



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Rocket Men play receives NYC Presentation with Phoenix Theatre (Indianapolis)

Award-Winning playwright Crystal Skillman's new play *The Rocket Men* will receive an invite-only presentation with the Phoenix Theatre on April 22nd at 2 PM at ART/NY (520 8th Avenue). The cast will feature Lily Ali-Oshatz, Lynn Craig, Kendyl Ito, Constance Macy, Sara Thigpen, and Colleen Werthmann. Paige Neely of the Phoenix Theatre will read stage directions.

The Rocket Men is a unique theatrical experience that carries us through time in a blink of an eye to present the story of the German "Rocket Men" who used their scientific skills to flee Nazi Germany and settle in the most unlikely of places...North Alabama. The play explores the dynamic relationship of Wernher von Braun and Heinz-Hermann Koelle, a lesser-known young German rocketeer, who joined the "Operation Paperclip" team several years later. These two have set their sights on space exploration and colonization beyond the moon, but as the play counts down to the launch of Apollo 11, we experience the haunting cost of their scientific advancements - their technology is based on the V-2 rockets built by slave labor.

The reading is the next stage of development for *The Rocket Men* which the Phoenix Theatre has recommended for a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere. The Phoenix will produce *The Rocket Men* in Indianapolis in Fall 2025.

"*The Rocket Men* is about a group of former Nazis who sent us to the moon. But also, it's about much more than that. It's about the ethics of tech, scientific discovery, and projects developed, scrapped, and rewritten on our way to the moon. And about the team members who go down in history... and those who have been buried or forgotten," shares Phoenix Theatre's Artistic Director Constance Macy.

Skillman chimes in: "Played by six female-identifying women who theatrically re-examine this story - still widely not known in America and for a purpose to be revealed by the night's end - "*The Rocket Men*" is a startling new play that asks what it means 'to be an American'. And it does so just as we're prepared to go back to the moon, still building upon the same technology."

The Rocket Men was originally commissioned, developed, and performed by Athens State University and Calhoun Community College in a college production at the Alabama Center for the Arts last spring. The piece was featured on NPR last spring and received further development at the Playwrights' Center in the summer of 2024. It is currently a semi-finalist and finalist for several developmental programs and awards.

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Crystal Skillman is an internationally award-winning playwright, fictional podcast writer, and comic book author. Crystal has written for Stories Podcast (Wondery Kids), Girl Tales, Adventure Time comics, and Marvel comics. She is the author of the critically acclaimed NYTimes Critics 'Pick OPEN (2022 Italian Tour). New Plays include THE ROCKET MEN and RAIN AND ZOE SAVE THE WORLD which premiered in London and is in the works for its American Premiere with Drew & Dane Productions. She is the book writer of MARY AND MAX the musical (Composer: Bobby Cronin) in the pipeline for Broadway (also with Drew & Dane Productions). Crystal is the author of the NYTimes Critics' Pick plays GEEK, CUT, and KING KIRBY (co-written with Fred Van Lente) which you can listen to on Broadway Podcast Network. Their new play together is TRAGEDY: A COMEDY. Crystal is the author of the comic EAT FIGHTER, also with co-writer Fred Van Lente, and artist Fernando Pinto (on Webtoon), coming out in print this year from Rocketship Entertainment. Her books are represented by the Jason Yarn Literary Agency. www.crystalskillman.com

The Phoenix Theatre Cultural Centre is home to a performance collective that includes seven professional theatre companies, each their own non-profit entity. Among them is the **Phoenix Theatre**, a 40-year-old Equity theatre dedicated to nurturing new plays and playwrights. A core member of the National New Play Network since its inception in 1998, the Phoenix has produced 120 world premieres over the past four decades. Performances are year-round at the Cultural Centre from its stages including the Livia and Steve Russell (144-seat proscenium) Theatre and the smaller black box-style Frank and Katrina Basile Stage, as well as the Michael O'Brien Art Gallery and an outdoor stage. With help from the city of Indianapolis and a host of philanthropic agencies and individuals, the Phoenix built the Cultural Centre in 2018 with a mission to serve as a hub to showcase local artists, host a variety of events and community conversations, conduct classes for all ages, grow Indianapolis' reputation as an arts destination, and help its downtown neighborhood thrive. www.phoenixtheatre.org.

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