



**San Francisco Playhouse and Lorraine Hansberry Theatre
announce casting for**

[hieroglyph]

By Erika Dickerson-Despenza

Directed by Margo Hall

On-demand video stream premieres March 13

SAN FRANCISCO (18 February 2021) — San Francisco Playhouse (Artistic Director **Bill English**; Producing Director **Susi Damilano**) and Lorraine Hansberry Theatre (Artistic Director **Margo Hall**; Executive Director **Stephanie Shoffner**) announce casting for its co-production of the new play *[hieroglyph]* by **Erika Dickerson-Despenza**. The cast features **Jamella Cross**, **Safiya Fredericks**, **Khary L. Moye**, and **Anna Marie Sharpe**. All actors appear courtesy of Actors' Equity Association. The work will be directed by **Margo Hall**, marking Lorraine Hansberry Theatre's first staged production since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and the first production Hall has directed for the company since taking the helm in September 2020.

[hieroglyph] will be fully produced and filmed on stage at San Francisco Playhouse, presented as an on-demand video stream from **March 13th through April 3rd, 2021**. Patrons may support the organization of their choice by purchasing tickets (\$15 - \$100) from Lorraine Hansberry Theatre at lhtsf.org or from San Francisco Playhouse at sfplayhouse.org.

The compelling drama *[hieroglyph]* follows 13-year-old Davis, involuntarily displaced in Chicago two months post-Katrina, where she wrestles with the cultural landscape of a new city and school community while secretly coping with the PTSD of an assault at the Superdome. With her mother still in New Orleans committed to the fight for Black land ownership and her father committed to starting a new life in the Midwest, divorce threatens to further separate a family already torn apart. Will Davis be

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE and LORRAINE HANSBERRY THEATRE

Announce casting for [hieroglyph]

left hanging in the balance? *[hieroglyph]* traverses the intersection of environmental racism, sexual violence, and displacement, examining the psychological effects of a state-sanctioned man-made disaster on the most vulnerable members of the Katrina diaspora. This work is part of award-winning playwright Dickerson-Despenza's planned 10-play Katrina Cycle of plays focused on the effects of Hurricane Katrina in and beyond New Orleans.

Playwright **Erika Dickerson-Despenza** is a Blk feminist poet-playwright, cultural worker, educator and grassroots organizer from Chicago, Illinois. One of America's most in-demand rising playwrights, her recognition includes: Susan Smith Blackburn Prize Finalist (2021), Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award (2020), Thom Thomas Award (2020), Lilly Award (2020), Barrie and Bernice Stavis Award (2020), Grist 50 Fixer (2020), and the Princess Grace Award in Playwrighting/Fellowship at New Dramatists (2019). Her residencies and fellowships include Tow Playwright-in-Residence at The Public Theater (2019-2020), U.S. Water Alliance National Arts & Culture Delegate (2019), New York Stage and Film Fellow-in-Residence (2019), New Harmony Project Writer-in Residence (2019), Dramatists Guild Foundation Fellow (2018-2019), The Lark Van Lier New Voices Fellow (2018). Memberships include BYP100 Squad, Ars Nova Play Group (2019-2021), and Ensemble Studio Theatre's Obie-winning Youngblood collective, and her work has been commissioned by The Public Theater, Studio Theatre, and Williamstown Theatre Festival. Dickerson-Despenza 's work has been developed at The Lark, Vineyard Arts Project, New York Stage and Film, Public Theater, Victory Gardens Theater, Fault Line Theatre and Jackalope Theatre. Her plays include *ocean's lip/ heavn's shore*, *took/tied*, *hung/split*, and *shadow/land*. Her work *cullud wattah*, following intergenerational women impacted by the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, was scheduled to premiere at New York's Public Theater in 2020 (postponed due to the pandemic). Both *shadow/land* and *[hieroglyph]* were named in 2019 to Kilroys List, the playwrights/producers/directors industry recognition of excellent new plays by women, trans, and non-binary playwrights.

The stellar cast assembled for this production bring a wealth of talent to the production. **Jamella Cross** (davis despenza hayes) has been seen at Marin Shakespeare Company, Ubuntu Theater Project, Bay Area Children's Theatre, Virago Theatre Company, and Aurora Theatre. **Safiya Fredericks** (ms. t.) has appeared in leading roles at theatres including Oregon Shakespeare Festival, California Shakespeare Festival, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Magic Theater, A.C.T., TheatreWorks, and at San Francisco Playhouse, as well as in many films and television productions. **Khary L. Moyer's** (ernest hayes) credits include Roundabout Theatre, Arena Stage, A.C.T., Shotgun Players, San Francisco Playhouse, and many

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE and LORRAINE HANSBERRY THEATRE

Announce casting for [hieroglyph]

others. **Anna Marie Sharpe** (leah) has appeared with South Bay Musical Theatre, Berkeley Rep, and Barestage, among others.

Helming the production is Lorraine Hansberry Theatre Artistic Director and award winning actor/director/playwright **Margo Hall**, who has performed and directed in theaters throughout the Bay Area. She directed *Barbecue*, *Red Velvet* and *The Story* for San Francisco Playhouse, and *Brownsville Song*, *B-Side for Tray* for Shotgun Players, where she also co-directed *Bulrusher* with Ellen Sebastian Chang. She is a founding member of Campo Santo, and has directed, performed and collaborated on several new plays with artists such as Naomi Iizuka, Jessica Hagedorn, Phillip Kan Gotanda, and Octavio Solis. She debuted as a director with the World Premiere of *Joyride*, from the novel Grand Avenue by Greg Sarris, for Campo Santo. The production won the Critics Circle Award and *SF Weekly* Black Box Award for Best Director. She also co-directed *Mission Indians* with Nancy Benjamin, *The Trail of Her Inner Thigh* with Rhodessa Jones, *Hotel Angulo*, and *Simpatico* for Campo Santo. Other directing credits include *Thurgood* for Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, and *Friend of my Youth* and *Sonny's Blues* for Word for Word.

About San Francisco Playhouse

Founded by Bill English and Susi Damilano in 2003, **San Francisco Playhouse** has been described by *The New York Times* as “a company that stages some of the most consistently high-quality work around” and deemed “ever adventurous” by the *Bay Area News Group*. Located in the heart of the Union Square Theater District, San Francisco Playhouse is the city’s premier Off-Broadway company, an intimate alternative to the larger more traditional Union Square theater fare. San Francisco Playhouse provides audiences the opportunity to experience professional theater with top-notch actors and world-class design in a setting where they are close to the action. The company has received multiple awards for overall productions, acting, and design, including the *SF Weekly* Best Theatre Award and the Bay Guardian’s Best Off-Broadway Theatre Award, as well as three consecutive Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards for Best Entire Production in the Bay Area (2016-2018). *KQED/NPR* recently described the company: “San Francisco Playhouse is one of the few theaters in the Bay Area that has a mission that actually shows up on stage. Artistic director Bill English’s commitment to empathy as a guiding philosophical and aesthetic force is admirable and by living that mission, fascinating things happen onstage.” San Francisco Playhouse is committed to providing a creative home and inspiring environment where actors, directors, writers, designers, and theater lovers converge to create and experience dramatic works that celebrate the human spirit.

About Lorraine Hansberry Theatre

San Francisco’s premier Black theatre company, the **Lorraine Hansberry Theatre** is devoted to presenting theatrical works by, for, and about the African American experience, and providing employment and career building opportunities for actors, directors, designers, and technicians from the Black and multicultural communities. The company has produced more than 158 plays, including West Coast and World Premieres, experimental works, classics in the Black theatre canon, lively musicals, and

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE and LORRAINE HANSBERRY THEATRE

Announce casting for [hieroglyph]

poignant socio-political dramas. The company attracts one of the most eclectic audiences of any theatre in the San Francisco Bay region and prides itself on offering an inclusive and welcoming space.

The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre was founded in 1981, named for the trail-blazing first Black female playwright to have a play performed on Broadway, as well as the youngest American and only fifth woman to receive the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play. Hansberry's groundbreaking 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun* introduced mainstream audiences to complex and dignified Black characters and exposed the harsh reality of racial segregation in south Chicago. Politically active, Hansberry worked tirelessly on U.S. civil rights issues as well as global struggles against colonialism and imperialism, particularly crusading for the role of women in activism. A supporter of gay rights and member of the queer community, Hansberry was posthumously inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in 1999.

In 2020, award-winning Bay Area actor, director, playwright, and educator Margo Hall, a leading presence in the Bay Area theatre community, was appointed the first female Artistic Director in Lorraine Hansberry Theatre's 40-year history. In assuming the position, Hall welcomed the opportunity "to nurture, guide, and present new artists to the world, creating a space for Black theatre to thrive in the Bay Area." With a career dedicated to bringing the stories of people of color to life, Hall is committed to creating a safe space for fostering Black artists, particularly Black female and nonbinary artists who continue to be deeply underrepresented, as well as increasing society's exposure to diverse perspectives.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS

THE PLAY: *[hieroglyph]* by Erika Dickerson-Despenza
Directed by **Margo Hall**
Co-produced by **San Francisco Playhouse** and **Lorraine Hansberry Theatre**

Involuntarily displaced in Chicago two months post-Katrina, 13-year-old Davis wrestles with the cultural landscape of a new city and school community while secretly coping with the PTSD of an assault at the Superdome. With her mother still in New Orleans committed to the fight for Black land ownership and her father committed to starting a new life in the Midwest, divorce threatens to further separate a family already torn apart. Will Davis be left hanging in the balance? *[hieroglyph]* traverses the intersection of environmental racism, sexual violence, and displacement, examining the psychological effects of a state-sanctioned man-made disaster on the most vulnerable members of the Katrina diaspora.

THE CAST: **Jamella Cross** as davis despenza hayes
Safiya Fredericks as ms. t.
Khary L. Moyer as ernest hayes
Anna Marie Sharpe as leah

WHEN: March 13 through April 3, 2021
Opening Night Video Premiere: Saturday, March 13, 2021 at 6:30 P.M. PST

WHERE: Streaming video at sfplayhouse.org (tickets required)

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE and LORRAINE HANSBERRY THEATRE

Announce casting for [hieroglyph]

TICKETS: Patrons may support the organization of their choice by purchasing tickets (\$15 - \$100) from Lorraine Hansberry Theatre at lhtsf.org or from San Francisco Playhouse at sfplayhouse.org or by calling (415) 677-9596.

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PHOTOS: High res photos can be downloaded from: <https://cbpr.co/press/hieroglyph/>
NOTE: Production/review photos will be available March 8