Nominee: Alice da Cunha
Nominee Role/Title: Artistic director
Organization: Physical Theatre Festival

Please detail how this nominee has significantly impacted your organization or the Chicago theatre industry:

Alice has brought unbelievable artists from overseas, around the country and right here in Chicago for the past 13 years through our annual festival and related events. She has promoted the work of dozens of artists from over 20 countries, and she has lifted up dozens of artists locally to showcase new works in development in the field of physical theater. Over the past several years, she has partnered with CLATA to present an annual all-Latinx evening showcasing new works by Chicago artists. This is just one of multiple partnerships she has made over the years with community, civic and education groups in her work with the Festival. Beyond the Festival, she has also taken part in several multi-Jeff-nominated shows as both a director and performer.

What makes this nominee's contribution different from others in the group?:

Alice just has a gift for creating meaningful artistic spaces where people can connect and communities can gather in celebratory fashion around the theatrical experience. She has played a large part in making Physical Theater Festival a decade-plus institution in the city that reliably brings artists and audiences together in a way that is global and local all at the same time. I think her vision and dedication have added something so valuable to the Chicago theater scene.

Nominee: Ariana Burks
Nominee Role/Title: Actress/Performer
Organization: N/A

Describe Your Relationship with the nominee and the nominee's major area of involvement:

I am Ariana Burks' Mother, and I have watched my daughter thrive in the Chicago Theatre scene since the tender age of 8. Ariana has performed on Chicago's biggest stages including the Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago Children's Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Court Theatre, Porchlight Theatre and many others! Born and raised on the South Side of Chicago, in an area where Theatre was not the normal trajectory to success, Ariana thrived in an environment that made it almost impossible for her to imagine getting to live out her dreams as a performer but here she is and is continuing to forge her way through!

Please detail how this nominee has significantly impacted your organization or the Chicago theatre industry:

As a young woman of color, residing in the Chatham neighborhood of Chicago, Ariana's contribution has been directly linked to the generations of kids she encouraged to strive for an unattainable dream, coming from a low income area on the South Side. so much so that every time Ariana performed in a show, the elementary schools she attended would use their "field trip money" to bring groups of kids from the area to see "one of their own" performing on a stage. Ariana being cast as Alice in "Wonderland, Alice's Rock & Roll Adventure" at Chicago Children's Theatre is one of the most inspirational moments for me as her Mother. South Side newspapers interviewing Ariana because she was one of the first ever "girls of color to be cast as Alice" was monumental. Little Black and Brown girls, dressing up like Alice In Wonderland, waiting for Ariana to come off of the stage to take pictures with Alice....an Alice that "looked like them" inspired many. Ariana is also a part of her schools "Black Alum" where she continues to promote under-served areas to continue pursuing dreams and passions because they can come true.

What makes this nominee's contribution different from others in the group?:

Ariana's contribution in this group is different from other's because Ariana lived through the struggles that she is currently in a place to inspire other to push through. Ariana was a low-income student, Ariana lived in an un-safe neighborhood, Ariana had difficulties getting an

agent earlier in her career due to being a minority, Ariana did go through the "acting scam schools/agencies/managers" and still made it out with the support of her family , standing on the idea that no matter her circumstances, she can thrive in an area that is basically untouched in Chatham and hopes to continue being abele to inspire little Brown and Black girls that they too can achieve their dreams should they choose to.

Nominee: Mia Park
Nominee Role/Title: Artistic Director
Organization: Asian American Arts Chicago (AAAC)

Describe Your Relationship with the nominee and the nominee's major area of involvement:

I am the board chair and producer for AAAC, the organization that Mia serves as board member and Artistic Director for.

Please detail how this nominee has significantly impacted your organization or the Chicago theatre industry:

Mia Park is a stage and on camera actor since 2000 in Chicago. Dedicated to promoting Asian American voices in Chicago theater since 2007 by forming AAPI theater company A-Squared Theatre Workshop; creating meet up groups to see AAPI artists on stage; creating educational workshops taught by local AAPI theater professionals to AAPI students; founding Our Perspective: Asian American Plays, which produced play readings written, acted, and directed by AAPI theatre artists at Steppenwolf, Goodman, Victory Gardens; founding Asian American Arts Chicago, formerly APIDA Arts, which produces AAPINH arts festivals and performances. She's been an advocate for Asian American artists in Chicago for over 20 years, which is how I met her. She's dedicated and fierce, with a strong voice—she deserves to be recognized for all the work she's put in for our community.

What makes this nominee's contribution different from others in the group?:

Mia Park has produced hundreds of theatrical performances featuring Chicago-based Asian American theater artists for over twenty years. No other actor/producer in Chicago has worked this hard and this prolifically at promoting the visibility and supporting the creativity of AAPI theater artists. Asian Americans continue to be underrepresented and marginalized on theatrical stages. Her work has not only planted seeds but also helped lead the shift of this perspective of inclusive casting by bringing awareness to AAPI presence on stage through these events she's produced. I believe that she had a vital effect on the growth of Asian American art in this city.

Nominee: Amanda Hosking
Nominee Role/Title: Audio and Video Supervisor
Organization: Writers Theatre

Describe Your Relationship with the nominee and the nominee's major area of involvement:

Amanda, in title alone, is the Audio and Video Supervisor at Writers Theatre (WT), but her contribution extends far beyond that. Sixteen years ago, she started her tenure at Writers as a Sound Board Operator and quickly became part of the regular crew. In 2016, with the opening of the current building, she transitioned to the leading the Sound Department while also running the board and live mixing every show – Hershey Felder, award winning pianist, actor and playwright, has hesitancy for anyone mixing his shows other than Amanda. Later, she transitioned into the Head of the Audio and Video department and focused more on leading a team of people rather than running each individual show. Her role focuses on institutional sound needs for the building and WT events as well as training incoming crew for shows and prepping, loading in, teching and striking each of our productions in a multi-theatre space. After spending many years with WT, Amanda has shown herself to be more than just her title. Amanda has been described as a knowledgeable logistics coordinator, a giving host, an above and beyond supervisor, a cross-departmental problem solver, and a backstage collaborator. Although, I am writing this as part of the WT Production Management Team, Amanda has impacted so many people that come into Writers Theatre that her co-workers, actors, board ops, designers, and stage managers all contributed to demonstrate how Amanda is the champion of the Writers Theatre backstage.

Please detail how this nominee has significantly impacted your organization or the Chicago theatre industry:

Ten years ago, when Writers Theatre opened its new space, Amanda started working to create systems for each contractor that entered the building that would make their transition into our unique space easy. In her day-to-day work Amanda “is constantly aware of the larger picture and works with the team to obviously support the Audio and Video departments but is vigilant about how those needs can collaborate with other departments. Her knowledge of WT allows her to problem-solve in moments of crisis calmly and efficiently. Her investment in WT also means she's always willing to pitch in however she can in an emergency” (Miranda Anderson – AEA Stage Manager). Amanda has created in-depth systems across all departments that have helped set each step of the

process up for success. From the moment that a stage manager arrives in the theatre, she is planning the rehearsal room set up. Before a crew member arrives, she has everything labeled and back up plans created, and she starts talking to designers immediately upon hire. WT designers have truly felt the most seen by Amanda as “She invariably strives to allow us as designers to focus on our creative tasks, while working to solve any and all technical hurdles that arise during the course of production, enabling us to focus on the larger aesthetic and design-related tasks at hand” (Stephan Mazurek – Projections Designer). Beyond just the productions, Amanda is vital to the technological success of our events like Glencoe Alfresco, WT Green Room Events and Open Calls. She ensures that no matter the timeframe everyone has all the elements they need for their events to be successful. Writers Theatre also has a unique partnership with the Women’s Library Club (WLC) of Glencoe – they have numerous events each month that require various levels of set up. With kindness and grace Amanda aids these women in making sure they have music, microphones and presentations set up – which helps Writers Theatre maintain this positive relationship with WLC. She also serves as someone that our team leans on in support of IT – especially in the early years of the building and during COVID – whether it is setting up music in the lobby, fixing people's macs or setting up Zoom carts – she is always hands on with our tech needs. Not to mention – in such a fast-paced environment, always turning around the next show; we rarely have time to make sure all the odds and ends are cleaned up and tidy. Amanda, however, is always ready to make another room organized and clean – she will regularly pop by the Production Management office to say she has just cleaned another room. Amanda has also consulted other companies across Chicago like Oil Lamp Theatre, giving advice on patching, new equipment and set up for sound heavy productions. In addition, each time another theatre company reaches out for help, support or equipment she is the first to jump in and figure out how we can support the other theatres in our surrounding area. The care that Amanda gives to every interaction is beyond what so many people offer in a fast-paced industry.

What makes this nominee's contribution different from others in the group?:

Amanda is the backbone of the Writers Theatre Production Department. Because she has been with Writers through every iteration – as a Sound Technician and Board Operator in our previous buildings at Tudor Court and Books on Vernon, as a Consultant on Audio needs during construction of the new building, and now as the Audio and Video Supervisor – she has an acute understanding of what is needed in each moment. And her support extends far beyond her own department. When she sees a problem, she tackles it head on – whether or not it is part of her job description. She has a sixth sense for things that may go wrong or things people may need (large or small) in the building or during a show and she is

quick to jump in and be ahead of the game – “putting others needs before her own” (Adam Friedland – Director of Production). For example, she brought in games, coloring books and an XBOX for our Young Performers when she saw they were bored during tech. She brought in a rug for our Crew Lounge to make it feel homier. Anytime someone says that they need something – Amanda is the first to jump in and say she has that in her basement. She stepped in when we had a Board Operator become ill. She is constantly and patiently helping our FOH team figure out the ALDs and the monitors (even when sometimes the problem is simply turning up the volume). For our designers, Amanda goes above and beyond “to help [them] realize [their] ambitions with a relatively small support staff via insightful forethought and incredibly organized advanced planning, especially given the scope and variety of productions presented by Writer's each season. Due to various circumstances, I [Andre] recently had to request several major late changes to the sound speaker system. Upon understanding the reasons for the requests, and the scope of the work, Amanda implemented those changes in the most efficient and elegant fashion - with good cheer and understanding as a bonus. As an itinerant artist, it is beyond refreshing to feel so supported by resident technical staff” (Andre Pluess – Sound Designer) Because of this, every actor, musician, and crew person that comes to work at Writers knows that Amanda is a person they can turn to at any moment for any reason. As a person in Production Management coming from a Carpentry background, my knowledge of Sound is not the strongest. Amanda has made herself available and approachable to not only teach me, but to all the cast, crew and designers to learn and to find solutions that allows everyone to shine on stage rather than worrying about technology – without ever making a person feel less than. Not only is she a teacher, but she is a learner. Just the other day I was asking her about how she developed her knowledge for sound and video and she said, "I started learning and never stopped.” That stands true as we bring in new designers and technology. For one of our recent productions, she learned a new system to help better connect Projections and Sound cues and helped to teach our Projections and Stage Management teams along the way. Finally, she cares for all her fellow co-workers. She is consistently checking in on our team to ensure that they have the support and care that they need to keep doing their jobs, whether or not it is sound related. Amanda is a Backstage Champion because even though her title may be Audio and Video Supervisor, her heart and mind are focused on every person backstage no matter their role or what department they fall under.