

## LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES WORLD PREMIERE OF NAOMI IIZUKA'S *WHAT HAPPENS NEXT* AS LATEST WITHOUT WALLS PRODUCTION

**PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH CORNERSTONE THEATER COMPANY,  
PLAYHOUSE-COMMISSIONED WORK WILL BE PRESENTED AT THE CHALLENGED ATHLETES  
FOUNDATION, FEATURING MIX OF LOCAL ACTORS AND MILITARY VETERANS**

La Jolla, CA – La Jolla Playhouse announces the world premiere of *What Happens Next*, by **Naomi Iizuka**, head of the UC San Diego MFA Playwriting Program, as the latest production in the Playhouse's popular **Without Walls (WOW) series**. A Playhouse-commissioned piece produced in association with **Cornerstone Theater Company**, *What Happens Next* will be directed by Cornerstone Theater Company Artistic Director **Michael John Garcés** and will run **April 19 – 29** at the **Challenged Athletes Foundation** (9591 Waples Street, San Diego). Performances will take place Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30pm and Saturdays and Sundays at 2:00pm (press night: Saturday, April 21). Tickets are \$20 for adults; \$10 for students and military, and can be purchased by calling (858) 550-1010 or at [LaJollaPlayhouse.org](http://LaJollaPlayhouse.org)

In *What Happens Next*, Bonnie, an idealistic but inexperienced acting teacher, finds herself paired with a group of veterans as part of a drama therapy program. As she is confronted with the reality of her reluctant new students, Bonnie struggles to find a way to build trust and find common ground. Inspired by stories shared by the military community, this riveting new play mixes professional actors and San Diego veterans in an exploration of the complexities of sacrifice and resilience of those who have served.

"The Playhouse has proudly expanded its outreach to San Diego's military community in recent years, and *What Happens Next* is a fantastic next step in that relationship, allowing us to perform Naomi Iizuka's powerful, insightful new play at the Challenged Athletes Foundation's headquarters," said **Playhouse Artistic Director Christopher Ashley**. "It also represents a chance to partner with Cornerstone Theater Company, whose transformative and often immersive work incorporates community members into their productions, making it a great fit for our WOW series."

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The cast features a mix of local actors and military veterans: **Parnia Ayari** as “Bonnie,” **Nick Borrelli** as “Jay,” **Judy Bauerlein** as “Tina,” **Bruce A. Lemon, Jr.** as “Karl,” **Nico Marcolongo** as “Frank,” **Jennie McFarling** as “Margaret” and **Kionte Storey** as “Mike.”

Since its inception in 2009, **Without Walls (WOW)** has become one of San Diego’s most popular and acclaimed performance programs. This signature Playhouse initiative is designed to break the barriers of traditional theatre, offering immersive and site-inspired works that venture beyond the physical confines of the Playhouse facilities. Over the last nine years, the Playhouse has been commissioning and presenting a series of immersive and site-specific productions at locations throughout the San Diego community, including *Susurrus* (2010), *The Car Plays: San Diego* (2011), *Sam Bendrix at the Bon Soir* (2012), *Accomplice: San Diego* (2013), *El Henry* (2014), *The Grift at the Lafayette Hotel* (2015), *The Bitter Game* (2016), as well as its biennial WOW Festivals in 2013, 2015 and 2017.

**Naomi Iizuka’s** plays include *36 Views*, *Polaroid Stories*, *Anon(ymous)*, *Language of Angels*, *Aloha*, *Say the Pretty Girls* and *Skin*. Her plays have been produced by Berkeley Rep, Goodman Theatre, Guthrie Theatre, The Public, Actors Theatre of Louisville, BAM’s “Next Wave Festival,” Soho Rep and Cornerstone Theater Company. She is an alumna of New Dramatists and the recipient of a PEN/Laura Pels Award, an Alpert Award, a Joyce Foundation Award, and a Whiting Award. Her play *Good Kids* was commissioned by the schools of the Big Ten Conference and deals with sexual assault on campus. Ms. Iizuka currently heads the M.F.A. Playwriting program at UC San Diego.

Cornerstone Theater Company Artistic Director **Michael John Garcés** has directed numerous plays for Cornerstone, including *Urban Rez* by Larissa FastHorse, *California: The Tempest* by Alison Carey, *Plumas Negras* by Juliette Carrillo, *Café Vida* by Lisa Loomer, and *3 Truths* by Naomi Iizuka. For Cornerstone he has also written several plays including *Magic Fruit*, *The Forked Path* and *Los Illegals*. His work has been produced in such theaters as South Coast Repertory, The Theatre @ Boston Court, The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, The Guthrie Theatre, The Wilma Theatre, The Great Plains Theatre Conference, Woolly Mammoth, The Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Folger Theatre, and The International Community Arts Festival in Rotterdam. Michael serves as vice president of SDC the national union of stage directors and choreographers.

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**Cornerstone Theater Company** makes new plays with and about communities. For over 30 years, Cornerstone has brought together an ensemble of professional artists of the highest caliber with people who would never think of themselves as artists to produce works of excellence based on the stories, concerns and issues of a given community. Their plays celebrate many voices and are staged in theaters, parking lots, factories, schools and subway stations. They strive to include people who have not been on stage or even seen theater, taking up residence in small towns and urban neighborhoods, collaborating with locals from start to finish to tell their unique stories through theater. By combining the artistry of people with many levels of theatrical experience, Cornerstone acts upon the conviction that artistic expression is civic engagement and that access to a creative forum is essential to the wellness and health of every individual and community.

The **Challenged Athletes Foundation** (CAF) is a world leader in helping people with physical challenges lead active, healthy lifestyles. CAF believes that participation in physical activity at any level increases self-esteem, encourages independence and enhances quality of life. Since 1994, more than \$93 million has been raised and over 18,000 funding requests from people with physical challenges in all 50 states and 70 countries have been satisfied. Additionally, CAF's outreach efforts reach another 60,000 individuals each year. Whether it's a \$2,500 grant for a hand-cycle, helping underwrite a carbon fiber running foot not covered by insurance, or arranging enthusiastic encouragement from a mentor who has triumphed over a similar challenge, CAF's mission is clear: give opportunities and support to those with the desire to live an active and athletic lifestyle. To learn more, visit [challengedathletes.org](http://challengedathletes.org).

**La Jolla Playhouse** is a place where artists and audiences come together to create what's new and next in the American theatre, from Tony Award-winning productions, to imaginative programs for young audiences, to interactive experiences outside our theatre walls. Currently led by 2017 Tony Award-winning Artistic Director Christopher Ashley and Managing Director Michael S. Rosenberg, the Playhouse was founded in 1947 by Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire and Mel Ferrer. Playhouse artists and audiences have taken part in the development of new plays and musicals, including mounting 95 world premieres, commissioning 50 new works, and sending 30 productions to Broadway – with two more set to open Spring 2018 – garnering a total of 38 Tony Awards, including the 1993 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

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