy drowning their resentment in the theatre bar...I slunk into our trailer camp in the alley."

25 YEARS AGO (1991)

Performances begin for the Broadway debut production of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston's *Mule Bone*, courtesy of Lincoln Center Theater, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre. The run kicks off 100 years to the month after Hurston's birth.

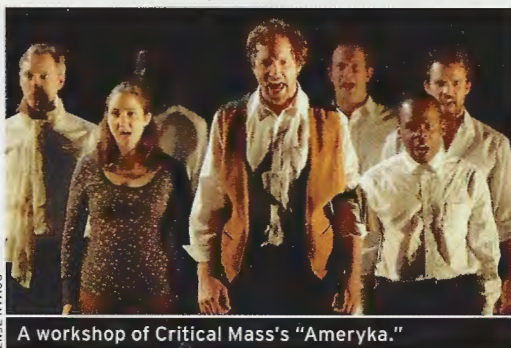
formance that takes the form of a dance party, DJ and all," Valdez effuses. His list of projects to look out for is similarly wide-ranging, from New Orleans, where **Junebug Productions** will premiere *Gomela/to return: Movement of our Mother Tongue*, a multidisciplinary performance about African-American history through a Gulf Coast prism; to Philadelphia, where **Team Sunshine Performance Corporation** will launch the second iteration of a planned 24-year endeavor called *The Sincerity Project*, begun in 2014, in which the company will biannually revisit "notions of sincerity, not to be confused with honesty or truth, as the company ages"; and his home base of L.A., where **Nancy Keystone** and her **Critical Mass Performance Group** will debut *Ameryka*, a devised work that "explores our dream of democracy through the influences of film, graphic arts, Poland, Thomas Jefferson, and jazz," at a studio Six01 Studio in Burbank. DJ not included. —Rob Weinert-Kendt

to use art as a means of "protest and disruption."

■ The idyllic mountain town of Creede, Colo., about 250 miles southwest of Denver, is pretty sleepy in the dead of winter, and so too is its local theatre, **Creede Repertory Theatre**. But this year things are heating up, notes artistic director **Jessica Jackson**, who's producing the theatre's first winter run of its decade-old summertime "cult hit" *Boomtown Improv Comedy*.

"Creede Rep is partnering with local organizations to create economic opportunity for our community in what is still called 'the off-season,'" says Jackson. That means programming *Boomtown* in conjunction with such winter festivals as "chocolate competitions, log-throwing, ice sculpting, weird bands, and curling, in case you were curious what people do up here at 9,000 feet." Asked what excites her outside her theatre's walls, Jackson name-checks a popular resident-theatre nightspot: "The more I experience theatre sitting down, the more I yearn for club theatre and its merging of nightlife and performance. I want to go hang out at **Oberon** at ART for a couple of nights." (Us too.)

■ Though based in L.A., director **Mark Valdez** has his eye on the whole country—an occupational benefit of having been the head of the Network of Ensemble Theaters for eight years. His next project is *DJ Latinidad's Latino Dance Party* at **Mixed Blood** in Minneapolis, for which 12 Latino artists across disciplines were commissioned



A workshop of Critical Mass's "Ameryka."

with the prompt: What does it mean to be Latino/a in the present-day U.S.? Contributors cite Mexican, Cuban, Chilean, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Guatemalan descent, and an equally diverse slate of media: dance, theatre, music, visual arts, hip-hop, and poetry. "We are curating their responses into a per-



Creede Rep's "Boomtown Improv Comedy" ensemble.

City talent (Dan Knechtges, Rob Ruggerio, Rob McClure, John Tartaglia) to beef up its musical-theatre bona fides. Miller wants us to know about one other promising development: A frequent actor at his theatre, **Anna Skidis**, started the city's first Latino theatre company, **Theatre Nuevo**, with a show last summer called *This Is Not Funny*. The company currently seeks play submissions for their next production, *Orgullo: a Pride of One-Acts*. The deadline is Feb. 1, and the e-mail is theatrenuevo@gmail.com.

■ **Congo Square Theatre** artistic director **Samuel Roberson** has women on his mind—female theatre artists, that is. The theme for his theatre's season, focusing on works by women of color, is "Power of Her." Running Jan. 8–Feb. 7 is the Chicago premiere of **Pearl Cleage's** *What I Learned in Paris*, a play "centered around the election of the first black mayor of Atlanta," Roberson says. In June, Chicago native **Harry Lennix** will direct the world premiere of **Lekethia Dalcoe's** *Small Oak Tree Runs Red*, which links lynch riots in 1918 Georgia to recurrent contemporary cases of police brutality. The distaff emphasis came about, Roberson admits, when he realized "how, even as a young leader of color, I was unaware of the male-dominated voice of American theatre...If I want to be a champion of change, I need to be an example as well as a leader in the fight to end disparity." Accordingly, all his other callouts were for work by XX-chromosome theatre folks: the local premiere of **Dominique Morisseau's** *Sunset Baby* at Timeline Theatre, Jan. 21–April 10; the Chicago Inclusion Project started by **Emjoy Gavino** to promote non-traditional casting; and the work of **Kristiana Rae Colon**, a freelance playwright and activist who started *Let Us Breathe*, a collective led chiefly by artists looking for ways