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FirstWorks Commissions Four Performance Projects from Rhode Island Artists

Works span dance, music, and theatrical genres and highlight FirstWorks' "Raise Your Voice" program theme

Providence, RI – **FirstWorks**, a Rhode Island non-profit dedicated to building community through world-class arts announces the winners of its Fall 2020 call for local artist proposals; the organization will fund four performance projects to be showcased in 2021. The selected artists — **Orlando Hernández** and **Vatic Kuumba**; **EmmaLee Holmes-Hicks** with **Piero Guimaraes** and **Jing Wang**; **Robb Dimmick** and **Ray Rickman**; and **Judith Lynn Stillman** — represent a range of disciplines including dance, music, and theater.

"FirstWorks is committed to celebrating and nurturing the local arts community as part of our mission," said Kathleen Pletcher, Executive Artistic Director of FirstWorks. "We are thrilled to support these four outstanding projects and the brilliant Rhode Island creatives behind them."

The commissioning of the four works is FirstWorks' latest initiative to support Rhode Island's arts community, and speaks to the organization's commitment to local artists as essential partners and to supporting "firsts" in the arts. Offering platforms for local artists to create and present their work is a part of FirstWorks' "Raise Your Voice" programming, a thematic initiative that amplifies diverse voices and celebrates difference through the arts.



The selected projects for FirstWorks' commission opportunity are: *Phantom Notes* — Orlando Hernández (dancer) and Vatic Kuumba (theater artist); *East Meets West* — EmmaLee Holmes-Hicks (musician) with Piero Guimaraes (musician) and Jing Wang (musician); *The Benefit of Black Women: Five Lives on Benefit Street* — Robb Dimmick (artistic director) and Ray Rickman (producer); and *Women Trailblazers* — Judith Lynn Stillman (musician). The commission supports both the creation of new work and the adaptation of existing projects for the digital world. Projects will feature live and virtual components, culminating in public presentations during FirstWorks' 2021 season, with dates to be announced. Selected projects range in topic: from the legacies of slavery in Rhode Island, to East-meets-West cultural fusion; from stories of Black women in historical Providence, to powerhouse female composers.

Commissioned artists will also engage in FirstWorks' education programming, conducting virtual student workshops and providing digital education content. More information about FirstWorks' arts education offerings can be found at <http://first-works.org>.

This project is supported by the New England Foundation for the Arts through the New England Arts Resilience Fund, part of the United States Regional Arts Resilience Fund, an initiative of the U.S. Regional Arts Organizations and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, with major funding from the federal CARES Act from the National Endowment for the Arts. This project is also supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit <http://www.arts.gov>.

About FirstWorks

FirstWorks is a non-profit based in Providence, Rhode Island whose purpose is to build the cultural, educational and economic vitality of its community by



engaging diverse audiences with world-class performing arts and education programs. Since 2004, FirstWorks festivals, performances and programs have attracted more than 600,000 participants. Last season, FirstWorks arts education programs reached over 5,500 students from public and charter schools across Rhode Island with transformative, arts-based learning experiences. FirstWorks is the founding partner of PVDfest, collaborating with the City of Providence to produce the City's free signature arts celebration held each June. In 2019 PVDfest drew 130,000 visitors to Providence to experience music, art and spectacular performances. Embracing collaboration, FirstWorks has fostered over 90 community partnerships across business, social service, government, arts, and education sectors. Visit <http://first-works.org> to learn more.

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