

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES PROJECTS FOR 2025 DNA NEW WORK SERIES

Popular Play Development Series Returns for 12th Year

LA JOLLA, CA — La Jolla Playhouse announces the dates and projects for its **2025 DNA New Work Series**, running in the Playhouse's Rao and Padma Makineni Play Development Center (PDC) and Seuss 1 rehearsal spaces **December 4 – 14**.

This year's readings include ***In the Black***, by Quaz Degraft, directed by Delicia Turner Sonnenberg; ***Night Game***, by Octavio Solis, directed by UC San Diego Theatre & Dance department chair Lisa Portes; ***Red Taxi***, by Banna Desta, directed by Jacole Kitchen; and ***Well Well Well***, by Brant Russell, directed by Jaki Bradley.

The Playhouse's annual DNA New Work Series offers playwrights and directors the opportunity to develop a script by providing rehearsal time, space and resources, culminating in public readings. This process gives audiences a closer look at the play development process, while allowing the Playhouse to develop work and foster relationships with both established and up-and-coming playwrights.

"The DNA New Work Series has become an incredibly vital pipeline for new plays, musicals and even WOW productions at the Playhouse. Since the launch of the program in 2013, more than a dozen DNA works have gone on to have full productions in our subscription season," said **Christopher Ashley**, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse. "Patrons relish the opportunity to take part in the birth of a new play, while giving playwrights invaluable feedback in the earliest stages of the development of their work."

Tickets to the DNA New Work Series readings are free; reservations are required. For more information, please visit lajollaplayhouse.org.

The DNA New Work Series has been a launching pad for numerous projects that have gone on to full productions in future Playhouse seasons, including Pulitzer Prize winner Ayad Akhtar's *The Who & The What*; *Chasing the Song*, by the Tony Award-winning team of Joe DiPietro and David Bryan (*Memphis*, *Diana*); Michael Benjamin Washington's *Blueprints to Freedom*; UC San Diego MFA graduate Jeff Augustin's *The Last Tiger in Haiti*; *Miss You Like Hell*, by Pulitzer Prize winner Quiara Alegría Hudes and Erin McKeown; *Kill Local*, by UC San Diego MFA graduate Mat Smart; *What Happens Next*, by UC San Diego MFA graduate and faculty member Naomi Iizuka; *The Luckiest* by Melissa Ross; *The Coast Starlight* by Keith Bunin; *SUMO* by Lisa Sanaye Dring; *Derecho*, by Noelle Viñas; and this season's *All the Men Who've Frightened Me*, by Noah Diaz. In addition, Marike Splint's *59 Acres* and Robert Farid Karimi's *American Dream Casino* were developed in the DNA Series prior to their premieres in the WOW Festival.

All DNA New Work Series projects take place with no scenic, costume or staging elements, and actors will have scripts in hand. The creative teams will be available for interviews for feature coverage; however, in order to preserve the developmental nature of the program, DNA Series presentations are not open to review.

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DNA NEW WORK SERIES PROJECTS***Well Well Well***

By Brant Russell

Directed by Jaki Bradley

Thu, December 4 at 7pm and Sat, December 6 at 7pm

Erik & Erika have been intertwined since young adulthood, for better, for worse, and for everything in between. Now 40, they re-unite at a party to celebrate Erika's engagement – to someone else. *Well Well Well* is a funny, smart, and bruising play that searches for the line between addiction and devotion.

Red Taxi

By Banna Desta

Directed by Jacole Kitchen

Fri, December 5 at 7pm and Sun, December 7 at 2pm in PDC

Abraha is part of a close-knit group of Eritrean friends living in Washington, DC, driving cabs and dreaming of returning home when their country wins its independence. But as years stretch into decades, Abraha's dreams of stability crash into political, technological and economic shifts that threaten to upend everything. *Red Taxi* is a sharp, comedic and moving new play that examines how one can succeed and preserve relationships when "home" is so fragile.

Night Game

By Octavio Solis

Directed by Lisa Portes

Thu, December 11 and Sat, December 13 at 7pm in PDC

Ted Williams stared down the fiercest pitchers in baseball while becoming a star for the Boston Red Sox. But when he returns to his childhood home in San Diego to visit his estranged brother Danny, Ted faces an entirely different kind of heat. Octavio Solis's new play for La Jolla Playhouse explores identity, destiny, and how the ties that bind can also strangle.

In the Black

By Quaz Degraft

Directed by Delicia Turner Sonnenberg

Fri, December 12 at 7pm and Sun, December 14 at 2pm in PDC

Every wolf starts as a cub... some just have to claw their way up. *In the Black* is a gripping, dark comedy solo play about an ambitious Black accountant fighting for a seat at the table in the high-stakes world of Wall Street. Torn between love, identity and the relentless pursuit of success, he must navigate power, class and identity in a system that was never built for him. How far will he go to survive...and who will he become in the process?

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Jaki Bradley is a director of theatre, TV, and film. Most recently she directed *Mother of Exiles* at Berkeley Rep and *All Nighter* at MCC. Jaki has directed at theatres across the country, including New York Theatre Workshop, The Old Globe, Ars Nova, New York Stage and Film, Ojai Playwrights Conference, Denver Center, and Arena Stage. Her films have screened at festivals in San Francisco, Palm Springs, and Beverly Hills. She has written for Netflix, Paramount, AGBO, Artists Equity, Wonderland, Scott Free, and sold an original series to FX. Proud member of SDC and WGA. jakibradley.com

Quaz Degraft (Playwright: *In the Black*) is a former accountant turned actor and playwright. A first-generation Ghanaian American, he draws on his experiences growing up in Yonkers and Rockland County, New York, to tell stories that mix humor, vulnerability, and sharp social insight. After earning his MFA in Acting from the USC School of Dramatic Arts, he created *In The Black*, a dark comedic solo play inspired by his years in finance. The show premiered to five-star acclaim at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, where audiences praised its honesty and wit. Quaz's work explores ambition, identity, and what it means to stay true to yourself in a world defined by success.

Banna Desta (she/they; Playwright: *Red Taxi*) is an Eritrean and Ethiopian-American writer for the screen and stage who crafts stories about and for the African diaspora. She is the author of *The Abyssinians* (Audible); *Midnight in Abyssinia* (La MaMa's CultureHub and The Africa Center); *Red Taxi*; *Bygone Fruit*, which premiered at the 2024 Women in Theater Festival; and *Pining*, which premiered at Rattlestick Theater and was published by Samuel French in 2019. Her work for the stage has been supported and workshopped by Atlantic Theater Company, The Apollo Theater, National Black Theatre, The New Group and the Dramatists Guild Foundation. She has held residencies at SPACE on Ryder Farm, Art Omi, Marble House Project and Tofte Lake Center. She was a staff writer for the BET+ series *First Wives Club* (Netflix Top Ten). She has assisted multiple television series in both the writers room and on set, including FOX's *Filthy Rich*, NBC's *This Is Us*, and Amazon's *Harlem*. She has held fellowships with Sun Valley Writers Conference, Marcie Bloom Fellowship in Film and The Gotham Film and Media Institute. She is a writing professor and arts educator at NYU, Rehabilitation through the Arts and Harlem Children's Zone.

Jacole Kitchen (Director: *Red Taxi*) is the 2025 Directing Fellow at La Jolla Playhouse. Most recently she was the associate director on the world-premiere musicals *Working Girl* and *The Heart* (La Jolla Playhouse). Other directing credits include: *Jin vs the Beach*, *Pick Me Last* and *Light Years Away* (LJP POP Tour), *Suburban Black Girl* (Outside In Theatre), *The Hula Hoopin' Queen* (Seattle Children's Theatre), *Manny and the Wise Queens* (Oceanside Theatre Company), *Our Town* (Mira Costa College), *Iron* (Roustabouts Theatre Company), *Cardboard Piano* (Diversionary Theatre), *An Iliad* (New Village Arts), and more. Jacole is an arts educator, community advocate, and mentor for professional development. www.jacolekitchen.com

Lisa Portes (Director: *Night Game*) is an award-winning director, leader, educator and advocate. She is a co-founder of the Latinx Theatre Commons and serves on the executive board of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) and on the Directors Council of the Drama League. She is an alum of the Board of Theatre Communications Group (TCG). Her work has been seen regionally at Cal Shakes, Cincinnati Playhouse, Denver Center, Goodman Theatre, Guthrie Theatre, Olney Theatre, Portland Center Stage, Seattle Rep, South Coast Repertory Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, and Victory Gardens Theatre. In New York she has developed and/or directed new work for Soho Rep, Playwrights Horizons, the Public, and New York Theatre Workshop. In 2016 she was honored with the SDC Zelda Fichandler Award for Directors; she was the first freelance director to be so honored. She serves as Chair of the UCSD Department of Theatre & Dance and is a proud alum of UCSD's M.F.A. Directing program. lisaportes.com

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Brant Russell's (Playwright: *Well, Well, Well*) *Well Well Well* was at New York Stage and Film in 2024, and received a Relentless Awards Honorable Mention. His play *Bankers* premiered at Know Theatre of Cincinnati in 2023. His adaptation (with Amy Berryman) of Patrick Hamilton's *Rope* will premiere at the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati in February, 2026. His work has also been commissioned and developed by Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park and Steep Theatre, Chicago. He chairs the Acting department at the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, and is the Drama Editor of the *Cincinnati Review*. He is a member of SDC and the Lincoln Center Directors' Lab. B.A.: Kenyon College; M.F.A.: Northwestern University. www.brantrussell.com

Octavio Solis (Playwright: *Night Game*) is a playwright and author whose works have been mounted in theatres across the country such as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Berkeley Rep, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Portland Center Stage, Hartford Stage, the Alley Theatre, the Dallas Theater Center, the Center Theatre Group, Yale Repertory Theatre, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts and the Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma. He worked as a voice actor and consultant on the Disney/Pixar film *Coco*. His short stories have been published in *Zyzzyva*, *Catamaran*, *Huizache*, and the *Chicago Quarterly Review*. Solis has received numerous awards including the United States Artists Fellowship for 2011 and the 2014 Pen Center USA Award. His book *Retablos* is published by City Lights Publishing. He recently produced the Ashland Beckett Shorts Festival in Ashland, Oregon. He is a Thornton Wilder Fellow of the MacDowell Institute and a member of the Texas Institute of Letters.

Delicia Turner Sonnenberg's (Director: *In the Black*) La Jolla Playhouse credits include *Derecho*, *The Garden*, POP Tour *HOOPLA!* and *#SuperShinySara*, WOW Festival's *The Car Plays SD* and *Counterweight*. Regional credits: The Old Globe Theatre, South Coast Rep, San Diego Rep, Round House Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Utah Shakespeare Festival. Other credits: Theatre Calgary, Center Rep, Theatre Squared, Diversionary Theatre, Cygnet Theatre, New Village Arts, Playwrights Project, Mo'olelo Performing Arts and productions at The Old Globe/University of San Diego Shiley Graduate Theatre Program, SDSU, UC San Diego and Rutgers University, among others. Delicia is a founder and the former Artistic Director of MOXIE Theatre which she helmed for 12 acclaimed seasons, receiving the Des McAnuff New Visions Award for "Risk Taking Leadership and Body of Work" and "2015 Director of the Year" from the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle. She is currently a Resident Artist at The Old Globe Theatre and serves proudly on the Board for La Jolla Playhouse. Delicia was twice a recipient of the Van Lier Directing Fellowship through Second Stage Theater, and is an alumna of the New York Drama League's Directors Program, as well as TCG's New Generations Program. She has received NAACP Theatre Awards, KPBS "Patte" Awards, a Women's International Center Living Legacy Award, as well as many Craig Noel Awards from the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle.

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. Founded in 1947 by Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire and Mel Ferrer, the Playhouse is currently led by Tony Award winner Christopher Ashley, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse, and Managing Director Debby Buchholz. The Playhouse is internationally renowned for the development of new works, including mounting 125 world premieres, commissioning 70 new works, and sending 37 productions to Broadway, garnering a total of 42 Tony Awards, as well as the 1993 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

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