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Multiplatform actress throws weight behind Flea

By JAIME NETZER

WHO: Sigourney Weaver is an award-winning film and theater actress known for her Oscar-nominated performances in "Aliens" (1986), "Gorillas in the Mist" (1988) and "Working Girl" (also 1988) and has starred in many Off Off Broadway productions.

WHAT: The Flea Theater in New York City, dedicated to "supporting talented artists with big ideas," was founded in 1996 by Weaver's husband, director Jim Simpson, designer Kyle Chepulis and playwright Mac Wellman. Designed as an Off Broadway platform that produces noncommercial work but gives actors and audiences alike a professional experience, the Flea stages productions, open-door programs (for young, non-Equity actors to get the chance to work with veteran thespians like Weaver) and multidisciplinary opportunities, such as workshops and productions of dance and music.

WHY: "I went to arguably one of the better drama schools in the country (Yale) in the 1970s, and I came out of that school not really knowing very much," Weaver says. "I found that working in Off Off Broadway shows was a real artistic home. I learned on my feet working with new

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shows was a real artistic home. I learned on my feet working with new plays and writers; that's where my true training really began." She adds, "Art helps us learn how to live, it helps us learn about who we are as a species, and it's something that has consistently gotten the short shrift in this country. You've got to water that plant. I feel that art is transforming -- it illuminates the human heart, and it brings us all together."

WHAT'S NEXT: "The Great Recession," six 10-minute acts written by six writers. "I want (the theater) to belong to the whole country," Weaver says.

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