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Clockwise from top left: Frances McDormand, Frankie Faison, Jeffrey Wright, Bill Murray, David Strathairn, and Bryan Doerries.

Theater of War Productions to Create Digital Amphitheater with Support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Launching at first-ever *Nobel Prize Summit: Our Planet, Our Future*, with performance featuring Frances McDormand, Bill Murray, Jeffrey Wright, David Strathairn, Frankie Faison, and other leading actors

Theater of War Productions will create a new hybrid physical/digital model of performance and discussion, with support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has just awarded the acclaimed social impact company a \$1 million grant. The Digital Amphitheater will harness the power of ancient and emerging technologies to reach hundreds of thousands of people, in live settings (when public performances are permitted again), on their devices, and in their homes, bringing them into powerful, global, pluralistic dialogue about some of the most critical issues of our time.

The company is slated to launch the Digital Amphitheater with a presentation of *The Oedipus Project* on Tuesday, April 27 as part of the first-ever *Nobel Prize Summit: Our Planet, Our Future*, a virtual event that will bring together Nobel Laureates and other leading scientists with thought leaders, policy makers, business leaders and young people to explore solutions to the challenges facing our global civilization and discuss the state of the planet at a critical juncture for humanity.

The Oedipus Project presents dramatic readings of scenes from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* as catalyst for global discussions about climate change, ecological disaster, and environmental justice, framed by the play's timeless themes of arrogant leadership, intergenerational curses, willful blindness, and ignored prophecy. At the time the play was first performed, in 429 BC, the audience would have been recovering from a plague that killed nearly one-third of the Athenian population. Seen through this lens, the play might be as relevant now as it was in its own time. This free, public performance of *The Oedipus Project* will feature the actors **Frances McDormand, Bill Murray, Jeffrey Wright, David Strathairn, Frankie Faison, Marjolaine Goldsmith**, and NYC Public Advocate **Jumaane Williams**, and others. Notably, the play's Chorus will be performed by Nobel Prize-winning scientists, including **Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn**.

“When the pandemic hit, we immediately retooled to create free, easily-accessible opportunities on Zoom for people struggling with trauma, loss, illness, and distress to communalize their experiences with others,” stated Bryan Doerries, Artistic Director of Theater of War Productions. “Along with the unprecedented loneliness, suffering, and division caused by Covid-19 came the need for innovative, adaptive approaches to fostering dialogue and healing. The goal of our work has always been to lift people out of isolation and to connect them with a larger community. And now, with the generous support of The Mellon Foundation, we are excited to build upon what we have learned during the pandemic to reach exponentially larger audiences all over the world, just when the world needs it most.”

For more than a decade, [Theater of War Productions](#) has performed ancient plays, poetry, and other seminal texts in unlikely places—such as hospitals, military bases, homeless shelters, prisons, houses of worship, Title I schools, parks, and public housing developments—to catalyze and frame crucial conversations about pressing issues of public health and social justice. In April of 2020, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions placed on public gatherings, the company began producing dynamic, online performances and discussions, in the style of its live events, on Zoom's webinar platform. The company's first online production, [The Oedipus Project](#), premiered on May 7, 2020, featuring a cast that included Oscar Isaac, Frances McDormand, Jeffrey Wright, John Turturro, and other leading actors, gathering more than 15,000 people from over 48 countries for a guided discussion about the impact of Covid-19 on individuals, families, and communities.

In the months that have followed, and with the ongoing support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, a long-term funding partner that has supported the company for more than a decade, the Weissman Family Foundation, and the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, Theater of War Productions has presented more than thirty online performances and discussions—based on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the Biblical *Book of Job*, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's sermon “The

Drum Major Instinct," the poetry of Robert Hayden, and Sophocles' *Antigone*, *Ajax*, *Philoctetes*, and *Women of Trachis*—for an ever-expanding international audience, with a special focus on the mental health of frontline medical professionals and communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

"Theater of War has a vision of theater that is for the people in the urgency of our times. The Digital Amphitheater's hybrid digital / physical performance space democratizes the artistic experience and explores solutions to some of the great social challenges that we face today," said Elizabeth Alexander, president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. "We are excited to support Bryan Doerries and this organization as they continue to build capacity for their crucial work."

"We are very pleased to be able to offer the Nobel Prize Summit audiences this special opportunity to attend a performance hosted by Theater of War Productions in the Digital Amphitheater. The topics we are broaching as part of our Summit are scientifically complex, often emotionally difficult, and even potentially contentious as we acknowledge different points of view. Performance and storytelling provide a critical common ground and a shared language to discuss important topics in new ways." Anna Sjöström Douagi, Programme Director Nobel Prize Summit 2021, the Nobel Foundation.

This has been a paradigm-shifting moment of growth for the company. Over the past ten years, Theater of War Productions has physically performed for roughly 200,000 people in 15 countries. Over the past ten months, performing on Zoom, the company has reached more than 80,000 people in more than 75 countries, touching every continent except Antarctica. When the restrictions are lifted on physical gatherings, Theater of War Productions has resolved to "never go back" to its previous production model. Instead, it will expand its digital strategies to support its physical productions, creating the capacity to broadcast from wherever it performs, bringing live, physical audiences into direct discourse with digital audiences all over the world. Harnessing the power of new and emerging technologies, while building upon its long track record of performing in underserved and overlooked communities, the company will focus much of its efforts and energy in the Digital Amphitheater on foregrounding the voices and perspectives of people with the greatest proximity to the issues it seeks to address, shining a very bright light into the shadows of society, illuminating those at the margins and placing them and their insights center stage.

About the Nobel Prize Summit: Our Planet, Our Future
April 26 – 28, 2021, Virtual Event

The first Nobel Prize Summit brings together Nobel Laureates, scientists, policymakers, business leaders, and youth leaders to explore the question: What can be achieved in this decade to put the world on a path to a more sustainable, more prosperous future for all of humanity? Across three days, the virtual event will combine keynotes and lively discussion with live performance and theatre. Speakers will explore solutions to some of humanity's greatest challenges: climate change and biodiversity loss, increasing inequality, and technological innovation in support of societal goals. The summit will ask: what can we learn from our collective response to the global pandemic? And, how can societies distinguish facts from fiction in a new information ecosystem? The Nobel Prize Summit is hosted by the Nobel Foundation and organized by the

National Academy of Sciences in partnership with the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, and the Stockholm Resilience Centre/Beijer Institute.

The Oedipus Project

Nobel Prize Summit: Our Planet, Our Future

April 27, 2021

3:30pm – 6:00pm EST

To register for this free Zoom event, please visit: nobeloedipus.eventbrite.com.

A reading of scenes from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* as a catalyst for a global discussion about climate change, ecological disaster, and environmental justice. Featuring: Frances McDormand, Bill Murray, Jeffrey Wright, David Strathairn, Frankie Faison, Marjolaine Goldsmith, NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, and a Chorus of Nobel Prize-winning scientists.

About Theater of War Productions

Since its founding in 2009, Theater of War Productions has facilitated events for more than 280,000 people, presenting 25+ different tailored programs for diverse communities across the globe. The company works with professional actors to present dramatic readings of seminal plays and texts—from classical Greek tragedies to sermons, speeches, and modern works of poetry—to provide a framework for engaging communities in challenging discussions about human suffering. The company uses a combination of theater and guided public dialogue to help communities address pressing public health and social issues such as combat-related psychological injury, suicide, end-of-life care, racialized violence, incarceration, disability, climate justice, gun violence, political violence, natural and manmade disaster, domestic violence, substance abuse, and addiction. Theater of War Productions was co-founded by Bryan Doerries and Phyllis Kaufman, who served as producing director from 2009 to 2016. Doerries currently serves as the company's artistic director. For more information on Theater of War productions, visit: theaterofwar.com.

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.

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