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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IN BRIEF:

Theodore Roethke and Bloedel Reserve: A Poet's Place
Saturday, February 28, from 3 – 4:30 p.m. at Bloedel Reserve

An afternoon of poetry in commemoration of renowned northwest poet Theodore Roethke and his connection to Bloedel Reserve.

Island Theatre Presents *First Class*

Sept. 28 @ 7 p.m. and Sept. 29 @ 3 p.m. at the Bainbridge Public Library. Free.

Island Theatre presents a one-act play by U.W. Professor Emeritus and poet David Wagoner that portrays his teacher, Theodore Roethke, in one of his legendary poetry workshops.

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, WA – The Bainbridge Island Poet Laureate Program and Bloedel Reserve invite the community to an afternoon of poetry featuring Tess Gallagher, Linda Bierds, Pimone Triplett, and Michele Bombardier in commemoration of renowned northwest poet Theodore Roethke and his connection to Bloedel Reserve. Refreshments will be served in the Japanese Guest House following the reading. Tickets - \$14 for Bloedel members and \$40 for non-members – include entrance to the Bloedel for a chance to tour the gardens before the event and post-event refreshments. The program takes place from 3 – 4:30 p.m. at the Japanese Guest House. Tickets are available at BloedelReserve.org.

The Theodore Roethke commemoration continues that evening at 7 p.m. and on Sunday at 3 p.m. at the Bainbridge Public Library where Island Theatre presents a play reading of *First Class*, by the late poet and Roethke student David Wagoner, that recreates one of Roethke's legendary U.W. poetry workshops.

DETAILS: Theodore Roethke and Bloedel Reserve: A Poet's Place

Theodore Roethke is recognized as one of the greatest American poets of the 20th century. That Roethke died while swimming in the pool (now the rock garden) at the Bloedel

Reserve during a 1963 visit with Prentice and Virginia Bloedel is an important part of Pacific Northwest history; the site is visited by poets and writers from all over the world. Roethke, who won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, produced a body of work and a teaching legacy that continues to influence poets today. His students include David Wagoner, Richard Hugo, Carolyn Kizer, Jack Gilbert, Tess Gallagher, and other luminary poets.

Featured poets at the event are:

Tess Gallagher, possibly Roethke's only still-living student, is a widely published and esteemed poet with numerous awards for her work, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and a Maxine Cushing Gray Foundation Award.

Bainbridge Island poet **Linda Bierds** is a recently retired U.W. Creative Writing professor whose honors and awards include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Ingram Merrill Foundation, the Poetry Society of America, and the MacArthur Foundation. She has received the PEN/West Poetry Prize, the Washington State Governor's Writers Award, the Consuelo Ford Award from the Poetry Society of America, and four Pushcart Prizes.

Pimone Triplett, a finalist in *Narrative* journal's Fifteenth Annual Poetry Contest, is the author of four poetry collections and a professor of creative writing at the University of Washington's MFA program.

Bainbridge Island's inaugural Poet Laureate **Michele Bombardier** is the winner of the 2024 New Ohio Review Prize. Her poetry collection, *What We Do*, was a finalist for the Washington Book Award. She holds an MFA in poetry from Pacific University and has received fellowships from Hedgebrook, Mineral School, and The Tyrone Guthrie Centre.

DETAILS: Island Theatre Presents *First Class* at the Bainbridge Public Library

"Theodore Roethke and Bloedel Reserve: A Poet's Place" will be accompanied by an **Island Theatre** playreading of *First Class* by the late poet and Roethke student David Wagoner at 7 p.m. on Saturday, September 28, and 3 p.m. on Sunday, September 29, at the Bainbridge Public Library; both readings are free, with donations welcome. Set in one of Roethke's legendary poetry workshops, the 75-minute production features Island Theatre founder **Steve Stolee** as Theodore Roethke.

"This is a poetry workshop, God help us," begins *First Class*. In his introduction to the play, David Wagoner wrote: "Most of the teaching methods of artists in all categories have gone unrecorded. We know very little about what great painters and great composers, for instance, said to their pupils. In *First Class* I've tried to re-create the atmosphere of one of Roethke's poetry workshops, working mostly from my memories of him and a number of examples of the kinds of poems and opinions he admired, some of the near rituals he used both on students and himself, some of his unique spirit, and some of the hectic ways Time and Place would leap over each other for him as if he were in charge of both."

In the process, the audience is swept into not only the exhilarating milieu of Roethke's classroom, but also the terrible landscape of the mental illness that clouded most of his life.

“Theodore Roethke and Bloedel Reserve: A Poet’s Place” is made possible through by a grant from the Bainbridge Community Foundation and funding from the City of Bainbridge Island. Other Bainbridge Island Poet Laureate Program support comes from the Bainbridge Public Library and Bainbridge Artisan Resource Network (BARN).

Images:

Tess Gallagher. Photo by Briane Ferrell. Courtesy of Tess Gallagher.

Theodore Roethke Sitting in an Armchair and Holding a Drink. Used with permission from the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW2909.

Theodore Roethke Standing at His Desk. 1962. Used with permission from the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW861.

Theodore Roethke, Poet, Seattle, July 1963. By Mary Randlett, Bainbridge Island. Used with permission from the University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW39565.

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