

## LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES PROJECTS FOR 2024 DNA NEW WORK SERIES

### POPULAR PLAY DEVELOPMENT SERIES RETURNS FOR 11<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

LA JOLLA, CA — La Jolla Playhouse announces the dates and projects for its **2024 DNA New Work Series**, running in the Playhouse's Rao and Padma Makineni Play Development Center (PDC) and Seuss 1 rehearsal spaces **December 5 – 15**.

This year's readings include *A Black-billed Cuckoo*, by **Mat Smart** (Playhouse's *Kill Local*), directed by **Shelley Butler**; *Matilde: A Fable*, by **Kirsten Greenidge** (Playhouse's *Milk Like Sugar*), directed by **Delicia Turner Sonnenberg** (Playhouse's *Derecho, The Garden*); *Marble Rooftop*, Emma Has Church, by **Eliana Theologides Rodriguez** (Playhouse's upcoming *Indian Princesses*), directed by Playhouse Director of Arts Engagement and Local Casting Director **Jacole Kitchen** (Playhouse POP Tours *Pick Me Last, Light Years Away*); and *Invisibles*, by **Cheryl L. West** (Playhouse POP Tour *Hoopla!*), directed by **Timothy Douglas**. For the second year, the DNA Series will also feature a playtest of a WOW work-in-process: *American Dream Casino*, created by **Robert Farid Karimi**.

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 and musicals 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. "DNA has become one of our most popular programs. 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](http://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 Alegria 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; this season's *Derecho*, by Noelle Viñas; and next season's *All the Men Who've Frightened Me*, by Noah Diaz. In addition, Marike Splint's *59 Acres* was developed in the DNA Series prior to its premiere in the 2024 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.

– more –

## DNA NEW WORK SERIES PROJECTS

### ***A Black-billed Cuckoo***

By Mat Smart

Directed by Shelley Butler

Thursday, 12/5 and Saturday, 12/7 at 7pm

Over the span of 24 hours in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, a close-knit birding group is turned upside down when some of its members see a rare bird and some don't. A quiet comedy about healing, the power of wonder, and how to move on after missing out.

### ***Matilde: A Fable***

By Kirsten Greenidge

Directed by Delicia Turner Sonnenberg

Friday, 12/6 at 7pm and Sunday, 12/8 at 2pm

Western Massachusetts, 1852. On a stormy winter night, newly-married freewoman Sarah waits for her husband Hap to return home from clearing the roads. But the knock on her cabin door comes from Matilde, a formerly enslaved woman who claims to need shelter for the night – but might be looking for a lot more. Kirsten Greenidge's suspenseful new play examines what freedom buys us – and what we still may owe.

### ***Marble Rooftop, Emma Has Church***

By Eliana Theologides Rodriguez

Directed by Jacole Kitchen

Thursday, 12/12 and Saturday, 12/14 at 7pm

Seven high school girls convene for their annual dance team bonding sleepover, navigating the power imbalances between them and competing to be the most “experienced” in the room. But what happens when one girl goes too far to prove herself to the rest? Alternately hilarious, harrowing and heartbreaking, *Marble Rooftop* fearlessly explores consent, agency and the price we pay to fit in.

### ***Invisibles***

By Cheryl L. West

Directed by Timothy Douglas

Friday, 12/13 at 7pm; Sunday, 12/15 at 2pm

Eurie, Muriel, Tyrique and Mr. Benny work inside the United States' most sacred hall of government, faithfully but invisibly serving those in power – until a typical day turns into a nightmare. In the aftermath, these essential workers are forced to grapple with the need to be seen – by their country, each other and even themselves.

### ***American Dream Casino***

A WOW Work-in-Process

Created by Robert Farid Karimi

Friday, 12/6: 4pm & 5:30pm; Saturday, 12/7: 4pm & 5:30pm; Sunday, 12/8: 11am & 12:30pm

*American Dream Casino* is a playful, interactive, casino-like experience that celebrates the power of immigrants' risk to achieve the American Dream. In this special preview edition, 21 participants at a time will discover the mysteries behind the Casino and the characters who work there. The experience lasts roughly one hour, during which participants must answer the question: how much are you willing to gamble for your own American Dream?

– more –

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

**Shelley Butler** (Director: *A Black-billed Cuckoo*) has over 40 Broadway, Off-Broadway and regional credits to date and has worked extensively with writers on new plays and musicals at theaters across the country. Notable productions include the world premiere of Lucas Hnath's *A Doll's House Part 2* at South Coast Repertory and the world premiere of Kate Hamill's *The Scarlet Letter* for Two River Theater. Shelley currently serves as Artistic Director for the South Carolina New Play Festival which is heading into its fourth season. Upcoming: world premiere of Jake Brasch's *The Reservoir* at The Denver Center, The Alliance Theatre and the Geffen Playhouse.

**Timothy Douglas** (Director: *Invisibles*) has directed over 100 plays, musicals and opera, including the premiere of Cheryl L. West's *Something Happened in Our Town* for Children's Theatre Company, *The Color Purple* at Signature Theatre (Helen Hayes Award for best musical), the U.S. premiere of Natasha Gordon's *Nine Night* at Roundhouse, *Champion* at Boston Lyric Opera, *Blue* at New Orleans Opera, *Frankenstein* at Classic Stage Company, and the Great Theatre of China's production/tour of Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*. He has made productions for ACT, Arena Stage, Berkeley Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse, Cleveland Play House, Denver Center, Downstage New Zealand, Folger Shakespeare, Guthrie Theater, Juilliard School, Kennedy Center, Mark Taper Forum, Milwaukee Rep, Portland Center Stage, Red Bull, Steppenwolf, and Yale Rep with the premiere of August Wilson's *Radio Golf*. Upcoming: *She Who Dared* (premiere) at Chicago Opera Theater. [timothydouglas.org](http://timothydouglas.org)

Playwright Laureate of Boston, **Kirsten Greenidge's** (Playwright: *Matilde: A Fable*) plays include *Commonground: Revisited*, *Our Daughters*, *Like Pillars*, *Little Row Boat; or, Conjecture*, *The Greater Good*, *Zenith*, *Baltimore*, *Milk Like Sugar*, *The Luck of the Irish*, *Sans-Culottes in the Promised Land* and *Bossa Nova*. Her work most often explores race, gender, class, and how these intersect in twentieth and twenty-first century American society. Kirsten has enjoyed development experiences at the Family Residency at Space at Ryder Farm, Huntington Summer Playwrights Workshop, the O'Neill, Bay Area Playwrights, among others. Her work has been produced at MetroStage Company, La Jolla Playhouse, the Kennedy Center, LTC3 (Lincoln Center 3), Playwrights Horizons, The Huntington Theatre Company, Company One Theatre, Mosaic Theatre, Humana Festival/Actors Theatre of Louisville and Yale Repertory Theatre. She is the proud recipient of an Obie Award (*Milk Like Sugar*), a San Diego Critics Award, two Independent Reviewers of New England Awards, two Edgerton Awards, a former National Endowment for the Arts Residency Grant to work with Woolly Mammoth Theatre, a Lucille Lortel nomination recipient, and a past KC/ACTF Kennedy Center Lorraine Hansberry Award winner. Kirsten is currently working on *One Penny Down*, commissioned by Writers Theatre of Chicago, and a musical adaptation of journalist Lauren Sandler's *This Is All I Got*. She is an Associate Professor of Theatre at Boston University, where she oversees the School of Theatre's Playwriting track of study for undergraduates, and is the School of Theatre Director. She is also a very proud recipient of a 2023 Lily Award.

Critically acclaimed trans-channel artist, interactive experience educator, performer, author, **Robert Farid Karimi** (Creator: *American Dream Casino*) designs interactive immersive game-performance experiences to spark players to imagine worlds of mutual community nourishment. With over 25 years of expertise, Karimi develops playful performances that foster dialogue and human connection to spaces worldwide — from General Mills to Off Broadway to Nuyorican Poets Café to NPR to HBO's Def Poetry Jam, Hawaii International Film Festival, The Smithsonian, and South by Southwest. Karimi is co-director of the Public Practice + Generative Play StudioLab and serves as Assistant Professor in the Music, Dance and Theater department at Arizona State University.

– more –

**Jacole Kitchen** (Director: *Marble Rooftop*, *Emma Has Church*) is Director of Arts Engagement and In-House Casting at La Jolla Playhouse, where she strives to expand and nurture community partnership, and fosters relationships between La Jolla Playhouse and our extensive local community of artists throughout greater San Diego. In addition to her position at the Playhouse, Jacole is a director, with productions including *Jin vs the Beach*, *Pick Me Last* and *Light Years Away* (La Jolla Playhouse POP Tour), *The Music Sounds Different to Me Now* (La Jolla Playhouse - WOW Festival), *Iron* (Roustabouts Theatre Co.), *Cardboard Piano* (Diversionsary Theatre), *An Iliad* (New Village Arts) and more. Jacole is also a private acting coach, and serves as Executive Director for San Diego Performing Arts League (SDPAL).

**Eliana Theologides Rodriguez** (Playwright: *Marble Rooftop*, *Emma Has Church*) is a writer and dancer whose plays include *Indian Princesses* (2024 Terrence McNally Fellowship, 2023/2024 Playwrights Realm Writing Fellowship), *Marble Rooftop*, *Emma Has Church* (2024 O'Neill NPC Finalist, 2020 John Golden Award for Excellence in Playwriting), *Poor Queenie* (2021 Playwrights Realm Writing Fellowship Finalist, 2021 Goldberg Play Prize Finalist, 2020 Kennedy Center MFA Playwrights Workshop), and *Juniperfect* (2021 commission with Adventure Theatre MTC). She is currently under commission at South Coast Repertory and is a proud member of EST Youngblood and the Clubbed Thumb Early Career Writers Group 24/25. An upcoming production of *Poor Queenie* is scheduled for 2025 at Subtext Studio in Chicago. B.F.A.: NYU Tisch, Dramatic Writing.

**Mat Smart** (Playwright: *A Black-billed Cuckoo*) has written 27 full-length plays that have been produced around the country. His play *Kill Local* premiered at La Jolla Playhouse in 2017 and is being developed as a feature film with Depth of Field. In 2022, *Kill Local* was translated into Korean and performed in Seoul. Mat has travelled to all seven continents and written a play set on each one. His play *The Royal Society of Antarctica* – about the three months he worked as a janitor on a science base in Antarctica – premiered at the Gift Theatre in 2015 and won the Jeff Award for Best New Work in Chicago. M.F.A.: UC San Diego.

**Delicia Turner Sonnenberg's** (Director: *Matilde: A Fable*) 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, Diversionsary 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.

– more –

**Cheryl L. West's** (Playwright: *Invisibles*) plays include *FANNIE: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*, *Last Stop on Market Street*, *Shout Sister Shout* (six Helen Hayes Award nominations, including best new musical), *Emerald City*, *Akeelah and the Bee*, *Pullman Porter Blues* (six Helen Hayes nominations including best new play) and *Jar the Floor* (optioned for Broadway). Her plays have been seen in England, Off-Broadway, on Broadway (*Play On!*) and in numerous regional theatres around the country. *Play On!* will have a seven-venue tour in the UK starting Fall 2024. She has written TV and film projects at Disney, Paramount, MTV Films, Showtime (*Holiday Heart*; Golden Globe nomination for Alfre Woodard), TNT, HBO, CBS, BET and is currently working on commissions for La Jolla Playhouse, Arena Stage and Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Awards include the Allen Lee Hughes Fellowship, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Helen Hayes Award. [cheryllwest.com](http://cheryllwest.com)

**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 36 productions to Broadway, garnering a total of 42 Tony Awards, as well as the 1993 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

# # #