



## **MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

### **Dramatic Writing**

#### **WHO WE ARE**

The USC School of Theatre Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing (MFADW) is an intimate, dynamic three-year program that approaches the craft through its critical roots in playwriting and extends this exploration into other genres of dramatic writing. The program encompasses stage, film, and television studies for today's dramatic writer. The faculty is composed of working professional playwrights and screenwriters, master teachers who have extensive experience in all areas of the professional writing world. The intimacy of our program allows for rich faculty-student contact both in the classroom and with regards to advisement outside of the classroom. All dramatic writing faculty members are practicing artists whose work can be seen on stages around Los Angeles, the country, and internationally.

Our program is offered in association with the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA). The foundations of dramatic writing in playwriting art and craft are studied at the School of Theatre, followed by students taking screenwriting and television writing classes at SCA. At the School of Theatre, students then focus on their medium of choice, expanding their vision to embrace global perspectives and new media, and then refining their work as they prepare their professional portfolios.

#### **DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION OF THE WORK**

The backbone of our extracurricular dimensions is a four-phase production program called The New Works Festival (Year I, Year II, Year III, and Year IV). In Year I, first-year students' work is presented. Students' work is produced in Year II. During the final spring of the program, students take a Creative Production Projects class that is team-taught by three dramatic writing faculty members. In that class, students rigorously develop their best play. Directly after graduation in the Year III phase, that play is presented in The USC New Works Theatre Festival with a professional director and cast, and with professional responders who observe the plays and subsequently have individualized dramaturgical sessions with playwrights. Responders have included South Coast Repertory Associate Artistic Director John Glore, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company literary manager Kristin Leahy, literary agent Morgan Jenness, La Jolla Playhouse Associate Artistic Director Shirley Fishman, Geffen Playhouse Literary Manager/Dramaturge Amy Levinson-Millan, Actors Theatre of Louisville Literary Manager Amy Wegener, Neely Swanson (most recently Senior Vice President of Development for David E. Kelley Productions), Mark Taper Forum

Literary Manager Pier Carlo Talenti, Abigail Gonda (former literary manager of Bush Theatre, London), and Carlenne Lacosta, Literary Manager of Native Voices at the Autry. The summer after graduation, students revise their festival plays and re-submit them to us. In The New Works Festival Year III, we send out those scripts to approximately 100 literary managers across the country. There are also opportunities for independent productions via Drama Club, a student organization composed of and exclusively dedicated to current MFADW students and alumni works. This four-phase production program is unique in its replication of a professional development process. We offer development of student's work throughout their time here, nurturing their artistic creations from ideas to being "on their feet," richly supplemented by professional transition support.

### **THE PREMIERE REGION**

USC's Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program is the only one of its kind located in a region where all spheres of arts and entertainment intersect. Los Angeles is the preeminent site of opportunity for today's dramatic writer. Some of the advantages of this location may be seen in the partnerships that complement the academic content in the program. Students utilize the School of Theatre's special association with Center Theatre Group (CTG), Los Angeles' foremost theatrical organization that includes the Mark Taper Forum, the Ahmanson Theatre, and the Kirk Douglas Theatre. Via this relationship, Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing students can experience observerships and internships with professional playwrights who are in residence at CTG theatres. The experience students gain in exposure to master artists is invaluable. We also offer a reviewing program with the city's premiere independent newspaper, the LA Weekly, that allows Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing students to write theatre reviews for pay. At the discretion of LA Weekly, students may then be hired to write reviews on a freelance basis, thereby allowing the student to build the foundations of work in theatre criticism.

### **SUCCESS OF RECENT GRADUATES AND CURRENT STUDENTS**

Our graduates illustrate the success that dedicated, first-rate study in a stellar dramatic writing program can deliver. Boni B. Alvarez's *Ruby, Tragically Rotund* had its world premiere production at Playwrights' Arena/Los Angeles Theatre Center; Julie Taiwo Oni's *Tether* and Alexis Roblan's *Genesis* were featured at The Inkwel in Washington, DC; *Tether* is slated for production. Oni's play *Societee & Thymedia* was workshopped with her as director at Los Angeles' Askew Theatre Company. While still a student, Donald Jolly had his play, *Bonded*, produced at California Institute of the Arts; and Janine Salinas' *Soledad* received its world premiere at Josefina Lopez's (*Real Women Have Curves*) CASA 0101 Theatre, Los Angeles. Salinas' screenplay, *Tercio De Muerte*, was awarded a Quarter Finalist position for the Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. In addition, Salinas' screenplay, *Las Mujeres Del Mar*, was a Dramatists Guild of America Wendy Wasserstein Prize nominee; the stage version was presented at the John Anson Ford Amphitheatre and was a Bay Area Playwright's Festival finalist. Salinas also is the recipient of a MacDowell Fellowship. Mayank Keshaviah had a workshop of his *Rangoon* at New York's Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, which has optioned it for production. Jolly, Roblan, Salinas, and Megan Breen have worked at Center Theatre Group's Mark Taper Forum including workshopping of their plays as part of Taper's Writers' Workshop. JP Smith's *Among the Sand and Smog* received two San Antonio productions by 24th Street Players and The San Pedro Playhouse. His *Into the Pines* received accolades in the National Latino Playwriting Competition, Borderlands Theatre Company. Gabriel Rivas Gomez's *Chasing Monsters* had its world premiere at Los Angeles'

Company of Angels. Jolly's *Bonded* will have its professional premiere at Playwrights' Arena. Shane Sakhrani will have nationwide readings of his play, *The Doctor is Indian*, by Salaam Theatre. Sakhrani's play was also a finalist in Alliance Theatre Company's Kendeda graduate playwriting competition. Breen's *My First, My Fist, My Bleeding Seeded Spirit* was a finalist in the John F. Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival graduate playwriting competition.

Current students' have been equally as involved in the profession. In 2009, Kevin King's *The Idea Man* was produced by Los Angeles' Elephant Theatre and garnered the Best New Play Ovation Award, LA's equivalent of New York's Tony Awards. Cort Brinkerhoff's *Squat* was produced by The Alive Theatre, Long Beach, California, at its Cherry Poppin' Play Festival. Stephanie Swirsky won The Kirstie McDonald Mori Emerging Playwright Award for her play, *Lashon Hara*, which was published as part of the prize. King's work along with alumni Alvarez and Salinas is being produced by Chalk Theatre Company. We are excited that our students are making inroads across the country with their plays and also in the film arena. Kirsa Rein's play was a finalist in the American College Theatre Festival's John Cauble Short Play competition.

#### **A STELLAR FACULTY**

Our faculty continues their brilliant and busy involvement in dramatic writing.

**Oliver Mayer's** *The Wiggle Room*, commissioned by Company of Angels, Los Angeles' oldest theatre company, will premiere in the theatre's 2010-2011 season. His new work, *The Wallowa Project*, commissioned by Son of Semele, Los Angeles, is in development for the 2010-11 season and his opera *America Tropical* will be presented in October 2010 as part of Visions and Voices Arts and Humanities Initiative, USC. A Spanish-language version of his renowned play *Blade to the Heat* was produced at Miami's Prometeo Theatre and he is writing a novel based on the play. Mayer is researching a new play about The Human Genome Project with help from USC University Professor Michael Waterman. He is a recent winner of a Gerbode Fellowship for *America Tropical* and has received a Los Angeles Cultural Affairs grant to take his play *Dias y Flores* to the International Hispanic Theatre Festival. Playwright, solo performance artist, director, and dramaturg.

**Luis Alfaro** is a MacArthur Foundation Fellow. In 2010, his new play *Oedipus El Rey* had its world premiere at San Francisco's Magic Theatre and opened subsequently at Boston Court Theatre, Pasadena. It is slated for production at Woolly Mammoth Theatre as part of Alfaro's National New Play Network rolling premiere award. His screenplay, *From Prada to Nada* is being produced by Lionsgate Films. Two of his plays, *Black Butterfly* and *Gardens of Aztlan*, are being published by Playscripts.

**Paula Cizmar** received a National Endowment for the Arts consortium grant for *Seven*, a documentary play written in collaboration with Anna Deavere Smith and Carol Mack, which toured Sweden and The Hague. *Seven* has been published by Dramatists Play Service, and will be performed at the Hudson Theatre on Broadway directed by Julie Taymor. *Seven* (in Spanish) goes on tour in Argentina. Cizmar's newest play *River: Post-Futurist* was produced at New York's Cherry Lane Theatre. Her current project, *Down4theCount*, is a dark comedy about the economy.

**Velina Hasu Houston** is internationally produced including Manhattan Theatre Club, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, the Old Globe Theatre, and others in the US to sites across Japan, People's Republic of China, Singapore, Australia, and Malaysia. In 2010, her work premiered in Chicago in Silk Road Theatre Project's *The DNA Trail* in association with the Goodman Theatre and her essay about *The DNA Trail* was published in *American Theatre* magazine. The play will be featured in January 2011 in *Visions and Voices*. Los Angeles Theatre Center will premiere her play *Calligraphy* in a co-production with Playwrights' Arena and Latino Theatre Company directed by Jon Lawrence Rivera in 2010. She is commissioned by Los Angeles Opera in collaboration with Shishir Kurup to write a new opera. She is published by Dramatists Play Service, Vintage Books/Random House, Smith and Kraus, Akashi Shoten (Tokyo), University of Hawaii Press, Temple University Press, University of Texas Press, and others.

Faculty are invited to present globally such as Mayer presenting his translations of Cervantes' *Interludes* at Oxford University's Out of the Wings Symposium at Oxford University, Cizmar speaking on art and social justice at the Arts in One World Conference at Brown University led by Erik Ehn, and Houston speaking on the power of theatre to mediate global relationships at the US-Japan Conference on Cultural Exchange Conference Arts and Culture Symposium and on the adaptation of Greek myth into contemporary drama at Aoyama Gakuin University, both in Tokyo.

Numerous guest artists have graced our program with their insights including Jose Rivera, Timberlake Wertenbaker, Edward Albee, Tony Kushner, Amiri Baraka, David Henry Hwang, Paula Vogel, Stephen Adly Guirgis, John Guare, Naomi Iizuka, Moises Kauffman, David Edgar, Howard Stein, Laural Meade, Tony Kushner, Doris Baizley, Danny Hoch, and India's premier playwright Girish Karnad.

#### **THE WESTERN EDGE PLAYWRIGHTS' SALON**

The Western Edge Playwrights' Salon is curated by the USC School of Theatre's Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing. It is a new literary salon designed to expand students' creative consciousness as well as define an aesthetic distinct to the West via play readings and thought-provoking lectures by stimulating guest speakers. The salon builds new avenues of thought to enrich the writing process for dramatic writing students. The salon's primary purpose is to enrich the student experience, and help bridge the gap between students' scholarly lives and their external journey toward and into the profession by providing access to original work in the raw that provokes discussion, imagination, and consideration. The Western Edge Playwrights' Salon will include readings of new student work, alumni work, and the works of Western playwrights as well as stimulating lectures to provoke inventiveness and imagination. In its inaugural year, the salon will be featuring a talk and master class by veteran California playwright **John Stepping** on **November 14, 2010, 7 pm, Village Gate Theatre, USC University Village**.