



# SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES DYNAMIC GLOBE-TROTTING 21<sup>ST</sup> SEASON

Line-up includes World Premiere and West Coast Premiere plays, runs September 2023 to September 2024

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (27 March 2023) — San Francisco Playhouse has announced its dynamic 21<sup>st</sup> season, to be presented September 2023 to September 2024. Unveiled at a special event last night to an enthusiastic group of Playhouse supporters and fans, Artistic Director Bill English and Producing Director Susi Damilano revealed the six works—which will include two musicals and four plays—the company will present at its home theatre in the heart of San Francisco's Union Square Theatre District, 450 Post Street. Subscriptions are now available; single tickets will be available in the coming months at sfplayhouse.org.

San Francisco Playhouse's 21<sup>st</sup> Season will take audiences on a globe-trotting journey, spotlighting stories set across the world. This season includes a World Premiere Play exploring gentrification and the metaverse at a Vietnamese restaurant, a West Coast Premiere highlighting Nigerian movie magic, a gender-bent take on a classic Broadway musical comedy, a hysterical farce of Hitchcock that traipses through the Scottish moors, a prescient production of a Broadway musical investigating Argentinian power struggles and politics, and a visceral and poetic American masterpiece.

"This season is full of heart and humor," said Artistic Director **Bill English** of the season. "Many of the works in this season are comedic and romantic—in times like these, it's cathartic to laugh and to see love reflected onstage. These works also speak to the power of big dreams, both realized and unfulfilled, a testament to the human spirit. Together we look forward to building a better world, one play or musical at a time, flexing our powers of compassion in our theatrical Empathy Gym."

The season begins in the Fall with the West Coast Premiere of romantic comedy *Nollywood Dreams* (September 28 – November 4, 2023). Written by Ghanian-American writer/performer *Jocelyn Bioh* (*School Girls; Or the African Mean Girls Play, Merry Wives* at The Public Theater, and the book of *Goddess*), this hilarious play with sharp wit and big heart spotlights the 1990s explosion of Nigeria's film industry Nollywood, churning out films as the country contends with economic and political turmoil. Aspiring ingenue Ayamma yearns for the glitz and glamor of movie stardom, landing an audition with Nollywood's hottest director seeking a fresh face. Between cat fights with the resident diva and igniting sparks with Nigeria's "Sexiest Man Born," Ayamma's dreams of leaving her travel agency job behind for a thrilling life might just come true. Premiered at MCC Theater Off-Broadway, *Nollywood Dreams* was spotlighted on The Kilroys' List of notable new works. *Variety* praised Bioh's "fast-moving comic text," calling it "laugh-out-loud funny...this version of Nollywood is, indeed, a dream." Bay Area theatre veteran *Margo Hall* directs.

During the holidays, the Playhouse will stage a new look at the rollicking Broadway musical *Guys and Dolls* (November 16, 2023 – January 13, 2024). Inspired by Damon Runyon's stories about post-prohibition New York, *Frank Loesser, Abe Burrows*, and *Jo Swerling's* hit musical about gamblers, gangsters, and betting on love follows two unlikely pairs: a high-roller wooing an uptight missionary to win a bet, and a night club singer whose slippery long-time fiancé can't seem to commit. Helmed by Artistic Director *Bill English*, the Playhouse's new production will explore and subvert the classic musical's gender roles, blurring the lines beyond the binary of "guy" or "doll." Filled with beloved Broadway standards including "Luck Be a Lady," "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat," and "I've Never Been in Love Before," *Guys and Dolls* premiered on Broadway in 1950 winning the Tony Award for Best Musical, and selected as winner of the 1951 Pulitzer Prize for Drama (rescinded due to HUAC's allegations of Abe Burrow's communist sympathies). It has since received five Broadway revivals and has been performed around the world. In 2015, *The New York Times* said, "There are many students of the form who proclaim '*Guys and Dolls*' the best musical comedy ever, and they may well be right."

The Playhouse will ring in 2024 with the World Premiere of **Minna Lee's** *My Home on the Moon* (January 25 – February 24, 2024). In this epic and imaginative sci-fi journey into the metaverse, business is booming for a formerly failing pho restaurant in the middle of a gentrified neighborhood after it receives help from a mysterious marketing consultant. Things are not all they seem as the restaurant's waiter Mai discovers she's trapped in a virtual reality simulation. With the help of astral projecting friends, ancient Vietnamese ancestors, and delicious noodles, she attempts to escape, considering the perfection of artificial life and harshness of reality. A semi-finalist for Ashland New Plays Festival, *My Home on the Moon* received developmental readings at U.C. Santa Cruz's Rainbow Theater Festival and Bucharest Inside the Beltway.

The season continues with *The 39 Steps*, directed by San Francisco Playhouse Producing Director and co-founder **Susi Damilano** (March 7 – April 20, 2024). Four nimble actors play more than 100 characters in this fast-paced farce of Alfred Hitchcock's film of the same name. Following a mysterious murder, all-action hero Richard Hannay launches on a high-speed chase from a London music hall to Scotland's highlands, where he must dodge devious spies, woo beautiful bombshells, and attempt to reveal secrets of The 39 Steps, an international spy ring. With inventive stagecraft and masterful performances, this riotous spoof is equal parts slapstick comedy and film noir thriller. **Patrick Barlow's** stage adaptation debuted at London's Tricycle Theatre before transferring to the West End, where it won the Olivier Award for Best New Comedy and ran for nine years. Roundabout Theatre Company's Broadway production was nominated for six Tony Awards including Best Play. *The New York Times* deemed *The 39 Steps* "Absurdly enjoyable, gleefully theatrical...a perfect soufflé," while *New York Post* declared it "The most entertaining show on Broadway." Damilano, who recently directed the Playhouse's hit production of the whodunit *Clue*, returns to the scene of the crime(s) with this delightful whodunnit.

In the spring the Playhouse will stage Tennessee Williams' seminal masterpiece *The Glass Menagerie*, directed by in-demand Bay Area theatre artist **Jeffrey Lo** (May 2 – June 15, 2024). In this captivating and visceral memory play, Tom longs to evade his monotonous day job and the suffocating grip of his

mother, faded Southern belle Amanda. Recalling her debutante days, Amanda toils to find a match for her debilitatingly shy daughter Laura, who escapes the realities of her world through her collection of glass animal figurines. Based on Williams' life and family, *The Glass Menagerie's* premiere opened on Broadway in 1945 to critical acclaim, with *The New York Times* deeming it "a pleasure." It thrust playwright Williams (who would go on to write *A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* and *The Rose Tattoo*) into the spotlight, beginning his trajectory to become one of the foremost playwrights of 20th-century American drama. *Los Angeles Times* declared, "No point in mincing words: Tennessee Williams is the greatest playwright America has ever produced." This stunning and poetic work has enthralled audiences around the world ever since, receiving seven revivals on Broadway. A recent review from *The Hollywood Reporter* lauded Williams' "unparalleled gift for soaring poetry tethered to penetrating emotional truth."

The 2023-24 season will conclude with **Andrew Lloyd Webber** and **Tim Rice's** hit Broadway musical *Evita*, directed by Artistic Director **Bill English** (June 27 – September 7, 2024). Presented on the eve of the 2024 Presidential Election, this pop-rock opera portraying power struggles and political coups remains prescient, as present-day Americans contend with totalitarian forces attempting to undermine democracy. *Evita* explores the life and meteoric rise of First Lady of Argentina Eva Perón, transforming from poor child to ambitious actress to the most powerful woman in Latin America as the wife of military leader-turned-president Juan Peron. Premiering in the West End in 1978 starring Elaine Paige in the title role, *Evita* performed at San Francisco's Orpheum Theatre and Los Angeles' Dorothy Chandler Pavilion before debuting on Broadway. Its Broadway production ran for nearly four years and won Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Original Score, and Best Book of a Musical, as well as Tony Awards for stars Patti LuPone and Mandy Patinkin. The film starring Madonna, Antonio Banderas, and Jonathan Pryce won an Academy Award for Best Original Song for "You Must Love Me." *The Guardian* lauded the musical as "Audacious and fascinating... a beautiful score from Andrew Lloyd Webber," while *The Hollywood Reporter* deemed it "a ravishing spectacle." London's *Evening Standard* said, "*Evita* was always an unlikely hit. But it keeps coming back, always newly relevant."

In chronological order, the San Francisco Playhouse 2023/24 season is as follows:

# **Nollywood Dreams**

By Jocelyn Bioh
Directed by Margo Hall
West Coast Premiere
September 28 – November 4, 2023 (opening night: October 4)

It's the nineties in Lagos, and Ayamma dreams of stardom. Working at her parents' travel agency, she yearns for the bright lights of Nollywood, the burgeoning Nigerian film industry. When she lands an audition with Nigeria's hottest director, tensions flare with his former leading lady—as sparks start to fly with Nollywood's biggest heartthrob.

Jocelyn Bioh (Playwright) is a Ghanaian-American writer and performer from New York City. Bioh's plays include School

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Girls; Or The African Mean Girls Play, The Ladykiller's Love Story, Merry Wives, Happiness And Joe, Nollywood Dreams, and African Americans. Bioh's acting credits include work on Broadway as well as productions with Soho Rep, The Public Theater, Playwrights Horizons, Classical Theater of Harlem, Wilma Theater, and Signature Theater. Television writing credits include "She's Gotta Have It" and "Russian Doll."

Margo Hall (Director) is the Artistic Director of Lorraine Hansberry Theatre and an award winning actor/director/playwright who has performed and directed in theaters throughout the Bay Area. She returns to San Francisco Playhouse, where she directed Barbecue, Red Velvet, and The Story. Other directing credits include Thurgood for Lorraine Hansberry Theatre; Friend of My Youth and Sonny's Blues for Word for Word; 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 lizuka, 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.

# **Guys and Dolls**

## A Musical Fable of Broadway

Based on a Story and Characters of Damon Runyon Music and Lyrics by Frank Loesser **Book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows Directed by Bill English** 

**November 16, 2023 – January 13, 2024** (opening night: November 22)

It's Damon Runyon's mythical New York City and nightclub performer Adelaide must find a way to convince Nathan, her gambling fiancé of fourteen years, to finally bet on love. Meanwhile, high roller Sky Masterson might have made a miscalculation when he put down money he could charm straitlaced missionary Sarah Brown.

Frank Loesser (Music and Lyrics) has been called one of the most versatile of all Broadway composers. Each of his five Broadway musicals Where's Charley?, Guys And Dolls, The Most Happy Fella, Greenwillow, and How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying, is a unique contribution to musical theater. Before Broadway, Loesser supplied lyrics to the music of such greats as Jule Styne, Burton Lane, and Hoagy Carmichael, penning such hit film songs as "I Don't Want to Walk Without You," "Two Sleepy People," "Heart and Soul," and, as composer/lyricist, "Spring Will Be a Little Late this Year," "On a Slow Boat to China," and his 1949 Academy Award winner "Baby, It's Cold Outside." Loesser won Tony Awards for Guys and Dolls and How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying as well as the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying.

Jo Swerling (Book) was an Academy Award-nominated screenwriter and playwright. His work includes the comedy Street Cinderella for the Marx Brothers—he also wrote their first movie, the unreleased silent comedy Humor Risk. He scored success by writing the book and lyrics for the musical revue The New Yorkers and the play The Kibitzer, before moving to Hollywood to write the screenplay for the Frank Capra picture Ladies of Leisure, the first of several collaborations with the director. His screenplays also include It's a Wonderful Life, Platinum Blonde, Behind the Mask, Pride of the Yankees, Lifeboat, and Leave Her to Heaven. He provided some uncredited writing for the Gone With the Wind screenplay. Abe Burrows (Book) was a radio humorist, songwriter, singer and pianist, television personality, panelist, playwright, and stage director. His collaborations with Frank Loesser earned him four Tony Awards (Best Musical for Guys and Dolls and Best Musical, Book, and Direction for How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying) and the Pulitzer Prize in Drama (for How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying). He also wrote, directed, or doctored Can-Can; Make a Wish; Silk

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Stockings; Breakfast at Tiffany's; Say, Darling; Two on the Aisle; Three Wishes for Jamie; Happy Hunting; Good News; and Cactus Flower.

**Bill English** (Director) is the co-founder and Artistic Director of **San Francisco Playhouse**. Alongside co-founder Susi Damilano, he has guided its growth from a bare-bones storefront to the second-largest nonprofit theatre company in San Francisco. English designed the Playhouse's first theatre space at 536 Sutter Street and reconfigured its current space from a 700-seat hall into the current gracious and intimate 199-seat venue. Over the last twenty years, he has served as director, actor, scenic designer, and sound designer, winning SFBATCC nominations or awards in each of those categories. Bill is also an accomplished musician and builder. Milestone accomplishments include introducing Pulitzer Prize winner Stephen Adly Guirgis to the Bay Area by directing three of his plays; commissioning over thirty playwrights including Theresa Rebeck, Aaron Loeb, Lauren Gunderson, Lauren Yee, and Christopher Chen; and developing World Premieres from workshops to Sandbox Series to Mainstage Season to Off-Broadway (including the Off-Broadway transfers of *Ideation* and *Bauer*), and presenting the very first production of *Grounded* by George Brant which later played at the Public Theater. He coined the phrase "the empathy gym," which drives everything at the Playhouse.

## My Home on the Moon

By Minna Lee

Director to be announced

January 25 – February 24, 2024 (opening night: January 31)

From the windows of the old pho restaurant, Mai watches her neighborhood get gentrified, storefront by storefront. Just as the restaurant seems doomed to close, a mysterious and enthusiastic consultant named Vera arrives, helping Mai achieve the impossible and put the noodle shop on a path back to the glory days. But as Mai discovers that things aren't what they seem, she must navigate the metaverse and enlist the help of ancient Vietnamese ancestors to help her find the truth.

**Minna Lee** (Playwright, they/she) is a Hmong-Vietnamese American playwright, performer, and animator. They are a 2022 Sesame Workshop Fellow and an MFA Playwriting student at Hunter College (class of 2024). Work includes *My Home on the Moon* (2022 Ashland New Plays Festival Semi-Finalist), the experimental theatre piece *Acting Stranger* in collaboration with Andrew Schneider and Fox Whitney (On the Boards, LA Performance Practice), and *One Horse Town* (Annex Theater).

## The 39 Steps

Adapted by Patrick Barlow
Based on the book by John Buchan
From the movie of Alfred Hitchcock
Directed by Susi Damilano
March 7 – April 20, 2024 (opening night: March 13)

Step aside, Hitchcock. The legendary filmmaker's serious spy flick becomes a chaotic and hysterical farce, with four characters playing dozens of roles—and even inanimate objects. While on vacation in London, a Canadian man with a boring life becomes embroiled in a cloak-and-dagger affair related to the mysterious "39 Steps," an international spy ring. *The 39 Steps* is a riotous blend of virtuoso performances and inventive stagecraft that will leave audiences delighted.

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**Patrick Barlow** (Playwright) is an English actor, comedian, and playwright. His plays include an Olivier Award-nominated adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, a reframing of Milton's *Comus*, and a spoof of *Ben Hur*. His comedic alter ego "Desmond Olivier Dingle" is the Founder, Artistic Director, and Chief Executive of the two-man National Theatre of Brent, which has performed on stage, television, and radio since 1980. Barlow has appeared in major motion pictures including *Nanny McPhee*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Notting Hill*, and *Shakespeare in Love*.

Susi Damilano (Director) is Co-Founder and Producing Director of the Playhouse. She directed the West Coast premieres of Honey Brown Eyes (SFBATCC nomination), Dead Man's Cell Phone, Coronado, The Mystery Plays, and Roulette; and the world premieres of On Clover Road by Steven Dietz, From Red to Black by Rhett Rossi, and Seven Days by Daniel Heath in the Sandbox Series. Other directing credits include Playhouse productions of Groundhog Day the Musical, Cabaret, Mary Poppins, Noises Off, She Loves Me, Stage Kiss, Company, Stupid Fucking Bird, Into the Woods, A Behanding in Spokane, Den of Thieves, Wirehead (SFBATCC nomination), Indecent, and Clue. She is a five-time recipient of the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Excellence in Theatre Award for Principal Actress in a Play for the Playhouse productions of Abigail's Party, Harper Regan, Bug, Six Degrees of Separation, and Reckless. Damilano has also performed leading roles in the Playhouse's Yoga Play, The Effect, The Roommate, Red Velvet, Tree, Bauer, Abigail's Party, Harper Regan, Coraline, Slasher, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Landscape of the Body, First Person Shooter, Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train, The Crucible, Kimberly Akimbo, Our Town, and The Smell of the Kill.

## The Glass Menagerie

By Tennessee Williams
Directed by Jeffrey Lo
May 2 – June 15, 2024 (opening night: May 8)

Ghosts of the past continue to haunt in Williams seminal play *The Glass Menagerie*. Amanda Wingfield is a faded remnant of Southern gentility who now lives in a cramped St. Louis apartment with her aimless son, Tom, and her debilitatingly shy daughter, Laura. With their father absent and the Great Depression in motion, the siblings find comfort in their distractions — alcohol, movies and writing for Tom and a collection of glass animals for Laura. When a gentleman caller arrives for dinner, the Wingfield family is flooded with hope. But it's uncertain if this mysterious visitor will change things for the better or shatter a family's fragile illusions.

**Tennessee Williams** (Playwright) was one of America's most prolific and important playwrights. He explored passion with daring honesty and forged a poetic theatre of raw psychological insight that shattered conventional proprieties and transformed the American stage. The autobiographical *The Glass Menagerie* brought what Mr. Williams called "the catastrophe of success," a success capped by *A Streetcar Named Desire*, one of the most influential works of modern American literature. An extraordinary series of masterpieces followed, including *Vieux Carre*, *Sweet Bird of Youth, The Rose Tattoo, Orpheus Descending* and the classic *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Williams won Pulitzer Prizes for Drama for *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and the Tony Award for *The Rose Tattoo*.

Jeffrey Lo (Director) is a Filipino-American playwright and director. Currently directing San Francisco Playhouse's upcoming production of *Chinglish*, he also helmed San Francisco Playhouse's *Hold These Truths* and *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin*. He is the recipient of the Leigh Weimers Emerging Artist Award, the Emerging Artist Laureate by Arts Council Silicon Valley and Theatre Bay Area Director's TITAN Award. His plays have been produced and workshopped at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The BindleStiff Studio, City Lights Theater Company, and Custom Made Theatre Company. Directing credits include *Little Shop of Horrors*, The *Language Archive*, and *The Santaland Diaries* at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley; *Red Bike* at Center Repertory Company; *Vietgone* and *The Great Leap* at Capital Stage; *Peter and the Starcatcher* and *Noises Off* at Hillbarn Theatre; *The Crucible, Yellow Face*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* at Los Altos Stage Company; *Uncle Vanya* at the Pear Theatre (BATCC award for Best Production); and *A Doll's House, Part 2* and *Eurydice at* Palo Alto Players (TBA Awards finalist for Best Direction). Lo has also worked with the Oregon Shakespeare

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Festival, San Jose Repertory Theatre, and is a company member of Ferocious Lotus Theatre Company and San Francisco Playground. In addition to his work in theatre he works as an educator and advocate for issues of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and has served as a grant panelist for the Zellerbach Family Foundation, Silicon Valley Creates, and Theatre Bay Area. He is the Casting Director/Literary Manager at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley.

### **Evita**

Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber

Book and Lyrics by Tim Rice

Directed by Bill English

June 27 – September 7, 2024 (opening night: July 3)

In this exploration of Argentinian First Lady Eva Perón's rise to power and eventual demise, Eva travels to Buenos Aires and finds a life she never thought possible. Audiences will follow Eva's life and death through the lens of a restless revolutionary leader as she scrambles up the social and political ladder in tumultuous 1940's Argentina.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's (Music) work has been consistently seen on world stages for more than 50 years, with musicals including *Phantom of the Opera, Cats, Sunset Boulevard, Evita, Jesus Christ Superstar, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Starlight Express, Love Never Dies, School of Rock,* and, most recently, *Bad Cinderella*. He shares the record for most shows running on Broadway simultaneously with Rodgers and Hammerstein. He is one of the select group of artists with EGOT status, having received an Emmy, four Grammys (including Best Contemporary Classical Composition for Requiem), an Academy Award, and eight Tony Awards (including the 2018 Special Tony for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre). He has also won seven Oliviers and a Golden Globe – and his honors include a Classic Brit award for Outstanding Contribution to Music, the Praemium Imperiale, the Richard Rodgers Award for Excellence in Musical Theatre, a BASCA Fellowship, and the Kennedy Center Honor.

**Tim Rice** (Book and Lyrics) has been writing lyrics for musical theatre for more than 40 years. His credits include work *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Jesus Christ Superstar,* and *Evita* with Andrew Lloyd Webber; *Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast,* and *King David* with Alan Menken, *Chess* with Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus of the pop group ABBA; and *The Lion King, Aida,* and *The Road to El Dorado* with Sir Elton John. He has achieved EGOT status, having won an Emmy, five Grammy Awards, three Academy Awards, and three Tony Awards.

#### 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 Mercury News*. 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. The 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. *KQED/NPR* recently described the company as "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

# *SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE 21<sup>ST</sup> SEASON* 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8

admirable and by living that mission, fascinating things happen onstage." The 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.

For more information the public can visit **sfplayhouse.org**. Subscriptions are now available and single tickets will be available in the coming months.

**PERFORMANCES:** Tuesdays and Thursdays: 7pm

Wednesdays: 2pm & 7pm - New weekday matinees

Fridays: 8pm

Saturdays: 3pm & 8pm

Sundays: 2pm

WHERE: San Francisco Playhouse (450 Post Street, San Francisco)

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**PHOTOS:** For high-res photos, please visit: http://www.cbpr.co/press/sfp 23-24season/