

[Descriptive transcript: Video opens with a flyer for Short Play Festival, presented by Deaf Spotlight. Text in center, with subtitle below: "Six short stories. One floral shop. Around the text is a red-purple plant foliage framing the sides with a green background behind it. Slide transitions to new text with a smaller foliage across top only. Text in center: SPF 2023 Panel Featuring Playwrights & Directors with moderator, Melissa Ylngst, (text). Video transitions to a view of the stage with twelve panelists sitting on the stage looking up at Melissa, who is moderating. Melissa stands at the right side and signs.]

>> Voice: Take it away, Melissa.

>> Melissa: Sure. Well, hello everybody. I'm so thrilled to be here. You know, this is the first time we've been together in person in three years, and oh, what a feeling. Right? I've been following Deaf Spotlight and their work for a very long time, and I'm so honored to be here in this Short Play Festival. I have not seen it, but I will tonight at seven. And based on my conversations with the cast and the crew, the energy is so exciting.

[Camera switches to a closer-up view of Melissa.]

>> Melissa: And what's so very special about this is that in 10 minutes, it's about making the impact in such a short time. And I think that was a huge challenge for many of you. Right. And I know I'm looking forward to it. And of course, y'all know I love to ask questions, but before I do, I'm gonna hold off and let them introduce themselves. So we'll start on The, yeah, why don't we start on the other end. And so, yes, let them share what their involvement is in the show.

[The camera pans along the line of panelists and starts with Cherry, sitting far left.]

>> Cherry: Shall I start? All right. My name is Cherry Pie Latorre. I live in Seattle, Washington, and I wrote "50 Flowers".

[Applause.]

>> Aimee: Hello. Hello, hello, I'm Aimee Chou. I also live here in Seattle, and I directed her play, "50 Flowers".

[Applause.]

>> Kai: Hello everyone. I'm Kai Winchester. I directed the play, "Plant A Kiss".

>> Michelle: Hi, I'm Michelle Banks from Washington, the other one DC and I directed Heba Toulan's. Heba Toulan's play for "Camellia for Camilla".

>> Josh: Hello, I'm Josh. I directed his play "Toxic Flower"

>> Willy: Bravo. I'm Willy Conley. I am the writer of "Toxic Flower".

>> Liam: Hello, my name is Liam Coleman. I wrote "Plant A Kiss".

>> Tyler: Hello, I'm Tyler DeShaw, and I'm the director for his play. "Beautiful Boy".

>> Rob: I'm Rob Roth. I wrote "Beautiful Boy".

>> Howie: I'm Howie Seago, and I wrote "Flower Dance". Thank you.

>> Alexandria: Hello, I'm Alexandria Wailes. I directed "Flower Dance" and the entire festival with Patty.

[Applause.]

>> Everyone: Wow. Bravo to everyone.

>> Melissa: Amazing. Okay, well my style is very conversational, so I'm gonna just throw out a question and any of you who are wanting to answer, just raise your hand and we'll talk until we're ready to move on. So my opening question is, with this year's theme based on flowers, and for those of you who are writers, was that an easy process to just come up with something related to flowers? Or did you have to really think about it?

>> Howie: I'll go. It was very easy for me. There were no words involved.

>> Melissa: Touche, go ahead.

>> Liam: Yeah, I'll go. I love cactuses, which you might have noticed in my play. I also love plants, so it wasn't too hard. I did do some research, but other than that, it came together easily.

>> Willy: I'm curious what research you had to do for "Toxic Flower". What kinda research did you have to do for that show?

>> Liam: What, what was it?

[Willy repeats the question.]

>> Liam: Actually, I, with the writing prompt about a floral shop, and I ended up writing five short plays. Then I narrowed it down because they only accepted three per author. And in terms of researching poisonous flowers in particular, I imagined what would happen if they sold these at

Home Depot. What about the children in the carts grabbing flowers? And then my mind just went in that direction, and how do we train employees about the dangers behind these toxic flowers? And yeah, it just spilled from there.

>> Melissa: Wonderful.

[Josh holds a hand up while others applaud.]

>> Josh: Funny story over the 3 weeks that we've been rehearsing, I told the actors and the directors who watched our play This time take a drink every time they say "dead" It was clear they'd be drunk by the end of the play! It became a very effective drinking game.

But then I created "Beautiful Boy" with Rob, and talked about the idea that flowers represent death, among other things. Rob and I talked a lot about him being an older gay man, me being a younger gay man. We shared our cross generational experiences. We did a lot of writing together and talked about with all the death caused by the AIDS epidemic and how many flowers were bought who profited from that? So we thought what would happen if someone who profited from that was gay. Would they have a kind of survivor's guilt? So we kind of explored that idea. Rob talked about how it feels like we don't see enough gay and deaf stories we also don't see many relationships between different generations So we explored that too. And you that's what we made. But most of the writing was done by Rob. The idea and story was really me, well both of us. So that was our creative process.

>> Rob: Right. At first it was a conversation when, when they brought up this prompt, um, of the flower store, I thought, you know, we got together and we said, let's, let's do something. Let's submit something together.

We each came up with our own ideas, we talked them through and ultimately worked his story and just went with it. It gave me the opportunity to give homage to my friends who had passed from AIDS. I'm wearing this jacket to symbolize that and to make sure that we never forget. It was an honor to work with Josh on this story.

> Melissa; Oh, that's beautiful. Alexandria?

>> Alexandria: Cherry Pie.- Would you like to talk about the inspiration behind "50 Flowers" and was that an easy story for you to create?

>> Cherry Pie: Really, it was not a fast process. I would say it took about 24 hours. I wrote little by little as it came together. I came up with several stories, picking pieces of each of them to build what you saw today. It was a lot of work, quite a process, I think probably about two, three days. I like how the script turned out. I hope that it was inspiring to others. So I submitted it for the festival. But it was not a quick process.

>> Melissa: So I have a question for the playwrights. Some of you were inspired by Deaf Spotlight's writers workshop that was a resource provided to inspire and empower artists to create and submit a play. But it's not always easy for everyone to write a script. So I, commend each of you for writing your plays. I know it was a challenge keep it under 10 minutes. But I wonder, for the writers, what was your process like? Was it easy to go from idea to a full script under 10 minutes? Or did you have to work hard at making it short and concise?

>> Rob: I'll, I'll say at first, yes, I did go to Deaf Spotlights Writer's Workshop. I'm retired, I have all the time in the world on my hands, and this opportunity arose. So I thought, why not take a writing workshop? And went through workshop taught by Kalen Feeney.

[Rob points to someone in the audience.]

>> Rob: Who was just wonderful. And there's Kalen!

[Applause.]

>> Rob: And so, I took the workshop. But the first play wrote was not very good. I submitted it and was rejected. So I did it again, and was eventually successful. I think I got better over the last couple of years. And two years ago, I submitted a play called "Boy Scout". Some of you might have seen it. And Josh was the director for that play. And that's when we started collaborating and working together. For this play, I would write then share with Josh We worked back and forth together, always in dialogue. And as I went through the process, I had to reduce it to the gist. What did I want the audience to leave the theater with? I wanted them to have something to take away. The writing process was all about condensing and expanding. It was an exciting and fascinating process. And then when the actors got in the room and read the script some of it just didn't work right in ASL. So we continued to make edits along the way. It was a constant process. I want to thank the actors and the director, Tyler, for being part of that process. Because there were a lot of changes along the way. And I think the end product shows all of that effort. was a real true collaboration, all of us working together. So I want to thank everybody who was involved.

[Applause.]

>> Melissa: All right. Anybody else wanna add to their experience?

>> Howie: Sure, I'll go. My initial inspiration was Rob. Actually, we've been friends for many, many years and I've always known Rob as a deaf activist, very active working in academic and community settings, not

necessarily in the arts, well in painting. When I found out that Rob submitted a play, I thought...Rob?! If Rob wrote something, I'm writing something. And then how it started was I saw the prompt about a flower shop and that got me thinking. And I thought for a good two weeks. I do have flowers in my backyard garden. I love flowers. And then I got to thinking and noticing homeless people all around Seattle. There are tents, encampments all around the city. And I thought, what would it take to make those people happy? We often see people on the side of the road and we might think about giving them money, but worried that it may go toward drugs. So I started giving out water bottles. And later, cookies. And then I thought, would a flower make that person happy? What would they do with a flower? And that's when I just started rolling forward with my idea. I thought about it for a good couple of weeks. Envisioning several different ideas in my head, and then I ended up realizing it doesn't need words. It's a picture. Like a silent film. And from then on it was a process of shaping and condensing.

>> Alexandria: I'd like to talk a little bit about that. What was interesting about that script in particular was the first two weeks we were on virtual, we were on zooms. I'm New York based, and obviously the actors were here. So we were working together and we were trying to figure this out. And without words, we had to do a lot of character development, um, analysis, really exploration of the ritual of each of the characters and trying to figure out what it was their journey looked like, and how those journeys might find a crossroads and how that moment unfolds. It a moment, an act of kindness. Recognizing the steps that lead to that. And to do that virtually was interesting. We decided to focus on the choreography. It was a strong collaboration between the actors. They were amazing. Irvine and I go way back. We've known each other many years. So it's nice to reconnect with him. And Harmony, this was the first time I've met her. It was so nice to have that energy. Multi-generational dancers. So we all tossed out ideas, collaboratively. Then when we met

in person we had to make the most of a very short timeline, but all of the work that we did virtually translated so well to in-person and it really paid off. It all came together only about three days ago. So really appreciate their spirit, willingness to contribute and their support and how they brought those stories to life without words. It was tempting to read the script and think "I've got this", but we had to pause and discuss what's really going on here. Because each tiny detail is significant. Nothing is trivial. Again, it's about the rituals and how to honor them, everything done with intention. We need to make it earned. So it was a good and exciting challenge to dig into that with the limited time we had.

>> Melissa: Wow, that's a tall order. Anybody else wanna chime in? Great Job. Specifically the writers.

>> Liam: Sure. I'll go. I think it's interesting. My writing process was to start with the personality. Develop a character audiences relate to. And then I wrote a version focused on the story. Less about personalities. Obviously a story needs to have personalities. So then I wrote a third version trying to find a balance So then I had to find a balance between the two of them, So actually, I signed the script to myself, I thought it would be, max 10 minutes. But apparently when you add actors and blocking, what was it Kai?

[Liam turns to Kai for confirmation.]

>> Liam: 20, 30 minutes? 50 minutes? 40? 50 minutes? I'm kidding. Right?

>> Kai: Ok, almost 20 minutes.

>> Liam: Yeah. Oh geez.



>> Melissa: And what was that like shortening it for you?

>> Kai: It was challenging for me because I didn't wanna lose any of the soul of the script. Um, there was a reason for everything that you wrote, Making cuts without losing the story, the personalities That was hard. So going through that process I wrote some suggestions and sent them your way asking can I cut this, or should I keep this? So we went through that process, I got your responses of what to edit, then I'd send to the actors who would read through, but it was still 15 minutes. So I'd go back to you for edits. I think went back and forth 4 times until we finally got to 11 minutes. Whew! And it was really challenging because what we were taking out was not easy and we were trying to strike a balance. I really want everybody to see the full script sometime without any time limit. But it was interesting trying to condense it without losing anything. And I think we struck a good balance. It was challenging and interesting.

>> Panelist: Congratulations. Really Very good work on that.

>> Melissa: Did you wanna add something, Tyler? Okay. Well, what I am noticing is there's a lot of first timers and never did they think they could. But you see, it's about believing in our community because everyone has a story to share based on their life experiences, their various journeys. But to be able to write something is quite intimidating. Should I write it? Can I, so for the Deaf Spotlight to really be here to give people the opportunity and the space to go ahead and make those submissions, we need to see more of that. Right?

[Applause.]

>> Melissa: So I wanna speak to the directors now. You all received scripts for your plays, and you had to create a vision from that. So what

was that like for you to get a script and then make a vision that was true to the script?

[LAUGHTER]

>> Michelle: Everybody's looking at me, so I'll just go for it. When I got the script. I had to read it over a few times to really get the best sense of the story and what it was about and how I might deliver that vision. How I could make sure that the story is authentic to the writer's vision. I would contact Heba and have that conversation. I asked her to tell me about the play. Why did you write this story? And then taking all of that in, I developed my own vision. Even though a playwright has their own vision, it has to become my vision as the director. So, I wanted the audience to get the message from this play And what is that message? Key to this story is forgiveness, and soul searching. So I explored how to deliver those two messages in a powerful way. Soul searching and forgiveness. So I had my vision, but the actors had their visions too. Working with Kai, Rogan and Rhonda we talked about their perspectives on the story which helped me to add more depth to how I could direct this story with their perspectives included, not just my own. So it was more of a collaborative effort from everyone. I believe in working as a team. It's not just mine. The writer, the director, the actors. We all came together as one. And that's how I approached directing my play And I hope that my message came across clearly.

>> Melissa: Wow. Beautiful. What a wonderful description. And you took the time to truly immerse yourself and have that deep conversation. Anyone else?

>> Tyler: Sure. I'd like to add to that recent comment. Deaf Spotlight, especially Patty has been incredible at fostering the team work here. It was a partnership from day one. They've also supported us by providing

mentors. Josh was my mentor. The three of us worked closely together. I am so appreciative of the support from the team. Not sure if folks know, but this was first time ever directing a play. Yep, this was my debut. Not just me, but I believe for Kai and also for Aimee. Is that right?

[Applause.]

>> Tyler: Aimee? Was this your first time Directing?

>> Aimee: Yes. Well actually I had directed on Zoom, if you can call it directing, but that's a whole different Platform.

>> Tyler: For stage direction?

>> Aimee: Yes. The first time. Yeah. So the three of us, I have to say, we could not have done this without the support system of Deaf Spotlight. It was invaluable.

>> Participants: So true.

>> Melissa: Anyone else? Oh, go ahead.

>> Josh: I have to admit, when I first got the script a woman talking about flowers for 5 pages. Really? I

[Laughter.]

>> Josh: mean, what, what am I supposed to do with this? And I asked Willy, um... I'm sorry, great script, but um...what's going on here? And he was like "it's about power dynamics, obviously". And we got into a conversation from there. Sometimes I pushed his buttons a little bit, because he was like "that's my script don't change it" And absolutely

right, but I had to get to a shared understanding I'm always thinking, where are the ideas? The themes? So when he said it's about power dynamics, toxic behaviors, That got me thinking, what would cause people to behave badly as adults? And I thought, it stems from, for those who go to therapy, we know it all starts with our parents, right?

[LAUGHTER]

>> JOsh: Good old childhood trauma. So when he wrote that line about the neighborhood kids bullying Deaf Daffy, I was like yes! So that was the starting point. How did this woman feel triggered by giving a lecture, wanting to have full control over the situation? She was donning armor when she put on that apron. I'm in control of this restaurant. Um, not restaurant. Where did that come from? I'm in control of this flower shop! Standing firmly behind a solid table, fully in control And then as people started talking, which she couldn't understand, Anna and I talked about what triggers us as deaf people Seeing people talk as if to exclude us, that is unsettling. Or suddenly everyone's laughing and I'm wondering if it's at me. It's probably not, but it's still triggering. Those are all working as triggers to remind her of things that happened in her childhood and shaped who she is as a person. So that's why I added the video to show the character Willy created. But also justify where this work came from, where did the hurt come from. And hope we leave the theater realizing that most of us are just trying to cope from our childhood we're trying to get on with our lives, but sometimes we find ourselves filled with tension, which is just our past trauma manifested. So yeah, that was my path.

[Applause.]

>> Melissa: Wow. That's deep,

>> Willy: Right? Yeah. I think what was good is that Josh followed what I wrote and added his vision on top of it. The element of the video, he added an additional layer to my script, really. He added a visual element that helped us get into the mind of Daffy. I thought that was a brilliant addition.

[Josh pats Willy on the back. Applause.]

>> Melissa: Thank you. Did you wanna add more?

>> Aimee: Yeah, Yeah. Well, in terms of my journey, it was interesting. When I was reading the script, I was like, okay, oh wow, this is a Filipino story. I am not Filipino myself. My parents immigrated from Taiwan, very different cultures. But the first thing I did was ask a ton of questions. Where in the Philippines are we? Um, I, I had so many question. Where are we going to incorporate Filipino sign language? I've traveled to the Philippines, but that was like 10 or 12 years ago. I noticed there was a lot of English signage used around the country, So I was curious how to honor Filipino culture and bring it to life on the stage. We had a DASL and a DFSL Which is a made up term - Director of Filipino Sign Language. We worked with a deaf person who lives in the Philippines who we rehearsed with. So there was a lot of layers to our story. The actors had lots of questions for Cherry Pie. Who was gracious and just amazing. Thank you so much.

>> Cherry Pie: You've most welcome.

>> Melissa: I was having a conversation with many of you yesterday, and based on the conversations that I had, I feel like there were so many authentic lived experiences that have been exposed and it's very represented here. So I wanna talk about representation and visibility. These days, we usually think of shows in the form of TV or movies,

but this is theater. Why is theater so important in our community? Of course we have film and TV. but theater, what sets theater apart?

>> Howie: I, I would say the audience. Take it away. Oh, audience.

>> Melissa: The audience.

>> Josh: What I've found to be very interesting, and I'm gonna get a little bit political here, but I find it fascinating that we keep cutting the arts yet we must keep football at all costs. But theater is constantly on the chopping block. When you really look at it, theater is language arts. We, as deaf people, need language. We need access to language. And theater give us tools to communicate. One of the directors I've worked with, Michael Arden, who directed "Spring Awakening" always said that if you put people in a room together, eventually they will start sharing their stories. It never fails. People will coalesce as a group and start sharing. It goes back to the cavemen days, when we were sharing stories around a fire. Because that's how we pass information to one another. Before we were writing our stories, we shared them face to face. "tiger over there" or "elephant with tusks over there". Warning of danger, communicating with each other. Humans have been creating and sharing stories all along. So I think this festival is our way of carrying that tradition sharing Deaf history, passing it on to the next generation. Video recording, writing scripts, these are ways for us to capture that history. Michelle's life, mine, Willy's, all of our lives. We're representing our life stories through theater. We are creating a tangible artifact, something that will last.

[Michelle and Rob raise hands.]

>> Melissa: Yes. Okay. We'll have Michelle and then Rob.

>> Michelle: What sets theater apart from movies, as Howie said, really it is the audience and that human connection.

>> Panelists: (agreeing) Mm-hmm.

>> Michelle: You don't have that on TV or with movie. I mean, you have human connection in 2d, but to physically be in the presence of people, to have eye contact, you are communicating with the audience. To interact with one another through theater is potent. And Josh said, the language arts. How do we express, how do we share our stories? That's critical. TV and movies do that, don't get me wrong. But in theater, you start with a very strong foundation, the stage. That's number one. If you really want to share your story, as a storyteller, the stage is the place to do it. It all starts on the stage.

>> Melissa: Rob?

>> Rob: Yeah, I agree with that. I would say that from my background as an artist, when I go to a gallery to see another's art, what I see in that moment is an artist communicating with me. And as I'm observing, I see the texture in the painting, the thickness, the physical qualities, there's a wide spectrum, there's abstract art, there are many different types of art. So by looking at that painting, I'm directly in communion with that artist. And in that very same way, when I'm creating art, I'm hoping to communicate with you. When I chose to write a play, I hope that was the beginning of a conversation. And through Tyler as the director, I hope that we established a personal connection. That's the difference with theater. In movies and TV as a viewer, I'm trying to glean what I can. But, movies and TV tend to be heavily directed and produced, aiming to appeal to the lowest common denominator. They're trying to appeal to a wide audience, and you can't have a true provocative impact in that way. And that's what theater does for me.

[Kai raises a hand.]

>> Melissa: Yes, Kai?

>> Kai: Yeah, I just wanted to add that for me, there are two important distinctions to make about theater. You have an audience and no two shows are ever the same. Last night's play and tonight's play will be different. You're present in the moment. You've put your phone away, and you're here right now. Whereas in a movie theater, it's passive. At home you can push pause and walk away. But in theater, you're right here, right now. What you see will be genuine and will never happen again. But also, what Josh said about deaf history, it started in church basements, small community gatherings. Sharing stories of family histories. It started in small communities. And back then that's how we learned from each other. Watching a story, then traveling to another town passing it on. That's how we passed information down, and it should continue. Film and TV is great, don't get me wrong, but it is not the same. For actors to have a live audience, it's not the same.

>> Alexandria: I'd like to add to that. Theater for me is community. And yes, everyone has their community, however, the community of artists the community of humans that comes together, means that each of us brings our individual selves to the work. It's a process of opening up and expressing our journeys, sharing the character's journey through our own bodies. Sharing ideas, collaborating, engaging in dialogue together. Similar to what others have already mentioned, I view theater as survival. As a way to survive. Language arts, interaction, social skills, soft skills, hard skills There are so many aspects to theater that make it work and this festival in involved quite a lot of people. Not just the actors, directors and writers. Most of whom are here, There are many others working behind the scenes for the months leading up to the festival. A team of



about 50 people including the actors and many others worked together to create this one weekend of live theater in real time. In the moment, connecting and breathing together. With masks on the entire time, oh yes, but still breathing, engaging, connecting, and being present in the moment together. And what you leave with, what you take away, is that you are changed, your perspective shifted in some way. The benefit of theater is that we come together as one in real time with the audience, sharing perspectives, stories, frames that may have never thought of before. In a space, specifically during a short play festival where you're exposed to several stories at once, that at its core is human stories, needs. The basic undercurrent of what connects us as humans. It's so powerful. And it started long ago, sitting around fires sharing stories at night, for survival or sharing ideas, creating, dreaming, stargazing with wonder. Imaging what's out there or what's under the water. Looking to each other for connection. It's incredible. Theater has the power to spread energy. And it's so important to foster that. In every way.

>> Melissa: Beautifully said. Survival, creation, connection. Yesterday during our conversations, several of you mentioned the concept of taking down the fourth wall. The imaginary wall between the stage and the audience. Removing the fourth wall allows for connection with the audience. So on that note, I want to open it up to you who just watched the show. I'm sure many of you here saw the show that just finished. So definitely I want to give you the opportunity because we have 10 minutes left. Maybe you saw something that you are just dying to ask about I want to allow space to ask any of questions you might have. So I would like to offer the floor to anyone. Who wants to start?

[Camera turns to show an audience member standing up and signing their question towards the audience.]

>> Audience: Hi Ann Silver here. I have so many questions, but I'll pick just one for now. What an amazing experience to have that play happen in two different languages was the first time I've experienced anything like it. Bravo. Just spectacular. I enjoyed that so much. And even though I, I didn't understand all of the signs in Filipino sign language, it was more accessible than I ever imagined. Thank you so much

[Applause. Camera zooms on Cherry Pie and Aimee while they beam and sign 'thank you'.]

>> Melissa: Indeed. And with that, I think it was really, really nice to have that representation, authentic lived experience. Asian writers, directors, actors, how beautiful is that? So, so Cherry Pie, I'm curious about your experience as the author of this play, how was it seeing an Asian actor bring it to life on stage? Did it feel authentic to the story you created?

>> Cherry Pie: Feels like home, seeing representation of Filipino and Asian stories. Momo was involved and Aimee as the director. It was a dream come true having an Asian team. Also, shout out to all the Asian folks in the audience. I see you.

[Applause.]

>> Melissa: Thank you. Are there any further questions from the audience?

[Camera pans out to the audience. A person in the back starts to sign.]

>> Melissa: Okay. Please stand.

[The person stands up.]

>> Audience: Yes. Uh, just out of curiosity, Have you received feedback from hearing people? Since the festival has no sound and only captions, I wonder if you've heard feedback about that? Repeating the question. What have been the reactions from hearing audiences?

[The camera pans back to the panel, sweeping past the CDI copy-signing the question. Several of the panelists look at Kai.]

>> Melissa: Kai?

>> Kai: No complaints so far. I have literally heard nothing.

[Laughter.]

>> Kai: Deaf joke.

>> Melissa: Oh, okay. Michelle?

>> Michelle: Well, I did speak with one hearing person, the artistic director of Sound theater company. They said it was amazing, despite not knowing sign language. They said it was inspiring, amazing work by everyone, actors, writers and directors. So I assume they enjoyed the show with just captions without relying on sound at all. The combination of captions and sign language on stage is effective for hearing audiences.

[Applause.]

>> Melissa: You can still make a difference for all audience members.

[Pause.]

>> Melissa: Howie?

>> Howie: Yeah, I'd like to go back to that comment about authenticity. As I wrote my play, my first script, the characters were to interact in a "dream dance" where they met and danced in a fantasy world. My original concept was that they would be signing a love song And so I selected lines from popular love songs And then Patty said she was worried about copyright law. When I checked into it, it seemed fine, but we decided it would be easier to just cut it. So in conversation with our director, Alexandria, we agreed to do that. And I thought go ahead and see what it's like with just dancing alone. It was important to me that dancing was in that dream world. And what was interesting is that one of the actors in the show said that lines of songs in the script represented the lived experience of a hearing person, which really made an impact on me. And quite right. So, what would deaf dancers do? And that's where Alexandria's brilliance came in. The choreography she created made it come to life. I was astounded. Wonderful work.

[Applause.]

>> Alexandria: Thank you. I'd like to add to that. Really, it was a collaboration of the actors and in talking with Howie about cutting the songs, which was totally fine. But it was helpful for the actors to understand the space in which these two characters meet. So having those lines was helpful for us to abstract and evolve into what was authentic for the moment. By transforming through movement and dance, which is another kind of language. It's communication. I have a background in dance. People communicate a whole lot through their bodies. So what I wanted to emphasize and lean into was how we engage with one another from afar in banter without words, however, with a script that inspires us with details on the mood the feeling, and so

forth. So it was really fun to play around with that So thank you Howie for having an open mind and open heart and going with it.

>> Howie: Sure. Thank you.

[Applause.]

>> Melissa: Excellent. Excellent. Okay, I think we have time for one final question.

[Camera pans to the CDI copy-signing the question.]

>> Audience: Not really a question, but more of kudos to you. The dance choreography brought back fond memories of watching musicals with Gene Kelly dancing so elegantly on the stage. And with a deaf cast too, just wow. Well done.

[Applause.]

>> Alexandria: Thank you for saying that. I will say that We did our research and looked to Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire and other iconic dancers from the 1950s. But we also were thinking about silent films and how characters interacted. The tension, the buzzing between them, their little micro movements. And it was fun to really commit to those ideas but translated into a modern sense. In 2023, how would that language be embodied today in a modern way that feels timeless. Because the value of thoughts, of philosophy continues to shift and evolve but still there is an underlying current that's fun to explore. It was just so much fun to dig into there. So thank you for your comments.

[Applause. Melissa stands up.]

>> Melissa: Oh, okay. The, the final, final question.

[Camera passes over to the CDI copy-signing the question.]

>> Audience: I do have a quick question, um, for any one of you, but just out of curiosity, um, how does writing and directing overlap? How did you make your choices? How did you work together?

>> Alexandria: Sure. I'll go. I can answer to that as the festival director, Working with Deaf Spotlight, To quickly sum up the process, they put out a call for submissions with a theme and a prompt. We received submissions of scripts and as a committee of screeners who read the scripts. We then narrowed down those script submissions and then figured what kind of message we wanted to share based on what's going on in the world. What does the world need now? And so as narrowed down to our finalists, we looked with intention at our group of writers. We wanted to foster new talent, giving opportunities to first time directors. We also wanted to support and grow local Pacific Northwest talent and also include people from out of the Seattle area. So from there we made our choices of folks we wanted to work with. And then we paired up directors with writers. We gave them a theme and let them move forward with the process. We had meetings, ongoing discussions with each team. It was a collaboration all along. And I'm very proud and honored to witness how much we have created. These are all the faces, well, not everyone is here today. But the level of work. It's really remarkable and touching. I want us to continue to support and foster that growth. There's so many more stories to tell out there.

[Applause. Melissa stands up again.]

>> Melissa: Oh, wonderful. I just got the signal that we have to stop at five o'clock. I know there's so many questions we want to ask.

What a beautiful combination of creativity, energy, and partnership. I'm sure many of you are leaving this experience feeling more inspired, learned more from it all. Right? Thank you to Deaf Spotlight for this opportunity. It was tremendous.

[Applause.]

>> Melissa: And I know not everybody could be here in Seattle for this. As we have talked about the importance of community and access to theater, I'm thrilled to share that these plays will be filmed and streamed on a new platform, VSYN+. More information is coming soon. This will be groundbreaking because the entire community deserves access to these wonderful stories.

[Applause.]

>> Melissa: Now I'm really excited for tonight's show, bravo to all of you. Thank you.

[Applause.]

>> Panelists: Thank you, Melissa.

[Video fades to black for a moment, and returns to two flyers from the beginning of the video. It transitions to a new slide, "Land Acknowledgement" with text below:

Video transitions to scrolling white text on a black background: "Festival Committee:" with names below.

- Festival Director: Alexandria Wailes
- Production Manager: Guthrie nutter
- Producer: Patty Llang

- Creative Director: Buddy Elledge
- Access Coordinator: Aly Boote
- Costume Designer: Laura Kessler
- Director of Artistic Sign Language: Akilyn Aaron-Lozano, Joey Antonio, Gabriel Silva
- Festival Photographers: Aly Drayton, Jason Tang
- Lighting Designer: Rob Falk
- Production Designer: Jennifer Harris
- Ticketing Manager: Libby Stanley"

#### Toxic Flower

- Playwright: Willy Conley
- Director: Josh Castille
- Stage Manager: Siena Radler
- Daffy: Anna Biracilano
- Understudy: Rhonda Cochran

#### Beautiful Boy

- Playwright: Rob Roth
- Director: Tyler DeShaw
- Stage Manager: Omar Faust
- Anothony: Irvine Stewart
- Zach: Zerek White
- Raymond: Rogan Shannon

#### Camellia for Camille

- Playwright: Heba Toulan
- Director: Michelle Banks
- Stage Manager: Omar Faust
- Kenneth: Kai Winchester
- Hearing Service Dog: Pala
- Marc: Rogan Shannon



- Madame de Sevigne: Rhonda Cochran
- News Customer: Harmony Baniaga
- Understudy: Tyler DeShaw

### Fifty Flowers

- Playwright: Cherry Pie LaTorre
- Director: Aimee Chou
- Stage Manager: Kellie Martin
- James: John Pecher
- Aissa: Monique Holt\*
- Son: Phelan Conheady
- Understudy: Rogan Shannon
- \* (text insert)

### Plant a Kiss

- Playwright: Liam Coleman
- Director: Kai Winchester
- Stage Manager: Kellie Martin
- Lex: Phelan Conheady
- Violet: Anna Bracilano

### Flower Dance

- Playwright: Howie Seago
- Director: Alexandria Wailes
- Stage Manager: Siena Radler
- Walker: Irvine Stewart
- Betsy: Harmony Baniaga
- Choreography collaboration with Alexandria Wailes, Harmony Baniaga and Irvine Stewart

### Many Thanks

- 4Culture
- ArtsFund

- ArtsWA
- Ballard Reuse
- City of Seattle Office of Arts & Culture
- The mogan Fund at Seattle Foundation
- National Endowment of the Arts
- Sawhorse Revolution
- Seattle People's Fund

### Special Thanks

- ACT Theater
- Access Team
- Actors' Equity Association
- Backstage Crew
- Black Box Operations
- Deaf Spotlight Board
- Deaf Spotlight MARCOM Team
- Driftwood Players
- Festival Mentors
- Festival Volunteers
- Jason Eastman
- Jenny Ku
- Conrad Strack
- Joyce Jameson
- Rafa Domingo
- RJ Jacobs
- Village Theatre
- Toxic Flower Youth Actors: Savina Strehe, Ben Zollner, Josephine Lackie, Amelia Wright.

Video transitions to show the logos for Actors' Equity Association and SAG-AFTRA. Following slide shows the logo for Northwest Film Forum,

with text “Shot and edited by Remove the Gap Productions”. Video ends with the Deaf Spotlight logo.]