BIOS FOR THE WOMEN OF SEVEN
Activists - Playwrights - Actors

HAFSAT ABIOLA-COSTELLO (Nigeria) - ANNA DEAVERE SMITH - SARAH HOLLIS

Hafsat Abiola-Costello became an advocate for human rights and democracy following the murder of her activist parents and founded the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy. The Initiative provides skills-training and leadership opportunities for young women across Nigeria. She served as the youngest member of the Ogun State cabinet in Nigeria and was the Special Adviser on the Millennium Development Goals to the State governor. She founded the China Africa Bridge (CAB) to ensure that growing ties between China and Africa benefit both sides. In her current role as President and CEO of The Women in Africa Initiative, Hafsat creates a platform for and connects leading and high potential women in Africa to facilitate their increased individual success and collective impact. Hafsat was chosen as a Global Leadership Award Honoree by Vital Voices in 2016.

Anna Deavere Smith (Author) is an actress, playwright, teacher, and author. She is credited with having created a new form of theater. Smith's work combines the journalistic technique of interviewing her subjects with the art of interpreting their words through performance. Her most recent play and film, Notes from the Field, looks at the vulnerability of youth, inequality, the criminal justice system, and contemporary activism. Television work includes For the People, Black-ish, Nurse Jackie, and The West Wing. Films include The American President, Philadelphia, and Rachel Getting Married. President Obama awarded Smith the National Humanities Medal in 2013. Additional honors include the prestigious MacArthur Award and the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for achievement in the arts. She has been honored with the George Polk Career Award in Journalism, a Ridenhour Courage Prize, and the Dean’s Medal from the Stanford University School of Medicine. Her work has received two Tony nominations and she was runner up for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama. She is a University Professor at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts.

SARAH HOLLIS (Hafsat Abiola-Costello) is very excited to make her LATW debut in SEVEN! Hollis just closed a season at Utah Shakespeare Festival playing Viola in Twelfth Night, Witch #1 in Macbeth, and Elizabeth Condell/Emilia Bassano Lanier in The Book of Will. Other regional theater credits include: Jess in King Charles III, Letter Writer #2 (u/s performed) in Tiny Beautiful Things and Ensemble in Pygmalion (Pasadena Playhouse), Beneath in A Raisin In The Sun (A Noise Within, LADCC Nominated for Best Featured Performance), Zoe in An Octoroon (Kinetic Theater Company), Viola in Twelfth Night (PCPA), and Betty 5 (u/s performed) in Collective Rage: A Play in Five Boops (Boston Court). TV: 24 (Fox, recurring), Lie to Me (Fox), The Unit (CBS). Film: Kill Your Darlings, The Russian Doll, Falling (Slamdance 2018), Madness (Charlie Watchell, dir). I thank my family for all their support, especially my parents for being activists themselves. I couldn’t do this without my team at KMR and my manager, Will Levine. Most importantly, thank you to Paul for believing in me…and everything. Social Media: @mssarahhollis

FARIDA AZIZI (Afghanistan) - RUTH MARGRAFF - LAILA AYAD

Farida Azizi became an activist fighting the marginalization of women under Taliban rule in her native country. She often traveled alone to rural districts to bring medical supplies and instruction to women who otherwise would have no care and would have to convince Taliban fighters that her work was of value to the local communities. Because of threats on her life, she has gained asylum and now lives in the United States with her two children and works on women’s rights and peace-building for Afghanistan.
Ruth Margraff (Author) wrote 6 critically-acclaimed martial arts operas with the late composer Fred Ho for the Apollo, Guggenheim Museum, LaMama, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Ruth's recent writing includes Mirror Butterfly her jazz opera for climate refugees with Afro Yaqui Music Collective at New Hazlett Theater (Pittsburgh), Kennedy Center Millennium Stage (DC), National Ensemble Theater plenary (Tucson), 1st Mesopotamian Water Forum (Kurdistan, Iraq), and released on Innova Records at Red Rooster/Ginny's and the National Jazz Museum (Harlem); Temptation of the Fresh Voluptuous for the Nisville Jazz Teatrski Festival (Serbia), Red Tape/Art Institute Ballroom (Chicago), Coe Marquis Series Sinclair Stage (Iowa); and haiku for Bella Gaia with NASA holographic imagery. With her Café Antarsia Ensemble she wrote Previously Blue, Three Graces, Wellspring, Judges 19: Black Lung Exhaling which have toured all over the U.S. and internationally. Ruth has received awards from Rockefeller, McKnight, NEA, and Fulbright foundations. She is a member of Theater Without Borders and League of Professional Theater Women, and is a Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Laila Ayad (Farida Azizi) was most recently seen in the World Premiere production of Leslye Headland’s Cult of Love at the Atwater Village Theatre in Los Angeles and Stephen Belber’s Joan at the Ojai Playwrights Conference. She developed DreamWorks’ The Prince of Egypt for the stage in the role of Tzipporah and is a founding member of Ovation Award-winning IAMA Theatre Company. Other recent theater credits include: Shiner (Off-Broadway), The Mystery of King Tut (National Tour), French Waitress (Triptych Theatre Company), Unbound (IAMA), Gruesome Playground Injuries (Dairy Arts Center), The Last Days of Mary Stuart (Son of Semle Ensemble), Bachelorette (IAMA), Why We Have a Body (The Producers' Club), and Macbeth (Gielgud Theatre). Film and TV credits include: four seasons as Charlotte Reid on Scandal, Grey's Anatomy, Reception, and Exodus Fall. Laila is a graduate of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts and The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. www.lailaayad.com.

ANABELLA DE LEÓN (Guatemala) – GAIL KRIEGEL – MARITXELL CARRERO

Anabella De León raised herself and her family from poverty in Guatemala by getting an education, which was exceptionally rare for a young woman coming from the poorest communities. In 1995, after earning a law degree, she became a member of Guatemala’s congress while devoting herself to the struggle for human rights. She has received multiple death threats as a result of her fight against corruption and for the rights of the poor and indigenous peoples.

Gail Kriegel (Author) is presently working on a new play Cracked Open, about a family dealing with the quagmire of the mental health system and, with 9 other playwrights, is collaborating on Ten By Ten: ten playwrights recreate the lives of ten women who deserve statues. Gail wrote the book, lyrics and music for Sweetee, directed by Tony award winner Patricia Birch and produced to critical praise at Signature Theatre Centre, NY; she recently finished the libretto for Protest, an opera for young audiences. On The Home Front, Gail's play about returning veterans, won a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, the Ruby Lloyd Apsey Award, One World Arts grant; it was first produced at Empire State Institute of Performing Arts and most recently at the National Black Theatre Festival. Gail's work is included in the Archives of Theatre and Film of Lincoln Center. As recipient of an Eileen Fisher Company grant, Gail directed three productions of Seven for the benefit of community action groups. She is Artistic Director of the East Broadway Theatre Project.

Maritxell Carrero (Anabella De León) was most recently seen as lead in Esperanza, a film produced by Jana Memel. She was the lead actress in Peter Sellars' opera, The Indian Queen, recipient of the 2015 Golden Mask Award, which she notably performed at the English National Opera, Teatro Real in Madrid, and Moscow's Bolshoi Theater. She holds an MFA from UC San Diego and is the writer/producer of A Revolutionary Mystic, a
biographical one-woman show retracing the life of famed Puerto Rican activist Lolita Lebrón. Recent regional credits include: La Jolla Playhouse, San Diego Rep, Greenway Arts, North Coast Rep, and Bilingual Foundation of the Arts. She was part of the multicultural production of All My Sons at Hollywood's Matrix Theater, winner of the 2012 NAACP Image Award for Best Ensemble. TV Credits include: Dame Chocolate and Televisa's Bajo Las Riendas del Amor. She originated the role of Señorita Reflejos in Dos y Dos, a children's series for Telemundo broadcast in both Latin and North America. Carrero's image has been used in numerous national advertising campaigns. She started her career performing theater as a teenager in her native Puerto Rico. She later trained with acclaimed Michael Chekhov technique teacher Mala Powers. She is currently a teaching artist at Theater of Hearts Organization in Los Angeles. “The world is violent and mercurial— it will have its way with you. We are saved only by love—love for each other and the love that we pour into the art we feel compelled to share being a parent; being a writer; being a painter; being a friend. We live in a perpetually burning building, and what we must save from it, all the time, is love.” -Tennessee Williams @maritxellcarrero

MUKHTAR MAI (Pakistan) - SUSAN YANKOWITZ - LOVLEE CARROLL

Mukhtar Mai was gang raped by four men and forced to walk home almost naked in retribution for an alleged honour crime. Mukhtar and her harrowing story grabbed headlines across the world. Instead of taking the traditional women’s route of committing suicide, she brought her rapists to justice, built schools to improve the condition of women, and became an advocate for education in her country. The organization she founded is the champion defender of women’s rights and education in the Southern region of Punjab Province, Pakistan, a region with some of the world’s worst examples of women’s rights violations, such as rape, gang rape, domestic violence, honour killing, vani (exchange of women in settling the disputes), forced and child marriages.

Susan Yankowitz (Author) is a playwright, librettist and novelist whose work has been called ‘moving and poetic’ by the LA Times; ‘magnificent… scorching’ by NPR; and ‘breathtaking’ by the NY Times, the Scotsman, and Pretoria News. Among the best-known are Terminal and 1969 Terminal 1996 (with Joseph Chaikin’s Open Theatre), A Knife in the Heart, Night Sky, Phaedra in Delirium and Thumbprint, her opera (with Kamala Sankaram) about Mukhtar Mai which will have its fourth production at Chautauqua next summer. Her play Gun will be published by Bloomsbury/Methuen in February 2020, and she has been commissioned by LATW to write a play about Susan B. Anthony, also for 2020. Her latest is titled The Crazy But True Tragic-Farical Trial Of Madame P, wherein a Pig and Various 4-Legged and Winged Creatures are Prosecuted for Theft, Murder, Bestiality and Diverse Crimes against Humankind. Her work has been translated into 27 languages and produced throughout the world. www.susanyankowitz.com

LOVLEE CARROLL (Mukhtar Mai) has played in theatre houses across the U.S.: (select) Rent, Around the World in 80 Days, and Twelfth Night. She can also be seen on multiple TV shows, such as: Scorpion, Grey’s Anatomy, How To Get Away With Murder. Film credits include: Candy Corn, The Last Conception, Await The Dawn. Classically trained, Lovlee holds double degrees in both Theatre and Psychology from Indiana University. She is honored to stand amongst the other women in SEVEN and would like to spotlight the true Heroes: Every woman who has been subjected to violence. Thank you to all of those who fight for the sovereignty of women. “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education.” — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

INEZ McCormack (Northern Ireland) - Carol K. Mack - Ellis Greer

Inez McCormack was an internationally renowned and hugely influential human rights and trade union activist. She was the first female full-time official of National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), the first female regional secretary of UNISON (Public Service Union) and the first
female President of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. She played a critical role in the 1998 Good Friday Peace Accords and continued to advocate for equal rights and fair labour practices for women and minorities. In 2006, she founded the Participation and Practice of Rights Project, helping the disadvantaged access resources and services in Ireland, both North and South. Inez continued to advise and support PPR until her death in 2013. In 2017, she became the only woman among five people from Northern Ireland to be named in the latest edition of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

Carol K. Mack's (Author) plays have been performed in theatres throughout the USA. Premieres include The Accident, American Repertory Theatre; In Her Sight, Humana Festival; A Safe Place, The Berkshire Theatre Festival; Postcards, EST; Territorial Rites, The Women's Project; and Without a Trace, the Tron, Glasgow and tour of Scotland. Her awards include: a grant from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture for her play The Visitor (read at the JCC in DC; Negro Ensemble Company; Fairfield University); GETGO, Telluride Playwrights’ Festival; A Rockefeller Foundation fellowship; Stanley Drama Award; Julie Harris/Beverly Hills Theatre Guild Award; and John Gassner Award. Her one act plays have been selected for four separate editions of Best American Short Plays, Applause Books; and her new collection of four award-winning plays: Without A Trace & Other Plays is published by Mill City Press, Inc. www.carolkmack.com

**ELLIS GREER** (Inez McCormack) L.A. Theatre Works credits include: Die Mommie Die, Jefferson’s Garden, and The Goodbye Girl. Other Los Angeles Stages: Native Son (Center Theatre Group); Three Days in the Country, Native Son, Les Liaisons Dangereuses (Antaeus Theatre Company); The Matchmaker (Actors Co-op). Regional Theatre: The Many Women of Troy (Pallas Theatre Collective); The Diary of Anne Frank (Oklahoma Children’s Theatre). She has also participated in readings and workshops at Pasadena Playhouse, Independent Shakespeare Co. and The Workroom. Film: Bastard. Special awards/training: Best Actress for St. Miranda at the DC 48 Hour Film Project. BFA Acting, USC.

**MARINA PISKLAKOVA-PARKER** (Russia) - **PAULA CIZMAR** - **SHANNON HOLT**

In 1993, Marina Pisklakova-Parker started the first helpline for battered women and worked alone responding to calls and assisting battered women. Now it is known as the Center for the Prevention of Violence “ANNA” which is a resource center for the whole of Russia and former Soviet states and coordinates a network of over 120 organizations. Marina and her organization actively work on creating an effective system of response to domestic violence by educating governmental officials and the public about the issue of domestic violence. Ms. Pisklakova-Parker was honored, together with seven other human rights activists, by Human Rights Watch in 1997 for her work in the area of domestic violence against women. In 1998, Human Rights Watch (California) honored her again, together with five other human rights monitors from different countries, as the most significant activists of the decade. Ms. Pisklakova-Parker is featured in the book by Kerry Kennedy Cuomo “Speak Truth to Power” as one of fifty human rights defenders from around the world. In 2004, she received an award of Vital Voices Global Partnership for her work on the issues of trafficking. She holds a PhD in Sociology. In 2011 she was named by Newsweek Magazine as one of 150 Women world-shakers. In 2013, Glamour magazine (Russia) named her a woman of the year in the category Best Social Project.

Paula Cizmar (Author) is an award-winning playwright and librettist whose work has been produced all over the country, including at Portland Stage, the Women’s Project, Jungle Theatre, San Diego Rep, and Playwrights Arena, among others. Paula has received commissions from Center Theatre Group, Echo Theatre, Playwrights Arena. Awards include an NEA grant, the Israel Baran Award, and a TCG/Mellon On the Road grant. She received an international prize to write Golden, a musical, with composer Nathan Wang. Her new opera, The Night Flight of Minerva’s Owl, with composer Guang Yang, won the Music That Matters competition at Pittsburgh Festival Opera and will premiere there in July 2020. She is a founding member of the
Institute for Theatre & Social Change at USC where she is an Associate Professor of Theatre. She is a member of the Antaeus Theatre Playwrights Lab. More information: www.paulacizmar.com

**SHANNON HOLT** (Marina Pisklakova-Parker) was previously seen at LATW in *Hedda Gabler*, *SEVEN*, *Steel Magnolias* and *Judgment at Nuremberg*, as well as the national tours of *Steel Magnolias* and *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Regional credits include Berkeley Rep, Mark Taper Forum, South Coast Rep, Laguna Playhouse, Pasadena Playhouse, The Public Theatre, Trinity Rep, Indiana Rep, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and Dixon Place in NYC. Stages throughout Los Angeles include work with Evidence Room, Rogue Machine, East West Players, Boston Court, Actors’ Gang, Padua Playwrights, Odyssey Theatre and Antaeus Theatre Company, where she is a company member. Her work has garnered nominations and awards from LA Weekly, Stage Raw, Broadway World, Backstage West, and LA Stage Alliance Ovations. Film and TV credits include: *Seinfeld*, *ER*, *The Marc Pease Experience*, and *Love, Liza*.

**MU SOCHUA (Cambodia) - CATHERINE FILLOUX - TESS LINA**

*Mu Sochua* is the former Minister of Women’s Affairs in Cambodia (one of only two women in the cabinet). She grew up away from her home country, having been sent abroad for her protection by her parents, who perished under the rule of Pol Pot. She was co-nominated in 2005 for the Nobel Peace Prize for her work against sex trafficking of women in Cambodia and neighboring Thailand. MP Mu Sochua, after door-to-door visits to 482 villages, won a seat in Parliament in July 2008 and was re-elected in 2013. After Mr. Hun Sen dissolved the government in 2017, Mu Sochua was warned that her safety was at risk and she fled Cambodia. Today, she continues to fight for democracy while living in exile by traveling the world and meeting with international leaders to call for action against Mr. Hun Sen’s government.

**Catherine Filloux** (Author) is an award-winning playwright who has been writing about human rights and social justice for twenty-five years. Her plays have been produced around the U.S. and internationally. In New York City, Catherine was honored with the 2017 Otto René Castillo Award for Political Theatre and with the 2015 Planet Activist Award. Filloux’s new play *whatdoesfreemean?* produced by Nora’s Playhouse, recently premiered in New York. Her play *Kidnap Road* premiered at La MaMa and was presented by Anna Deavere Smith as part of NYU’s Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue. Catherine is the librettist for three produced operas; and her most recent is Olga Neuwirth’s new opera, *Orlando* premiering at the Vienna State Opera. Her new musical, *All Dressed Up and Nowhere To Go*, with composer Jimmy Roberts and John Daggett, is a 2018 NAMT finalist and was recently workshopped at Redhouse Arts Center in Syracuse, New York. www.catherinefilloux.com

**TESS LINA** (Mu Sochua) has been fortunate to work on both sides of the Mississippi, as well as across the pond. In SoCal, her credits include the Mark Taper Forum, La Jolla Playhouse, and Laguna Playhouse. She has also performed regionally at the Guthrie Theatre, San Jose Rep, Indiana Rep, and notably at the Denver Center in a co-production with the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, directed by the late Sir Peter Hall. Tess is Associate Artistic Director of Shakespeare Orange County, where she is both producer and artist, and is performing the title role in *Antony and Cleopatra* this summer. Film and TV credits include: *How to Get Away with Murder*, *S.W.A.T.*, *Revenge*, *House*, *Mental*, *CSI*, *CSI: Miami*, *NCIS*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, and *Danika* with Marisa Tomei. She is a graduate of Juilliard and a teaching artist at Orange County School of the Arts.