

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES PROJECTS FOR 2022 DNA NEW WORK SERIES

NEW WORKS BY KEITH BUNIN, IDRIS GOODWIN, LIA ROMEO AND NOELLE VIÑAS FEATURED IN POPULAR PLAY DEVELOPMENT SERIES

La Jolla, CA – La Jolla Playhouse is pleased to announce the dates and projects for its 2022 DNA New Work Series, running December 1 – 12 in the Playhouse’s Rao and Padma Makineni Play Development Center (PDC). The readings include ***The Loyal Opposition***, by **Keith Bunin** (*The Coast Starlight*), directed by **Christopher Ashley**, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse (*Come From Away*); ***Manny and the Wise Queens*** by Idris Goodwin (2021 POP Tour *Pick Me Last*), directed by **Jacole Kitchen**, Playhouse Director of Arts Engagement and In-House Casting (*Pick Me Last*); ***Derecho***, by **Noelle Viñas**, directed by **Delicia Turner Sonnenberg** (*The Garden*); and ***The Agency*** by **Lia Romeo**, directed by **Pesha Rudnick**. Tickets to the DNA New Work Series readings are free; reservations are required. For more information, please visit LaJollaPlayhouse.org.

The Playhouse’s **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 Works Series serves as a vital pipeline for new work – on our stages and beyond – as well as a crucible for fostering new artist relationships. Over the years, DNA has become one of the Playhouse’s most popular programs; patrons relish the opportunity to take part in the birth of a new play, while giving playwrights invaluable support and feedback in the early stages of the work’s development,” said **Ashley**.

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; Melissa Ross’ *The Luckiest* and Keith Bunin’s *The Coast Starlight*.

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***The Loyal Opposition***

Commission by La Jolla Playhouse

By Keith Bunin

Directed by Christopher Ashley

Thursday, December 1 and Saturday, December 3 at 7:30pm in the PDC

Lee, Milo and Jesse met in college and have been crashing into and out of each other's lives ever since. When Lee finally acts on her dream of opening a restaurant, she re-assembles the group to prepare a grand first meal on a fateful March night. Funny, open-hearted and deeply moving, *The Loyal Opposition* charts the gravitational pull of our friends and our pasts amidst the chaos and uncertainty of the present.

Manny and the Wise Queens

Commissioned by La Jolla Playhouse

By Idris Goodwin

Directed by Jacole Kitchen

Friday, December 2 at 7:30pm and Sunday, December 4 at 2:00pm in the PDC

In the small town of Bethlehem in December, a bright star draws distant visitors bearing gifts to usher in a new era. Only this is 2020, and according to Manny, a depressed 18 year old recent high school graduate, the "bright star" is just two planets close together. Manny has locked himself away in his family's attic to escape whatever holiday cheer remains in his quarantined town – until the sudden arrival of two wise queens provides a potential key to Manny's deliverance. Idris Goodwin's new comedy is a celebration of home, hip-hop and the unexpected gifts we share.

Derecho

By Noelle Viñas

Directed by Delicia Turner Sonnenberg

Thursday, December 8 and Saturday, December 10 at 7:30pm in the PDC

Hoping to join the wave of women of color elected for public office, Eugenia Silva fights to bring an old friend onto her primary campaign. As a storm brews, tensions between her ambitions and her sister Mercedes begin overshadowing the need to reconnect with her roots and family. As the past manifests and interrupts the present, the sisters must confront how traditional Latino values conflict with an ever-changing American definition of success.

The Agency

By Lia Romeo

Directed by Peshya Rudnick

Friday, December 9 at 7:30pm and Sunday, December 11 at 2:00pm in the PDC

Ani has always dreamed of becoming an actress, but she's not getting cast and she's almost out of money. So she takes a job at a "rental agency," where lonely clients can hire actors to serve as surrogate friends or loved ones. It seems like the perfect gig – it pays well, she's good at the work and she's helping people feel better. But what will it mean for her real-life relationships? Lia Romeo's new comedy examines a world where we can buy whatever we want – if we're willing to pay the price.

-- more --

Artist Biographies

Tony Award winner **Christopher Ashley** has served as La Jolla Playhouse's Artistic Director since 2007. During his tenure, he directed the world premieres of *Come From Away*, *Diana: The Musical*, *Memphis*, *Escape to Margaritaville*, *The Squirrels*, *A Dram of Drummhicit*, *Restoration* and *Chasing the Song*, as well as *His Girl Friday*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Freaky Friday* and *Xanadu*. He also spearheaded the Without Walls (WOW) initiative, the DNA New Work Series and the Resident Theatre program. Mr. Ashley recently directed *Come From Away* for AppleTV+ and *Diana: The Musical* for Netflix. Other screen credits include the feature films *Jeffrey* and *Lucky Stiff*, and the American Playhouse production of *Blown Sideways Through Life* for PBS. Mr. Ashley's Broadway credits include *Come From Away* (Tony and Outer Critics Circle Awards), *Diana: The Musical*, *Escape to Margaritaville*, *Memphis* (Tony Award nomination), *Xanadu*, *Leap of Faith* (Drama Desk Award nomination), *All Shook Up* and *The Rocky Horror Show* (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle Award nominations). He also helmed productions of *Come From Away* in London (Olivier Award nomination), Toronto, Australia and on national tour. Other national tours include *Escape to Margaritaville*, *Memphis*, *Xanadu*, *All Shook Up* and *Seussical: The Musical*. Additional New York stage credits include *Blown Sideways Through Life*, *Jeffrey* (Lucille Lortel and Obie Awards), *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told*, *Valhalla* (Lucille Lortel Award nomination), *Regrets Only*, *Wonder of the World*, *Communicating Doors*, *Bunny*, *The Night Hank Williams Died* and *Fires in the Mirror* (Lucille Lortel Award), among others. Mr. Ashley is the recipient of the Princess Grace Award, the Drama League Director Fellowship and an NEA/TCG Director Fellowship.

Keith Bunin is very happy to return to La Jolla Playhouse, which most recently commissioned and premiered his play *The Coast Starlight*. His play *Sam Bendrix at the Bon Soir* was produced by the Playhouse in 2012 as part of their Without Walls (WOW) Series. His plays *The Busy World Is Hushed*, *The Credeaux Canvas* and *The World Over* all premiered Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizons, and his other plays include *The Unbuilt City* (New York Stage and Film), *The Principality of Sorrows* (Pure Orange Productions) and the musical *10 Million Miles* (Atlantic Theater Company). His screenwriting credits include Disney/Pixar's *Onward*, *Horns* and the upcoming *Which Brings Me to You*. He was also a writer for the HBO TV series *In Treatment*.

Idris Goodwin is an award-winning storyteller for multiple generations. He is the author of over 60 original plays ranging from his Hip Hop inspired breakbeat series to historical dramas to works for young audiences. Titles such as *And In This Corner Cassius Clay*, *How We Got On*, *Hype Man: A Break Beat Play* and *Bars and Measures* are widely produced across the country. Driven by a passion for cultural impact and civic engagement, Idris currently serves as Artistic Director of Seattle Children's Theatre and Board President of Theater For Young Audiences/ USA.

Jacole Kitchen is the Director of Arts Engagement and In-House Casting at La Jolla Playhouse. As the co-leader of the Learning and Engagement Department, Jacole helps to expand and nurture community partnerships, and foster relationships throughout the greater San Diego community of artists. Directing credits: *Iron* (Roustabouts Theatre Co.), *The Music Sounds Different to Me Now* (La Jolla Playhouse – 2022 WOW Festival), *Pick Me Last* and *Light Years Away* (La Jolla Playhouse Performance Outreach Program (POP) Tour), *Cardboard Piano* (Diversions Theatre), *An Iliad* (New Village Arts), *September and Her Sisters* (Scripps Ranch Theatre – Out on a Limb) and more. In addition, Jacole is a private acting coach, and serves as Executive Director for San Diego Performing Arts League (SDPAL).

-- more --

Lia Romeo is a playwriting fellow at Juilliard. Her play *The Forest* was developed at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, and was scheduled for a NNPN rolling world premiere (cancelled due to the coronavirus); it premiered at NJ Rep in 2022. Her play *Sitting and Talking*, starring Dan Lauria and Wendie Malick, was produced online by companies around the country during the pandemic. Other plays have been produced off-Broadway at 59E59 as well as regionally around the country. Four of her plays have been recognized by the Kilroys List. Her plays are published by TRW, Broadway Licensing and Smith & Kraus. She is the associate artistic director with Project Y Theatre Company, and she teaches playwriting at Primary Stages/ESPA and in the M.A. program in creative writing at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Pesha Rudnick is the founding artistic director of Local Theater Company in Boulder, CO, where she pursues the company's mission to discover and develop new American plays. For Local Theater Company, Pesha directed 20 new works including the world premiere productions of *Paper Cut* (Colorado Theater Guild winner, Best New Play) by Andrew Rosendorf, *Elijah: An Adventure* by Michael Mitnick, *Faith* by James McLindon and *The Firestorm* by Meridith Friedman (all nominated for Colorado Theater Guild's Best New Play). Nationally, Pesha has developed and directed dozens of new works (for stage and podcast) including the world premiere of *O.P.C.* by Eve Ensler at the American Repertory Theater, *26 Miles* by Quiara Alegria Hudes at Curious Theater Company and *Say My Name for Fictionz*. She has worked at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Creede Repertory Theater, Florida Stage, The Kennedy Center, and many others. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, and a master's degree from New York University. Pesha is a Drama League Directing Fellow and a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. Visit PeshaRudnick.com to watch her TedX talk on "The Danger of Live Theater."

Delicia Turner Sonnenberg 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. For La Jolla Playhouse: *The Garden*, POP Tours *HOOPLA!* and *#Super Shiny Sara*, and WOW Festival shows *The Car Plays SD* and *Counterweight*. Other credits include: The Old Globe Theatre, South Coast Rep, Utah Shakespeare, San Diego REP, Cygnet Theatre, New Village Arts, Diversionary Theatre, Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company and Playwrights Project, among others.

Noelle Viñas (she/her/ella) is a playwright, TV writer and educator from Springfield, Virginia and Montevideo, Uruguay. Viñas was a recipient of the 2020 John Gassner Award and the 2021 Jeffry Melnick New Playwright Award at Primary Stages. During the pandemic, her plays were produced by Shotgun Players, Colt Coeur, Imagination Stage and Westtown School. Her work has been developed or in residence as a member of the 2022 Working Farm at SPACE on Ryder Farm, New York Stage and Film, Tofte Lake Center, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Djerassi Resident Artists Program and the Civilians R&D Group. Viñas resides between Brooklyn and LA, where she was most recently a staff writer on *Mrs. Davis*. B.A.: Emerson College; M.F.A.: Brooklyn College.

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 plays and musicals, including mounting 105 world premieres, commissioning 60 new works, and sending 33 productions to Broadway – including the hit musical *Come From Away* – garnering a total of 38 Tony Awards, as well as the 1993 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

###