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**Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts
Announces the 2018 – 2019
Wallis Studio Ensemble Company Members**

**The Groundbreaking Emerging Theater Company
Enters Its Third Season at The Wallis**

(Beverly Hills, CA October 15) The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts announces the actors selected for The Wallis Studio Ensemble's 2018-2019 company. This marks the third season of this groundbreaking company for early-career actors producing theater for social change. The *San Diego Tribune* describes the emerging ensemble as "hauntingly beautiful" - and by *ArtNowLA* as "Mesmerizing ... harrowing and provocative, this is avant-garde theater that sticks with you long after the curtain comes down." The Ensemble also received the *Los Angeles Times* theater pick of the week in June 2018 and was featured on NPR's KPCC in a piece by Priska Neely in 2016, in its first season.

The 2018-2019 Wallis Studio Ensemble will feature: Trecey Dory, Schuyler Girion, Ella M. Joseph, Viva Kanani Obiajulu Wittman, Kelvin Morales, Sina Pooresmaeil, Jo Rodriguez, Helya Salarvand, Alex Sheldon, Lucia Towers and Siera Williams.

Launched in the 2016-17 season as part of the GRoW @ The Wallis arts learning program, The Ensemble has already gained a reputation for highly physical, energetic and daring work that addresses contemporary issues head on. In its first two seasons, The Ensemble mounted four full-length productions at The Wallis (Douglas Adams' *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Thebes* by Gareth Jandrell and two devised pieces: *Disposable* and *Word of Mouth*) and performed at both the San Diego International Fringe Festival and the Crisis Arts Festival in Tuscany, Italy.

"At the heart of its work, The Wallis Studio Ensemble crosses boundaries, and with an ethos of collaboration, creates thoughtful provocative work," stated The Wallis' Artistic Director, Paul Crewes. "Consistent with our approach to programming, The Studio Ensemble is exploring new ways to adapt work, create new works and re-imagine existing texts for a contemporary age."

"In developing GRoW @ The Wallis' programming, we have been informed by two key criteria," explained Mark Slavkin, Director of Education at The Wallis, "First, what does

Los Angeles' arts community need that does not already exist? And second, how can we integrate and align our education programs with the professional work we present on our stages? L.A. has many fine training programs for young actors and many exciting professional opportunities in theater, film, and television. But there isn't a bridge in place to support early career actors transition to their professional careers."

In creating its education programs, The Wallis has sought to engage faculty that combine artistic achievement with a passion for teaching. Distinguished artist and educator Madeleine Dahm was selected as the first Artist in Residence for GRoW @ The Wallis. Dahm plays an invaluable role helping The Wallis shape and advance its artistic and educational goals. Informed by her own early experiences as a young artist in the U.K., she brought to The Wallis the belief that L.A. should have a theater company for early career actors. Inspired by this vision and her remarkable commitment to bring this idea to life, The Wallis joined with her to launch the Wallis Youth Theater Company in 2016. The name of the company was rebranded to The Wallis Studio Ensemble in 2018 to better reflect the nature of the program.

"The Wallis Studio Ensemble is committed to producing visceral and innovative theater that serves as a galvanizing force for social change" said The Ensemble's Artistic Director, Madeleine Dahm. "It provides an opportunity for early-career actors to be part of a collaborative community of peers, with not only craft at the forefront of the work but also racial, ethnic, gender and sexual orientation equality. We feel that theater needs to better reflect the diversity of the world in which it exists, it is a shared human experience, and young artists have a crucial role to play in its future."

The Wallis also offers exceptional opportunities for the actors in the Studio Ensemble to interact with visiting theater professionals. This includes seeing their work on stage at The Wallis, informal meet and greets, and more in-depth explorations with select professional artists or companies featured during The Wallis' season. This immersive experience allows Ensemble actors to gain additional insights from more seasoned actors about craft and technique, sustaining a professional career and overcoming obstacles related to race and gender.

The selection of specific performance work for the Studio Ensemble is determined in collaboration with The Wallis' Artistic Director, Paul Crewes, and with an eye to complementing the other professional theater presentations in a given season. The actors themselves also play a key role in determining the core issues and ideas they hope to explore each season.

In addition to Dahm, other creative contributors to The Wallis Studio Ensemble's work include six-time Ovation Award-winning lighting designer Bosco Flanagan, acting coach Andrew Villareal and company manager Calvin Ripley.

The Wallis Studio Ensemble 2018-2019 Season Company Members:

Trecek Dory, who has been acting since he was 12 years old, is pleased to be in his third season with The Wallis Studio Ensemble. He is Afro-American, with Afro-Caribbean, Cherokee, and Caucasian lineage, and is passionate about fighting for equality and social justice. A regional finalist of the August Wilson Monologue Competition, his credits with the Studio Ensemble include, *Word of Mouth* at the Crisis Art Festival, Italy. Oedipus in *Thebes* and Other in *Disposable*, at the San Diego International Fringe Festival. He was the Main Puppeteer and the Vogon Captain in the ensembles recent hit production of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Schuyler Girion is a theatre maker and proud Angeleno. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley, where she studied English, Theater and Performance Studies. Growing up in a family of storytellers, she was inspired by the societal impact of stories from a very young age and is particularly interested in the cultivation of new and challenging theatrical works. While at Berkeley she was a founding member of the New

Play Practicum, a developmental readings and workshops series. After graduating, she became the assistant to the Director of New Work Development at The Public Theater NY, where she spent a year and a half osmosing the inner workings of new play development at the renowned off-Broadway house. She then worked as Community Impact Coordinator during the 2017 PublicWorks production of *As You Like It*, assisting a community ensemble of 125 everyday New Yorkers (Public Theater); served as the Associate Director of the concert reading of *The River is Me*, a new musical inspired by the life and death of Emmett Till (54 Below); and was dramaturg for the MFA playwriting developmental workshop of Civil (Columbia University). She has trained at the American Conservatory Theater and the Lee Strasberg Institute. Her acting credits include: Tessa in *Summertime* Olga in *After the War Blues*, and Niblo in the workshop production of *American Shakespeare Riot*. She is currently a resident artist of the LA theatre company, The Vagrancy, where she most recently assistant directed *Romeo and Juliet*. Schuyler is thrilled to join the Wallis Studio Ensemble as an actor and hopes to continue to create innovative, moving and dynamic works that challenge our place in this world.

Ella M. Joseph is an actor from Savannah, Georgia. She emigrated with her family from Panama and she was fortunate to grow up in a home full of love and culture. At age 16, she began her training in performance with All Walks of Life Inc, a non-profit organization that focuses on educating young people through the arts, and promoting positive and active involvement between individuals and their communities. This was where she first gained insight into the power of theatre to create bonds and push boundaries. After graduating from Savannah Arts Academy, she trained at Northern Arizona University for four years as a Performance Emphasis Theatre major. Joseph has always felt that it is imperative to provide opportunities in the arts to those who are disadvantaged in order to ensure people from all backgrounds take part in - and that the demographic of those involved in the arts is also diverse. As a theatre practitioner, she believes it is crucial to constantly question the world we live in, and bring light to the voices of the unheard. Her recent acting credits include Calpurnia in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Williamina in *Silent Sky*, Esther in *Intimate Apparel*.

Viva Kanani Obiajulu Wittman is an actor and dancer from the thick jungle of the windward side of the island of Maui. She is a recent graduate of Bennington College and is interested in making art that addresses current social issues. Her advanced work at Bennington was an evening-length dance theatre production on memory, inheritance and the reproduction of history in the present body, and was in part a reflection on what it means to be biracial but white-presenting throughout girlhood. Her recent theatrical credits include Quincy Long's new play *Daughters of Io* and *East Coast Curriculum* by Lucy Thurber. Wittman was the Story Editor and Casting Director with the studio 1RIC's Augmented Reality experience *Terminal 3*, which premiered at the 2018 TriBeCa Film Festival, then appeared at the 2018 Sheffield Film Festival, the 2018 Barbican Center season (with a month-long installation) and the 2018 LA Film Festival. The project was nominated for the TriBeCa Storyscapes award and was covered by Fast Company, VR Scout, Venturebeat, New York Times and the BBC. Wittman has also held several competitive internships, including with the Martha Graham Dance Company in New York and the Centre de Danse du Marais in Paris. Wittman works in activism as much as she can and is delighted to be a part of the Wallis Studio Ensemble's third season.

Kelvin Morales is the youngest child of two immigrant parents from El Salvador. He grew up hearing stories of his parents' home country and, at an early age, fell in love with the power of storytelling, and has been telling his own stories ever since. His heritage, and passion for performing have paved a unique path in his professional career, working in contemporary theatre, cultural events, commercials, musicals and Shakespeare. This is Morales' third year with the Wallis Studio Ensemble. His company credits include the Crisis Art Festival Tuscany, Rise Up LA, the Wallis Annenberg Center for Performing Arts and the San Diego International Fringe Festival. Recent acting credits include *In the Realm of the Maya* directed by Enrique Castillo at Plaza de la Raza; Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*; Salerio in *The Merchant of Venice*, Snug in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a member of Will Geer's Theatrum Botanicum; Conrad in *Much Ado About Nothing* with Project Nongenu. This summer he performed in the Griffith Park Shakespeare Festival as a member of Independent Shakespeare Company, playing Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Chiron in *Titus Andronicus*.

Sina Pooresmaeil hails from Northern Virginia just outside of Washington D.C, and fell in love with acting while on a trip to Los Angeles during a college summer break, where he met and began training with Tim Robbins' company The Actors' Gang. Sina pursued the arts further while finishing his double major in Biology and Kinesiology at Penn State University. His east coast productions include Steve, Almost Maine and Patrick in *Sacred Trauma*, a play by Ellis Stump. His own one act play *Chief's Well*, based on a Samoan ghost story, was seen at Wonderlust Theater Company, and his play *The Sad Clown*, was a finalist for the No Refund Theatre playwriting competition. Having recently relocated to Los Angeles Pooresmaeil is currently playing Gregory in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Group Repertory Theatre. He trains and performs improvisational comedy with the Upright Citizens Brigade and The Actors' Gang. His artistic interests lie in continuing the ancient history of storytelling for Iranian-Americans and more generally, for people of Middle Eastern descent, with a focus on the specificity of his culture rather than gross generalizations and stereotypes drawn from the current media landscape. He looks forward to working on vital theatrical productions at The Wallis with this wonderful company.

Jo Rodriguez is a recent graduate from AMDA with a BFA in Acting where she had the opportunity to play various roles in productions such as Annabella in *Lightless Sulphur* and Jenny/Marge in *Mr. Burns: A Post Electric Play*. Rodriguez, an original member of The Wallis Studio Ensemble, is now beginning her third season. She is also their in-house photographer and social media manager. Outside of The Wallis Rodriguez manages ArtNowLA's social media and writes plays. While she has had several plays produced, her biggest accomplishment as a writer will be participating in The Strawberry One-Act Festival in New York in 2019. As a playwright she has a nonlinear approach and is interested in analyzing and breaking down the fundamentally human questions of, who we are, why we are, and what we are supposed to be.

Helya Salarvand moved to California from her home in Iran and has always found herself drawn to the intersection of politics and theater. Coming from a country where artistic censorship is prevalent, the political nature of artistic and theatrical work has always been of vital importance to her. Her work as an actress is rooted in her desire to give voice to women who are absent from mainstream narratives; including but not limited to queer, radical, and feminist Muslim women in the Middle East whose stories remain unheard. Salarvand is

interested in the fight for prison abolition and freedom for Palestine, furthering global feminist conversations and exploring the resilient nature of womanhood through art. She was recently seen in the radical interactive augmented reality project *Terminal 3*, which premiered at Tribeca Film Festival in 2018 and is now at the Barbican Centre in London, and is part of the LA Film Festival. Salarvand joined the Wallis Studio Ensemble in their second season and is eager to continue working with the company because of its commitment to creating original socially conscious theater works. She is drawn to the ensemble's avant-garde work and its authentic storytelling which strives to create a deeper, more layered relationship with its audiences.

Alex Sheldon is one of the founding members of the Wallis Studio Ensemble, now in its third year. He was raised as an artist at Will Geer's Theatricum Botanicum, steeped in classical theatre throughout his life and training, and has since performed over a decade of Shakespeare as a company member at Theatricum. As a member of the Studio Ensemble, Sheldon is not only an actor, but a designer as well, serving as the company's mask/puppet maker, and resident fight choreographer. Most recently he created the entire collection of alien puppet and mask characters for The Ensemble's hit production *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Mired in classical tradition, Sheldon integrates gothic and romantic aesthetics with a modern, progressive approach. He also works in a variety of other mediums, serving as an illustrator, sculptor, and playwright. His favorite acting credits include: *The Trickster (Word of Mouth)*, the Studio Ensemble, performed in Arezzo, Italy), *Creon (Thebes)*, the Studio Ensemble), *The Cat (Animal Farm)*, Theatricum Botanicum), *Paris (Romeo and Juliet)*, Theatricum Botanicum), *Borachio (Much Ado About Nothing)*, (Project Nongenuie), *Slartibartfast (The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy)*, the Studio Ensemble). Sheldon is a member of the Society of American Fight Directors.

Lucia Towers has always had a passion for storytelling and more importantly, listening to the stories of others. Growing up as a lesbian in a small farm town in Northern California she did not see movies or art that accurately represented queer people. Now 25 years old, Towers is passionate about representing lesbians and queer people in a more relatable and normalized way in the hopes of providing the representation she wishes she had as a child. She started acting at ten years old in a small community theatre and went on to study at the Pacific Conservatory of Performing Arts. Her recent credits include Marina in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, *Much Ado About Nothing* with Project Nongenuie and starring in the LGBT Webseries "Twenty and The Leslie," and the short film *Sanctuary*.

Siera Williams is a 23-year-old African American woman hailing from Huntsville, Alabama. She is a poet, writer and actor, hoping to travel with a production company of her own one day. She has appeared in two short films, *Blessed* and *Social Life*, and had her poetry featured and performed in the play *He Calls Me Ribs*. Recent credits include: Velma in *Birdbath*, Rowena in *Biloxi Blues*, Rebecca in *Social Life*, Other in *Disposable*, and Arthur (Martha) Dent in *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. She volunteers at FTC's Food Bank and supports Convoy Of Hope, and New Hope Opportunities.

For more information about The Wallis, please visit: TheWallis.org.

For more information about The Wallis Studio Ensemble, please visit: TheWallis.org/StudioEnsemble

For more information about GRoW @ The Wallis, please visit: TheWallis.org/GRoW

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