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## **THE CENTER FOR ASIAN AMERICAN MEDIA & BRENDA WONG AOKI SELECTED AS RECIPIENT OF HEWLETT 50 ARTS COMMISSION**

***"J-town, Chinatown: Our Town" will be a multidisciplinary and multimedia work written by storyteller/playwright Brenda Wong Aoki, scored by award-winning jazz musician Mark Izu with Chinese & Japanese home movies by Stephen Gong***

San Francisco, CA -- Today, the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) announced it has been selected as a recipient of a Hewlett 50 Arts Commission, a program of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to commission new works by world-class artists. CAAM is among a stellar group of 10 Bay Area-based nonprofit organizations that will receive \$150,000 to create important and unique work that facilitates discussions around the most pressing local issues.

"We are thrilled to receive this grant that will further CAAM's role as a multidisciplinary, multimedia presenter of extraordinary Asian American creative works," said CAAM Executive Director Stephen Gong. "The scale of this work will bring this kind of collaboration to a new level, and also advances our acclaimed Memories to Light: Asian American Home Movies project."

"J-town, Chinatown: Our Town" will be a multidisciplinary and multimedia work performed by award-winning storyteller and playwright Brenda Wong Aoki and scored by award-winning jazz musician Mark Izu, using contemporary Western as well as traditional Chinese and Japanese instruments. The performance will capture the 120-year histories of the nation's first Chinatown and Japantown of San Francisco, interweaving Wong Aoki's mixed-race family stories. True stories about people and places from her life and that of her Chinese and Japanese American family's 121-year history in San Francisco. Over the course of her 42-year career, Wong Aoki has developed a form of monodrama based in elements of Nohgaku, a traditional form of Japanese theater, combined with contemporary aesthetics and informed by personal perspectives on current events and everyday life. Inspired by the story of her son, a mixed-race young man raised in San Francisco, Wong Aoki will weave together narrative, film, live music, dance, and other media to examine a young man's familial connection to the city of San Francisco as it undergoes a period of rapid, dislocating economic change and rampant inequality. The piece, which will draw on interviews with the artist's aging relatives and CAAM's Memories to Light collection of home movies from Japanese and Chinese American families, will premiere at the Herbst Theater as part of CAAMFest in 2021.

CAAM has worked with Aoki and Izu numerous times over the past 30 years, most recently with “Aunt Lily’s Flower Book: 100 Years of Legalized Racism,” which premiered at the Herbst Theatre in San Francisco in May 2018 as CAAMFest’s Closing Night program.

“The seismic shifts taking place in Japantown and Chinatown compel us to not only capture people and places before they are gone and forgotten, but to support our communities while they are under attack from gentrification, even as we make a work of art,” Wong Aoki said.

Launched in 2017 to celebrate the foundation’s 50th anniversary, the Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions is a five-year, \$8 million initiative supporting the creation and premiere of 50 new works by world-class performing artists working in five disciplines. The largest commissioning initiative of its kind in the country, the program is a symbol of the Hewlett Foundation’s longstanding commitment to sustaining artistic expression and encouraging public engagement in the arts across diverse communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. The 10 awardees in New Works for Theater & Spoken Word include: California Shakespeare Theater & Marcus Gardley, CAAM & Brenda Wong Aoki, Destiny Arts Center and Marc Bamuthi Joseph, The Imaginists and Arpad Schilling, Kitka & Karmina Silec, Magic Theater & Taylor Mac, PolicyLink & Michael Moore, Stanford Live & Weyni Mengesha, Teatro Vision & Salomon Santiago, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts & Rafael Casal

More information about the Hewlett 50 Arts Commission can be found at:  
[hewlett.org/50Commissions](http://hewlett.org/50Commissions).

#### ABOUT CAAM

CAAM (Center for Asian American Media) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to presenting stories that convey the richness and diversity of Asian American experiences to the broadest audience possible. CAAM does this by funding, producing, distributing and exhibiting works in film, television and digital media. For more information on CAAM, please call (415) 863-0814 or visit [www.caamedia.org](http://www.caamedia.org)

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