



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**PRESS CONTACT: David Rosenberg**

David Rosenberg Public Relations

[david@drpublicrelations.com](mailto:david@drpublicrelations.com) / (773) 505-1429

**Underscore Theatre Company To Close Permanently;  
Chicago Musical Theatre Festival Gains New Home**

**CHICAGO** (September 21, 2022) – The Board of Directors of **Underscore Theatre Company** today announced the company will close its doors permanently after eleven dynamic years of producing musical theatre in Chicago, including 16 world premieres. However, the company's much-lauded **Chicago Musical Theatre Festival** will have a new home under the leadership of Chicago's **Kokandy Productions**, another company dedicated to raising the profile of the City's musical theatre community. Underscore's remaining assets will be transferred to Kokandy to help ensure the Festival's future success as an incubator for new works.

Comments Founding Executive Director and Board Vice President **Laura Stratford**, "We chose to dedicate our time during the pandemic, when we could not produce, to a nearly year-long strategic planning process talking with writers, producers, directors, and new musical makers from all across the country about what is most beneficial for their work in the new musical landscape. Underscore, like many of its peers in the storefront theatre community, operates with limited resources both in capital and human capacity. What we learned from our planning process was that to maintain a sustainable future, our model would need to undergo a dramatic shift, especially as the community continues to recover from the ongoing impact of COVID-19. Artistic Director Whitney Rhodes and Executive Director J. Sebastian Fabál recognized that what would be required to make these changes was beyond the capacity and resources of what a part-time role could allow, and both made the difficult decision to step down. After some deliberation, the Board has elected to take this opportunity to seed a new start for the Chicago Musical Theatre Festival. As an additional gift to the Chicago musical theatre community, we will publish the findings of our strategic planning process, with the hope that they may be of use to those who continue this work."

Underscore Founding Artistic Director and Board Member **Alex Higgin-Houser** adds, "While Underscore is closing its doors, our mission isn't over. When we founded this company over a decade ago, it was with the goal of making Chicago a hub for new musicals. We're thrilled Kokandy Productions is committed to carrying the torch of new musicals into the future by taking the reins of the Chicago Musical Theatre Festival. We also want to thank Artistic Director Whitney Rhodes and Executive Director J. Sebastian Fabál for their tireless work and leadership, particularly through the pandemic. We wish them both all the best in their future endeavors."

Kokandy Productions Artistic Director **Derek Van Barham** comments, "We are honored to be welcoming the Chicago Musical Theatre Festival into the Kokandy family, and to be taking charge of such an essential event for our musical theatre community. We thank our friends at Underscore for creating such an inspired opportunity for emerging artists and for entrusting us with continuing the CMTF legacy. We're excited to see the festival continue to evolve and thrive for years to come."

**About Underscore Theatre Company**

Founded in 2011, Underscore Theatre Company established itself as Chicago's home for new musicals, producing 16 world premiere musicals, six seasons of the Chicago Musical Theatre Festival totaling 56 festival productions, 14 readings and workshops and quarterly concerts. In that time, Underscore was nominated for 17 Non-Equity Joseph Jefferson Awards and won Best Supporting

Actress in a Musical (Veronica Garza for *Tonya and Nancy: The Rock Opera*) and Best New Musical for *Haymarket*. Many of the musicals developed at Underscore have gone on to have subsequent productions and, in at least one case, to be licensed by Theatrical Rights Worldwide (*Numbers Nerds*).

# # #