



Park Square Theatre Presents the  
Full Circle Theater Company Production Of

# *The Empathy Project*

Created and Written by Stephanie Lein Walseth

Directed by Claribel Gross

*At Park Square Theatre  
in the Historic Hamm Building  
in Downtown Saint Paul*

Andy Boss Thrust Stage

*Investigate the power and limits of empathy  
in a deeply fractured world.*

**November 12 - 21, 2021**

## *The Empathy Project*

Created and Written by Stephanie Lein Walseth  
(90 minutes in length with no intermission)

### CAST

Song Kim	Robert
Dominique Jones	Michael
Shanan Custer	Ingrid and Kathleen
Oogie_Push	Barbara
Siddeeqah Shabazz	Hope
Kim Vasquez	Luisa, Jessica, and Anna
Peter Colburn	Bob and Richard
Marci Lucht	Andrea and Rachel
Joshua C. Larson	Jason

### PRODUCTION TEAM

Playwright/Story Weaver	Stephanie Lein Walseth
Director	Claribel Gross
Stage Manager	Anna Pladson
Assistant Stage Manager	Keara Lavandowska
Movement Director	Mary Harding
Composer	Paul Damico-Carper
Scenic Designer	Mina Kinukawa
Set Builder and Technical Director	Bill Sather
Costumer	Khamphian Vang
Lighting Designer	Tom Mays
Associate Lighting Designer	Karin Olson
Sound Designer	Quinci Bachman
Sound Board Operator	Shoshana Freund
Lighting Board Operator	Keara Lavandowska
Producer	Rick Shiomi
Photographer	Stephen Hage
Publicity	Quinci Bachman
ASL Interpreters	Mary Catherine
	Shelly Lehner
Audio Describer	Connie Fullmer

# Playwright's Notes

As the presidential election of 2016 neared, I felt, as did so many, the tension and weight of the nation's increasing polarization. Listening to perspectives of family members across the state, and friends, neighbors, and colleagues here in St. Paul, I was struck by the realization that our stories are not often put into dialogue with one another, especially across lines of political, geographic, and racial difference. Within the echo chambers of our siloed newsfeeds, and amidst the maelstrom of political events over the past five years, we rarely have the opportunity to deeply hear about and understand the lived experiences of those we perceive as "the other." *The Empathy Project* emerged as an artistic means to create and hold space for that dialogue. As you bear witness to the stories shared here, I hope you will find stereotypes challenged, human complexities revealed, connections forged across fault lines, and your capacity for empathy deepened. We won't solve the nation's nor the world's political divisiveness in one night at the theater. But perhaps we can inspire renewed curiosity about one another, shifting ever-so-slightly the contours of our interconnectedness.

-Stephanie Lein Walseth, November 2021

**Interviewees:** Nicolette Anderson, David Bryant, Beverly Bushyhead, Jan Carey, Adlyn Carreras, William Doherty, Chad Donner, Roger Grafenstein, Mary Palcich Keyes, Andrew Lindberg, Gordon Nakagawa, Susan Nelson, Emma Reilly, Jeff Schaeftbauer, And six anonymous.

The Empathy Project is a work of creative nonfiction, not a statement of fact, or journalism. This piece is based on interviews of actual Minnesotans between November 2019-June 2020. It uses some of the interview language verbatim, and at other times uses poetic license in the exact phrasing in order to convey the heart of the story's meaning. The names of interviewees have been changed to protect their identities.

**\*Content Alert:** As in many artistic works, some of the stories told in this piece are about painful and even traumatic experiences that interviewees bravely and insightfully shared with me. These stories are presented here in the context of self-understanding, insight, truth-seeking, and hope; however I feel it's important to share with viewers beforehand that there may be some triggers.

## Biographies



**Stephanie Lein Walseth (Playwright/Story Weaver)** is a Full Circle Theater Core Artistic Leadership Group Member. With Full Circle she was one of the co-writers for the company's debut production of *Theater: A Sacred Passage*, one of the directors for *365 Days/365 Plays: A 2017 Remix*, the dramaturg for *Under This Roof*, and a frequent panel discussion and post-show moderator. As an actor, director, dramaturg, stage manager, theater administrator, and educator she has worked with Penumbra Theatre Company, Theater Mu, Mixed Blood Theatre, Sod House Theater, the Playwrights' Center, Guthrie Theater, Theatre Unbound, Starting Gate Productions, Theater in the Round, Frank Theatre, CLIMB Theatre, Native Voices at the Autry (CA), and Portland Stage Company (ME).



**Claribel Gross (Director)** is a theater maker and teaching artist currently based in Chicago. She has a passion for new work and works in development. Most recently, Claribel has worked collaboratively to devise an audio play, *Women Like a River Falling from the Sky*, for the BorderLight Festival in Cleveland and she created a solo show, *Gasp* for the 17 Minute Story Festival with Macha Theatre in Seattle. She's currently working on a bi-lingual touring show for young audiences and dreaming up ways to take it on tour through Latin America. Claribel holds an MFA in Theater Arts from Sarah Lawrence College and is inspired by the work of theater artists and companies like Full Circle Theater that use the tools of the arts to create lasting, positive change in communities.

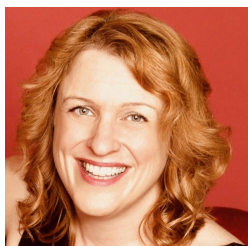


**Song Kim (he/him - Actor)** grew up in Portland, OR and has worked in different capacities with various companies in the Twin Cities and elsewhere. He has performed with Nimbus, Theater Mu, Full Circle Theater Company, and most recently appeared as 'Uncle' in Julia Cho's *Aubergine*, at Park Square Theater.



**Dominique Jones (Actor)** is a multi-versed performance artist and mentor who has participated in many reputable performances through theatre, music, poetry, and dance. A slight Minnesota nomad originally from the Twin Cities, They have been grateful to be a part of various productions as a videographer, troupe

member, producer/composer, writer, and many more. Some of their work has been seen in places such as the Commonweal theater, The Guthrie, and Wonderlust Productions. Through their involvement in the community as a teacher, mentor, and artist, they were honored to be named one of the first U.S. Bank Future Leaders in 2018. They are super excited to have their debut with Full Circle Theater!



**Shanan Custer (Actor)** is a theater maker, writer, director and improviser who has worked with the Brave New Workshop, Interact, History Theatre, Frank Theater, Theatre Pro Rata, The Mystery Café, DalekoArts, Mu Performing Arts and Park Square Theatre. Shanan is an actor with the Mysterious Old Radio Listening Society and a frequent actor/writer for Sue Scott's podcast Island of Discarded Women. Her play Bad Things, Good Whiskey (with Carolyn Pool & Rhiannon Fiskradatz) will open at Park Square in

2022.



**Siddeeqah Shabazz (Actor)** is originally from Oakland, CA. She graduated with degrees in theater from the University of La Verne in Southern California and the Guildford School of Acting in England. In the Twin Cities she has worked with Climb, Shadow Horse Theatre, Gadfly Theatre, Chain Reaction Theatre, Freshwater Theatre, 20% Theatre, Exposed Brick Theatre, Savage Umbrella Theatre, Aniccha Arts, Intermedia Arts, Artistry, Underdog Theatre, Transatlantic Love Affair, Full Circle Theatre, and Wonderlust Productions.

Siddeeqah is delighted and thrilled to work with Full Circle Theatre once again!



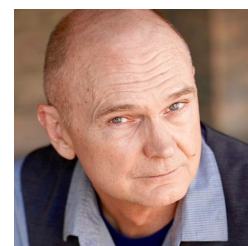
**Oogie Push (Actor)** is a citizen of the Meskwaki Nation. She holds an MFA in Theatre: Design & Technology from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and a B.A. in American Indian Studies with an emphasis in Theatre from Haskell Indian Nations University. She is a company member with Wonderlust Productions. She has three monologues that were performed on the Guthrie's McGuire Proscenium for STORIES FROM THE DRUM, and at Minneapolis Institute

for Arts for its 3rd Thursday: Art & Lit. She performs with Pillsbury Theatre's Breaking Ice, sometimes with Theatre Unbound, and has toured Alaska performing Shakespeare in one-room schools, in gymnasiums, and on stages in the most remote villages of the Arctic Circle, thanks to the Fairbanks Shakespeare Theatre Company. When she isn't acting, writing, traveling or figuring out video editing, she's weaving bags, one of which will soon be displayed at The Chicago Field Museum's Meskwaki Exhibit. Most recently she and the rest of the cast became characters of a graphic novel based off Wonderlust Productions 2016 "In My Heart: The Adoption Play Project" which is now on sale at [wlproductions.org](http://wlproductions.org) You can also find Oogie on her YouTube channels: Oogie\_Push; Auntie Oogie Presents; and Theatre Talk w/Oogie.



**Kim Vasquez (Actor):** "Originally from Saint Paul, Kim spent over 25 years in New York City, having worn many hats on Broadway and Off-Broadway. Currently Kim can be seen in "In The Heights" the movie and various episodes of "Saturday Night Live", season 44, where she played Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. She is thrilled to be back in the Twin Cities and to be the Producing Director and

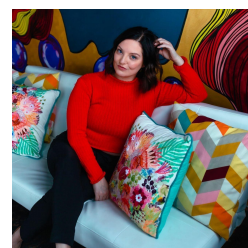
an Artistic Associate at Park Square Theatre. Kim received her B.F.A. in Acting from the University of Minnesota – Duluth, although she studied under Barbara Reid at the UofM-Twin Cities campus as well, and she's a graduate of the National Shakespeare Conservatory in New York City. She would like to dedicate this performance to her master acting coach, Jimmy Tripp."



**Peter Colburn (Actor):** I believe Theatre is one of the most visceral and thought provoking experiences you can have, in the arts. I am happy, and honored to be working with such a fine, and dedicated group of artists on this production.

Some of my stage credits include: Red Tail Productions: A Smokey Mountain Christmas Carol (Boston); Park Square Theater (FFF): Heaven; Yellow Tree Theatre: Still

Dance the Stars; The Jungle Theatre: Dial M, for Murder; Playhouse on the Square: Greater Tuna, Peter Pan; Circuit Theatre: Sherlock's Last Case; Vanguard Repertory: Twelfth Night; Troupe America Productions; The Fantasticks. Along with TV appearances on: Criminal Minds, and The Mentalist.



**Marci Lucht (Actor)** is an actor & teaching artist based in Minneapolis. She holds a B.A. in Acting from Augsburg College. Regional performance credits include Old Log Theater, Actor's Theater of MN, Classical Actors Ensemble, 20% Theatre, Theatre in the Round and Full Circle among others. Currently, she is a teaching artist in residence with the Guthrie and Yellow Tree theatres.



**Joshua C. Larson (Actor)** is delighted to be making his debut with Full Circle Theater Company. Josh was last seen as Sparrow in "Hillbilly Shakespeare," a musical he also wrote, directed and starred in with his thirteen-year-old son Jack and Luke Rowan for Suburban Cowboy Productions. Josh has also been seen in shows at The Old Log, Minnesota Jewish Theater, Stages Theater Company, Artistry and Theater in the Round. Josh is also



a member of "Hell Burnin' Sinners" country/rock band. Josh is employed full time as a reserve teacher at Park Spanish Immersion elementary school in St. Louis Park. Thanks to Kären and Jack for love and support!



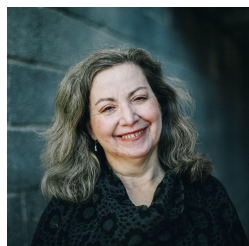
**Anna Pladson (Stage Manager):** This is Anna's first time working with Full Circle Theatre. She graduated from the University of Minnesota in 2017 with a BA in theatre where she discovered the Margolis Method and has been training in it to enhance her acting. Anna has been a core collaborator with Combustible Company since 2016, both as an actor and stage manager. She has been singing all her life and is taking voice lessons with

Ronnie Bell, Viterbo Conservatory for the Performing Arts. Outside of theatre, Anna is practicing aerial at Xelias Aerial Arts or playing roller derby with Minnesota Roller Derby.



**Keara J Lavandowska (Assistant Stage Manager)** is a UMD grad with a BFA in Stage Management thrilled to be working with Full Circle Theater Company for the first time! Her recent credits include Bright Star; The Meeting (Renegade Theatre Co.); Roald Dahl's Matilda the Musical (Children's Theatre Company); Murder For Two; Merry Wives of Windsor (Theatre at Monmouth); The Music Man; Sweet Charity; Clown Bar (The Duluth Playhouse); Dear Finder 2018; and Antigone (University

of Minnesota Duluth).

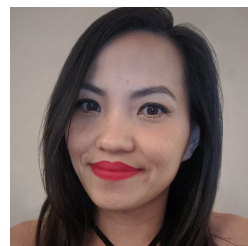


**Mary Harding (Movement Director)** is a dancer, choreographer, and teacher. She has danced professionally with ballet, jazz, and modern companies in repertory ranging from Pas de Quatre to works by Bebe Miller, Bill T. Jones, Lewis Whitlock III, and Danny Buraczeski. While a member of the Zenon Dance Company, Harding taught dance residencies in schools across the nation. Mary Harding has been head of the dance program at Perpich Arts High School since 1990, choreographing over 75

dances in that time. Currently she also works with Minnesota teachers as a member of the Perpich Professional Development and Resource Programs and works with teacher candidates at the University of Minnesota.

**Mina Kinukawa (Scenic Designer)** has been freelancing in Minnesota for the last decade. Most recently she has designed for the JungleTheatre, Theater Mu, Full Circle Theater, PenumbraTheatre, and the New Native Theatre. She has also worked in film & TV productions in Los Angeles, and designed scenery for theatres such as East West Players, EchoTheatre Company, Lodestone Theatre Company, Company of Angels, Milagro Theater, Profile Theatre, and

Northwest Children's Theatre Company.

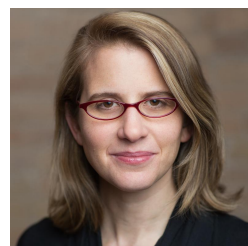


**Khamphian Vang (Costumer)** is a Twin Cities based freelance designer-artist with a background in fashion, theater and costume design. She approaches each project as an opportunity to give a visual voice to the characters and elevate storytelling through emotive and symbolic design. Khamphian's first show in the Twin Cities was Full Circle Theater Company's production of CAUGHT in 2019. Since then, her work has been featured at Theater Mu, Walking Shadow, and Jungle Theater.



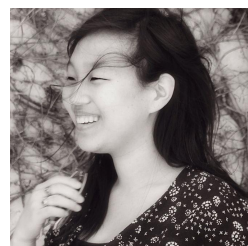
**Tom Mays (Lighting Designer)** is a Twin Cities based Scenic, Lighting and Projection Designer for theatre. He is also the head of Lighting and Projections for The Guthrie Theater. This is Tom's third collaboration with Full Circle. Credits include: The Guthrie Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Seattle Rep, The Minnesota Opera, Opéra de Montréal, The Gate Theatre (Ireland), Spoleto Festival, Wolf Trap, and The National Theatre of Romania. During the pandemic he has worked on three Film/Theatrical hybrids.

Tom has an MFA in Scenic and Lighting Design from U.C. San Diego, and a B.A. in Theatre from The Colorado College.



**Karin Olson (Associate Lighting Designer)** has been lighting performance for over 20 years, collaborating with design teams at the Guthrie, Penumbra, Mixed Blood, Frank Theatre, Theatre Mu, and with dance companies Threads Dance Project, Alternative Motion Project, Collide Theatricals and TU Dance. She designs regionally for Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Syracuse Stage and Trinity Rep. Recent designs include Spamtown, USA! at the Children's Theater and Taiko Arts Midwest's HERbeat at

the Ordway. Upcoming projects include Redwood at the Jungle and Antigone at Cleveland Playhouse. More info at [karinolsonlighting.com](http://karinolsonlighting.com).



**Quinci Bachman (she/her - Sound Designer)** is Full Circle Theater Company's General Manager and Production Associate where she works in both the marketing and administrative departments, creating numerous graphic designs. She has also stage managed and sound designed a number of Full Circle's productions. Most recently, she acted as video editor for Full Circle's 2021 Spring Virtual Event Series.

## **SPECIAL THANKS from Stephanie Lein Walseth**

**To all of the project interviewees**, for your willingness, bravery, and vulnerability in sharing your histories, values, philosophies, experiences, and life stories with me. I have done my best to hold them with care, and to honor your complexity. I am honored and humbled by each of you and your generosity of spirit. May the gift of your voices and perspectives help to transform the world. I know they have already transformed mine.

**To the cast, artistic team, and Full Circle Theater family**, who brilliantly dove into this ever-changing project with flexibility, patience, grace and gorgeous artistry. Huge thanks to all of the artistic collaborators who have worked on the project over the course of the last year in its many iterations and have helped to shape it into what it has become. And special thanks to Claribel Gross, for directing and midwifing this full production. It has been an honor and joy to collaborate with you.

**To the team of friends, family, and colleagues** who tirelessly helped me transcribe 20+ hours and 300+ pages of interviews in order to make this project a reality, including Rick Shiomi, Quinci Bachman, and especially Martha B. Johnson, Claribel Gross, and Cindy Peterson.

**To the organizations with whom we have partnered on this project**, and who have helped to champion the work in its two years of development and have connected us to audiences in the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota.

**To our Discussion Facilitators and Panelists** - Thank you for your willingness to guide and deepen our conversations about the art and the work of depolarization. Your generosity is so appreciated.

**To all of the donors and funders** who have generously contributed to *The Empathy Project*! Your kindness is directly supporting the work of Minnesota artists! I can't thank you enough.

**To my family, especially Sam, Graham, and Madeline**, who gifted me the time and space to create this piece and put it into the world. Your support means the world. You are my heart and my rock.

## **We thank our generous donors from our last and current season**

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F. R. Bigelow Foundation, Bob and Kathie Goodale Legacy Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, Minnesota State Arts Board, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, Saint Paul Cultural Sales Tax Revitalization Program

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Alan Bachman, Russell and Barbara Christensen, Dulas Family Fidelity Charitable Fund

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**With special thanks to our monthly donors: Barbara Pierson, Howard Smith.**

## SPECIAL THANKS From Full Circle To

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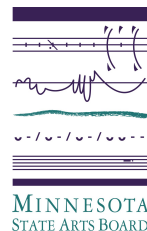
### Full Circle Theater Company Season Sponsors:

Full Circle Theater expresses its gratitude to The McKnight Foundation for its general operational support of our company.

This project is supported by the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation and by the F. R. Bigelow Foundation.

This activity is supported, in part, by the City of Saint Paul Cultural Sales Tax Revitalization Program.

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### About Full Circle Theater Company

Founded in 2014, Full Circle Theater is led by a Core Artist Leadership Group made up of Co-Artistic Directors Rick Shiomi and Martha B. Johnson and Core Artists Stephanie Lein Walseth and Lara Trujillo.

The **MISSION** of Full Circle Theater is to produce heartfelt, groundbreaking theater that artfully addresses issues of diversity and social justice for 21st century audiences.

### Full Circle Board of Directors

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For more information visit:

[fullcircletheatermn.org](http://fullcircletheatermn.org)

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