I am writing to support Clubbed Thumb's request for funds to continue its excellent work nurturing new voices in American theater.

My very first New York production was a workshop production of a play called *LATE: a cowby song* that Clubbed Thumb produced at the Ohio Theater. On a small budget, the production values were extremely high. The actors were wonderful, the design was exactly what I imagined, and what's more, the audiences understood what I was up to, because they had been trained to imagine a theater of possibility and theatricality by going to Clubbed Thumb's shows over the years. Clubbed Thumb believed in my work and nurtured my career before anyone else in New York had taken any notice of my writing. That belief in a new writer's work is pure gold.

It is through productions that young playwrights understand their own work, and it is through productions that they are given the faith to keep going and write the next play. Clubbed Thumb has always been fearless about giving young playwrights productions (as opposed to endlessly workshopping or helping them to "fix" their plays) and fearless about doing work that challenges conventional form. Clubbed Thumb is a theater of risk, of daring language, of intelligence, and their productions also have that ingredient which can be so rare these days in American theater and yet it is the very ingredient that theater must have in order to survive—the primal, the first principle—the concept of fun. Clubbed Thumb's plays and productions have a sense of fun, in addition to their experimentation and intelligence.

This vibrant theater company has cultivated a loyal, young, open audience that is thrilled to see challenging new work. The nurturing of such an audience is absolutely essential at a time when the American audience seems to be in crisis, and plays that challenge accepted notions of artistry fall on deaf ears. There is nothing more chilling for a playwright than speaking to an audience that has no desire to hear what they are saying. Clubbed Thumb's audience is eager for formal surprises and new voices, which is so rare, so heartening. I would rather speak to Clubbed Thumb's audience than to almost any other audience in New York.

Finally, Clubbed Thumb recently started a commissioning program in which they give $15,000 to a playwright through a blind competition. There are three things about this venture that are very rare and very important. First off, commissions for young playwrights are usually much less remunerative, even from larger theaters who might be able to afford to pay more. My first commission, for example, from a major off-Broadway theater was for five thousand dollars. It takes me about two years to write a play, start to finish. No one can live on $2,500 a year. But a playwright actually could live for one year on fifteen thousand dollars. So this leadership from Clubbed Thumb is extraordinary and important. We need to pay our playwrights well; otherwise they will defect to Hollywood. This is a fact. Secondly, the blind judging process is utterly unique. This year the commission went to a playwright named Andy Bragen, who has been writing remarkable work for over a decade and has yet to have been given what is known in this business as a break. I think the blind submissions process helped to recognize the quality in Mr. Bragen's work, and I fear that submissions processes that aren't blind often

end up rewarding people whose work has already been rewarded, as prejudices and expectations often lead the way in shaping a subjective response to a work of art. Third, Clubbed Thumb actually intends to produce the work of the commissioned writer. This is also an extremely rare and important commitment for a theater company to make to a writer. It shows great faith in the writer, and also a penchant for taking risks. It shows a respect for relationship over and above a lust for a shiny product.

I am so glad that Clubbed Thumb exists, and that it is continuing to grow and to lead the field with its innovations, its integrity, and its unique mission. I am grateful for their early support, and I continue to go see their work with much appreciation. Without them, the world of New York theater would be a much more lonely, much more feeble, much less daring theatrical place. Thank you for considering Clubbed Thumb for further funding.

Sincerely,

Sarah Ruhl