

## Letter of Intent – Finer Point Funding Application – Shrewd Productions

November 15, 2020

To: Christi Moore  
Executive Director, Scriptworks

From: Shannon Grounds  
Producing Artistic Director, Shrewd Productions

Dear Ms. Moore,

Shrewd Productions would like to apply for \$2,000 in Finer Point funding for its Spring production of Briandaniel Oglesby's ***Small Steps***. The production will take place virtually (for the audience), and run in May/June of 2021. Due to the themes of loneliness and isolation, and the structure of the play, we feel that ***Small Steps*** is a wonderful fit for a virtual production, and will resonate with an audience all too familiar with the protagonist's struggles regarding the lack of human contact.

### **About the Play**

When Skip Powers realizes that no one will ever love him, he volunteers to go to Mars -- and the Principal of NASA says, "Yeah, sure. You'll do." Skip isn't close to his family, hasn't had ANY luck with dating, and isn't interested in participating in the gene pool -- making him the perfect candidate for NASA to send millions of miles on a solo mission that will, in all likelihood, kill him. After disheartening experiences on gay hookup apps, he's more than prepared for training with the Abstinence Coach -- but a little less prepared when the Love of His Life tries to keep him on earth. This play about what it means to attempt to live your life in the pursuit of great things spans a million years and fifty-five million miles.

Shrewd Productions intends to utilize live performance, augmented virtual reality, and live-streaming platforms to bring this story to life. We are currently in discussions with a variety of media designers and technologists to find the best way to manifest this unique and touching comedy, for a fully-realized theatrical experience. Some options we are considering are live-stream video, zoom rooms, and the combination live performance and filmed segments. It's very important for us that this not feel like simply a film of a play, but engages the audience in a real way.

We chose ***Small Steps*** to be the banner production of our virtual season, because the story seems so perfectly right for this time in history. Skip is alone and lonely, even though he's surrounded by people. But he doesn't feel connected. Once Skip makes the commitment to the solo mission to Mars, he MUST be alone, for fear of contamination. He can't touch or be touched. Ironically, it is only until Skip is utterly and completely alone in space, that he truly begins to experience connection.

## About the Playwright

Briandaniel Oglesby writes plays for teens and plays for mature audiences. He is a mixed-Latino LGBT playwright based out of Austin and from Sacramento. His play ***Small Steps*** started with Scriptworks Ten-Minute Play Festival, and has subsequently been developed at the JAW Festival and Playwrights' Week at the Lark. His play *Halfway, Nebraska* was developed at Playwrights' Week at the Lark, and went on to win the award for Outstanding Playwriting from the New York International Fringe Festival. *His She Gets Naked in the End* received the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Latinidad Award, and he is a three-time National Finalist for the festival for his short work. He frequently develops his plays-for-teens with a group of teenagers, using devising techniques and kinesthetic dramaturgy. This includes the inventive adaptation of Grimm's tales in *The Twelve Huntsman*, adventure plays *The Untitled Pirate Play* and *And Then, She Picks Up The Sword*, as well as a gay re-imagining of [a different] *Romeo and Juliet* for middle schoolers he wrote and directed for his students. His adaptation of *The Jungle Book* was commissioned and produced by Big Idea Theatre and published by Stage Rights. For ten years, he was Literary Manager for Barnyard Theatre, a company he co-founded that produced new work in a historic dirt-floored barn. He has an MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts from the University of California at Riverside and a second MFA in Playwriting from the University of Texas at Austin. Briandaniel's most recent project was ***Letters From Camp Shrewd***, an episodic play-by-mail, produced by Shrewd Productions.

## About Shrewd

Championing unique perspectives and emerging artists, Shrewd Productions is focused on women's voices, new plays, and work developed through a collaborative artistic approach. We are committed to creating high-quality theatrical experiences that are thoughtful, provocative, and entertaining, featuring the work of women, LGBTQ, and BIPOC artists as we seek to provide a broader array of voices in American theatre and for Austin audiences.

Shrewd has been honored over 80 nominations and multiple awards from the Austin Critic's Table, B. Iden Payne Committee, Broadway World, and Austin Theatre Examiner and inclusion on multiple "Best Of" lists in the Austin Chronicle. We are proud to be a member of the Austin New Works Theatre Community, building Austin's professional theatre community devoted to the development of original work.

Recent productions include the world premieres/first productions of *Alabaster* by Audrey Cefaly, *Jump* by Charly Evon Simpson, *The Afterparty* by Reina Hardy, *The Madres* by Stephanie Alison Walker, *Hold Me Well* by Eva Suter, *Emma When You Need Her* by Rudy Ramirez and Ensemble, Liz Fisher's *Deus Ex Machina*, Katie Bender's *Still Now*, Reina Hardy's *Glassheart*, Jenny Connell Davis' *The Dragon Play* and Beth Burns' *The Long Now* as well as critically lauded productions of Megan Gogerty's *Lady Macbeth and Her Pal, Megan*, Shrewd's gender-fluid take on *As You Like It*, Charles Mee's *Big Love* directed by Robert Faires at the Long

Center, and Joshua Conkel's multi-award winning *MilkMilkLemonade*. Previous Shrewd productions include the world premieres of Monika Bustamante's *Io: a myth about you* and *Stillborn: a bedtime story*, and Cyndi Williams' *Where Are They Now?*; regional premieres of *Kidnapped by Craigslist* by Katie Goan and Nitra Gutierrez and *Trash Anthems* by Dan Dietz; and original collaborations *Cheater*, *Feast of Fools*, *Camp Shrewd*, and *Xmas Unwrapped*. This past season, Shrewd launched the episodic play-by-mail *Letters From Camp Shrewd* by Reina Hardy, Trey Deason, Krysta Gonzales, and Briandaniel Oglesby.

Shrewd's production of ***Small Steps*** will be its world premiere, continuing the company's tradition of developing new plays and supporting work centering under-represented voices. We respectfully request the funding support of Scriptworks to bring this inventive and absurdly hilarious new play to life. A production budget is itemized below.

Sincerely,

Shannon Grounds  
Artistic Director, Shrewd Productions  
[shrewdproductions@gmail.com](mailto:shrewdproductions@gmail.com)