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City of Asylum Presents “Writers In the Gardens” Sept. 7 Unique progressive reading features new work by Pittsburgh writers

August 26, 2013 —PITTSBURGH, PA: **City of Asylum/Pittsburgh** presents **Writers in the Gardens** on September 7, 2013 at 3:30 p.m. This unique annual literary event takes its audience on a progressive reading through several private northside gardens; in each garden, a local writer treats the audience to a reading. The event is free, but space is limited; reservations can be made online at www.cityofasylumpittsburgh.org

“Writers in the Gardens is a celebration of creativity in our community,” said **Henry Reese, President of City of Asylum/Pittsburgh**, noting that the event was started seven years ago and has presented more than 30 local writers and as many different gardens. “**Sandra Kniess**, who has curated the space for this event every year, has arranged for six different neighbors to volunteer their unique and beautiful gardens for the event. **Marc Nieson**, a writer and member of the faculty at Chatham University’s MFA in Creative Writing, curated the writers for us. And this year, for the first time, City of Asylum commissioned writers to create site-specific pieces especially for the event.”

Curator Marc Nieson said, “I am very excited about the concept of place-based work. Not only will the writer be standing in the garden, but what they’ve written will be rooted there as well.”

Describing his process for identifying the writers for the event, Nieson stated, “The first writer I approached was **Joan Bauer**, whose civic seed-sowing and poetry I admire, and who had yet to be presented at Writers in the Gardens. After her, I sought writers who might counterpoint or play off her style.” He chose two poets and two prose writers to complement Bauer. “**Robin Clarke** is a poet whose subject matter, like Joan’s, focuses on questions of civic awareness and social justice; her lyric stylings and voice emerge from another branch entirely. **Vanessa German** is an artist I hold in great esteem; her presence is arresting, her song pitch-perfect, and her lyrics echoing in gravitas. Emerging writer **Laura Castonguay** is an avid, if not obsessive gardener, and I’ve been greatly moved by her prose’s polish and moxie.” For the fifth writer, Nieson selected **Peter Trachtenberg**, noting, “The narrative scope of Peter’s wit and pen is dizzying. His vulnerability on the page astounding, and his aim is true. I wanted to see what he’d do with the intimate space of a garden.”

The event takes place in the afternoon on September 7, and is followed in the evening by the annual Jazz-Poetry Concert at City of Asylum. Information and reservations at www.cityofasylumpittsburgh.org

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Participant biographies follow.

City of Asylum/Pittsburgh — Writers in the Gardens 2013
Participant Biographies

Joan E. Bauer is the author of *The Almost Sound of Drowning* (Main Street Rag, 2008) and has worked as a teacher, counselor, editor and (volunteer) non-profit fundraiser. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *5AM*, *Poet Lore*, *Quarterly West*, *Along These Rivers: Poetry and Photography from Pittsburgh*, *Imagine Peace: Come Together*, and *Blue Arc West: An Anthology of California Poets*. In 2007, she won the Earl Birney Poetry Prize from Prism International. Along with Jimmy Cvetic, she hosts and curates the Hemingway's Summer Poetry Series in Pittsburgh.

Laura Castonguay is currently earning her MFA in Creative Writing at Chatham University, where she is focusing on fiction. She adores poetry and nonfiction as well. When not writing, she is walking, running, or sprinting through the woods, delving her hands into the nature of her constantly growing garden, or sitting quietly so as to watch the world turn. Her first short story was published this spring in the *Red Clay Review*.

Robin Clarke is a poet, activist and teacher in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she has lived most of her life. She is a non-tenure-track faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh, and a member of the Pittsburgh Industrial Workers of the World, Save Our Community Hospitals, and the Thomas Merton Center. She is the author of *Lines The Quarry* (forthcoming, September 2013), winner of the Omnidawn 1st/2nd book prize for poetry. With the poet Sten Carlson, she co-authored a chapbook of poems entitled *Lives of the Czars* (nonpolygon, 2011).

Vanessa German is a self-taught multi-disciplinary artist. She makes sculptures and interactive, operatic, spoken-word performances. To date, she has written and performed 3 evening-length performance works. Named the 2012 Emerging Artist of the Year by Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Vanessa was also noted in *The Huffington Post* as "one of 30 contemporary art makers under 40 you should know about." In historic Homewood, she has created Love Front Porch and ARThouse, both highly popular art-making programs/venues for the community.

Peter Trachtenberg's latest work of nonfiction is *Another Insane Devotion* (Da Capo, 2012), which was named a *New York Times Book Review* Editors' Choice. He's also the author of *7 Tattoos: A Memoir in the Flesh* and *The Book of Calamities: Five Questions About Suffering and Its Meaning*, winner of the Phi Beta Kappa Society's 2009 Ralph Waldo Emerson Award. His honors include the Whiting Award, the Nelson Algren Award for Short Fiction, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a residency at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center. He teaches in the creative writing program of the University of Pittsburgh.

Marc Nieson is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and NYU Film School; his background includes children's theatre, cattle chores, and a season with a one-ring circus. An excerpt from his memoir *Schoolhouse* received a notable listing in *Best American Essays 2012*, and other prose has earned him two Pushcart Prize nominations, the Literal Latte Fiction Award, and Raymond Carver Short Story Prize. Award-winning feature-length screenplays include *Speed of Life*, *The Dream Catcher*, and *Bottomland*. Currently he's at work on a new novel, *Houdini's Heirs*, while proudly serving on Chatham University's MFA faculty. He is on City of Asylum's advisory board.