



## 45TH ANNIVERSARY DORA MAVOR MOORE AWARDS

PRESENTED BY THE ROMANO D'ANDREA FOUNDATION

### TAPA announces Juan Jaramillo as the 2025 Christine Karcza Disability Leadership Award Recipient

Toronto, ON (May 28, 2025) – The Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) today announced that **Juan Jaramillo** is this year's recipient of the **Christine Karcza Disability Leadership Award**, a \$5,000 bi-annual award administered by TAPA and presented to an individual who identifies as d/Deaf, Mad or d/Disabled and has demonstrated the advancement of accessibility initiatives in the arts. The inaugural recipient of this award was Emily Maxwell.

Jaramillo is a Deaf playwright, director, and accessibility advocate committed to making performing arts inclusive and representative of the Deaf community. With over 30 years of experience in theatre, Juan has led ASL-based productions, created mentorship opportunities for Deaf artists, and fought for accessibility in the arts.

As the Founder and Artistic Director of Dancing Hands Theatre, Juan produces Deaf-centered performances that highlight ASL storytelling and Deaf culture. His acclaimed play, *Fernando and His Llama Friend*, featuring an all-Deaf cast, has been performed at major international festivals, including the Sound Off Festival (Canada), the International Fringe Festival in Edinburgh (UK), and the Colombia Disability Festival (2023), in collaboration with Rueda Flotante Theatre in Medellín. This production earned Juan a Dora Mavor Moore Award nomination for Outstanding New Play (2023) as its playwright and creator.

Says Jaramillo: "This award means a lot to me as a Deaf artist who has been working to make theatre more accessible. I want to see more Deaf, IBPOC, and disabled artists on stage — telling their stories in their own language, with real support behind them. This isn't just about me — it's about all of us. I hope this helps open more doors for Deaf-led theatre and real access for everyone."

As part of their prize, Jaramillo has selected emerging Disability leader **Ralitsa Rodriguez** to receive a prize of \$2,500. Rodriguez is a seasoned Deaf actress and performer with a career spanning over three decades. She has dedicated her craft to breaking barriers and bringing powerful stories to life through a unique blend of American Sign Language (ASL) and vocal performance. She is known for her iconic portrayal of Lydia in *Children of a Lesser God*, a role she performed for 22 years, including three productions directed by Mark Medoff. She also starred as Sarah Norman Leeds in *Children of a Lesser God* at the San Diego Repertory Theatre, directed by Sam Woodhouse, in 1986, before the story was adapted into the Academy Award-winning film.

The Dora Awards, Canada's largest and oldest awards program, celebrates the incredible talent within Toronto's professional theatre, dance, and opera communities. The 45th anniversary

celebration will include 43 gender-inclusive award categories across seven divisions to honour the remarkable artistry of the 2024-2025 season.

The 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary *Dora Mavor Moore Awards presented by the Romano D'Andrea Foundation* will take place at Meridian Hall on Monday, June 30 at 7:30 p.m.

The celebration will be hosted by Dora Award-winning actor Peter Fernandes. For additional information, please visit [tapa.ca/doras](https://tapa.ca/doras).

**Connect and Share:** [BlueSky](#); [Instagram](#); [Facebook](#): #Doras2025

**About Juan Jaramillo:**

Juan Jaramillo (he/him) is an Afro-Indigenous Colombian Deaf artist, director, writer, and accessibility advocate based in Toronto. He is the founder and artistic director of Dancing Hands Theatre, where he creates ASL-based performances that amplify Deaf stories and IBPOC voices. He recently wrapped a meaningful tour in Colombia, visiting Deaf schools and meeting inspiring Deaf artists. Juan continues to lead new projects that celebrate Deaf leadership and cultural pride.

**About the Christine Karcza Disability Leadership Award**

The Christine Karcza Disability Leadership Award (Karcza Award) is a bi-annual award administered by the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) and is presented to an individual who identifies as d/Deaf, Mad or d/Disabled. The award recipient receives a cash prize of \$5,000.

The Christine Karcza Disability Leadership laureate selects a leader of their choice who is an emerging d/Disabled or non-d/Disabled leader to receive a cash prize of \$2,500.

A disability activist and rigorous advocate of access in the arts, Christine Karcza worked tirelessly and passionately with leading cultural organizations, including the National Arts Centre, the Stratford Festival, the National Ballet, the Toronto Fringe Festival, the Royal Ontario Museum, Creative Users Projects and Mirvish Productions, building awareness of the many barriers that exclude disabled people everywhere.

**About the Dora Mavor Moore Awards**

The Doras are named for Dora Mavor Moore (1888-1979), a well-loved teacher and director who helped establish Canadian professional theatre in the 1930s and 1940s. Recognizing the outstanding achievements in Toronto's performing arts industry, the Doras honour the creators of numerous theatre, dance and opera productions annually in the following divisions: General Theatre, Independent Theatre, Musical Theatre, Dance, Opera, Theatre for Young Audiences, Touring and Innovation.

The Dora Awards are administered by the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA). In addition to the Doras, other programs and services provided by TAPA include: Annual Arts Week at the City, hipTIX (offering \$10 tickets to students between the ages of 14 and 29), TAPA RBC Emerging Artists Mentorship Program (TREAM), and the professional development TAPA Trade Series.

For this year's press kit please click [here](#).

For images of past Dora Awards, please click [here](#).

**For Media Requests:**

**Katie Saunoris | KSPR**  
[katiesaunoris@gmail.com](mailto:katiesaunoris@gmail.com)

To request media credentials for Dora Award events, please email Katie Saunoris.