



SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2017
ELM STREET CULTURAL ARTS VILLAGE
WOODSTOCK, GA

CELEBRATING WOMEN, WISDOM, AND POSSIBILITY

Jo Howarth Noonan Foundation
for the Performing Arts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**New Foundation Debuts with Stellar Line-up at
MOJO FEST 2017**

Saturday, March 25, 2017

Elm Street Cultural Arts Village (8534 Main St, Woodstock, GA 30188)

New Plays Highlight Mission to Create More Roles for Women in Theater

Atlanta (March 15, 2017) – The newly-formed Jo Howarth Noonan Foundation for the Performing Arts, honoring actress Jo Howarth, whose sudden passing rocked the Atlanta theater community in 2015, announces its public debut on March 25 with MoJo Fest 2017. The festival will include staged readings of 5 newly commissioned 10-minute plays, a panel discussion with accomplished women who have worn many hats in the theater community in Atlanta and beyond, and a reading of a full-length work.

The list of playwrights, directors and casts reads like a “who’s who” of Atlanta theater and includes Margaret Baldwin, Carolyn Choe, Suehyla El-Attar, Shannon Eubanks, Daryl Lisa Fazio, Andrea Frye, Jill Hames, Karen Howell, Alan Kilpatrick, Tess Malis Kincaid, Penny Mickelbury, Dina Shadwell, Bethany Lind, Shelly McCook, Kathleen McManus, Topher Payne, Brenda Porter, Mary Saville, Susan Shalhoub Larkin, Julie Skrzypek, Nick Tecosky, Pamela Turner, and more.

Mojo Fest, like the Foundation that bears Jo Howarth’s name, aims to extend Jo’s achievements beyond her own life, by creating more opportunities for actresses over 40 to stay engaged and vital in American theater. Award-winning playwright and Foundation board member Topher Payne explains: “Jo represented something more than just a friend to everyone in our Atlanta community. She was a source of positive energy, and an actress who loved and respected the craft and the magic of professional theater. And Jo was a woman who *came back*.”

Jo had been an actress from childhood through her 20s, performing in her hometown of Springfield, Illinois, at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, and in the Twin Cities, where she reached the stages of the Illusion and the Guthrie Theaters in Minneapolis and workshopped many new plays at the Playwrights Center. She retired from acting to start her family, but as her children grew, she made plans to return to the stage.

Foundation board member Jill Patrick describes the challenges many actresses face when returning to the stage after years focused on family: “There are not enough substantial roles for actresses over the age of 40. In addition to the head-winds that older women face in so many other careers and professions, theater presents this additional obstacle. Here in Atlanta and across the country, women with tremendous talent and experience are involuntarily retired, forced to compete with each other for minor roles, and are otherwise marginalized.”

This is a challenge the Foundation hopes to address. Board President Patrick Noonan, who was married to Jo for 30 years, describes his vision: “We’re hoping to change the game for women in theatre: I envision us commissioning several outstanding new full-length works every year, and becoming a “go to” resource for Artistic Directors around the country. This is not only for the actresses themselves, of course: Audiences will no longer be denied the opportunity to experience these great talents at full strength. Casts and directors will no longer be denied the possibilities that arise when such wisdom and experience are retained. The mentoring, the support, the traditions, all can be enhanced. In a few years, we look forward to traveling around the country and watching actresses on stage in plays that we commissioned, knowing that we helped make that happen.

“We’re looking forward to launching the Foundation at MoJo Fest 2017. It will be a wonderful opportunity to bring together Atlanta’s great theater community, along with the area’s fans of the performing arts, and start the conversation about how we can celebrate Jo’s spirit, and multiply it.”

For more information about Jo Howarth Noonan Foundation for the Performing Arts, please visit the new web site at <https://www.johowarthnoonan.org/>. You can follow the Foundation on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/JHNFoundation/>. To purchase tickets, please visit Brown Paper Tickets at <http://mojofestival2017.bpt.me/>

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MoJo Fest 2017 will take place on March 25, 2017 at the Elm Street Cultural Arts Village (8534 Main St, Woodstock, GA 30188). Doors will open at 12:30pm, with new 10-minute plays beginning at 1:00pm. The evening’s play reading will conclude by 9:00pm. Admission is \$25 and includes a dinner catered by Affairs to Remember. Advance tickets are available online at Brown Paper Tickets: <http://mojofestival2017.bpt.me/>

About the Jo Howarth Noonan Foundation for the Performing Arts:

Jo Howarth Noonan passed away unexpectedly – and far too young – on June 10, 2015. An accomplished actor, mentor and patron of theatrical arts, she was known not only for having been an actress at an early age, but also for having returned to stage, and having a successful career in her 40s and 50s. She also was loved by all for her warmth and generous spirit.

The new non-profit foundation that carries her name aims to extend Jo’s achievements beyond her own life, by creating more opportunities for actresses over 40 to stay engaged and vital in American theater.

By commissioning new stage works, recognizing plays and screenplays that provide substantial roles for older women (also as writers and directors), sponsoring mentoring and networking events, and hosting an annual MoJo Fest, the Foundation seeks to have a lasting impact on theater across the country.

Theater communities and audiences coast to coast will benefit from retaining the talent, wisdom, professional experience, and LIFE experience of these women, and our work will carry Jo's name.