

THEATREWORKS SILICON VALLEY PRESENTS
READINGS OF FUTURE THEATRE HITS
20TH ANNIVERSARY NEW WORKS FESTIVAL
WITH GUEST APPEARANCES BY DAVID HENRY HWANG,
RAJIV JOSEPH, AND SHAKINA
August 11-20, 2023
Lucie Stern Theatre, Palo Alto

PALO ALTO, CA (16 June 2023) — Hundreds of lovers of new theatre will gather this August for an advance look at tomorrow’s hits at **TheatreWorks Silicon Valley’s 20th Anniversary New Works Festival**. This unique festival returns to Palo Alto’s Lucie Stern Theatre with its extraordinary opportunity for audiences to experience new plays and musicals in their early stages of development and see their evolution over multiple performances. This year’s offerings range from a rollicking musical comedy about scandals and murder in a senior living community, to an aromatic dark comedy that includes on-stage cooking and shares recipes and bites with the audience; a drama that explores sibling conflict, family legacies, and another treasured recipe; and a globe-trotting solo show with music by a seasoned film and television actor. The festival will kick off with a dinner and conversation with nationally-acclaimed playwrights **David Henry Hwang** and **Rajiv Joseph**. Later in the festival, actor/activist **Shakina** (NBC’s “Connecting,” NBC’s “Quantum Leap,” Hulu’s “Difficult People”) will perform. The popular festival runs **August 11-20, 2023** at the **Lucie Stern Theatre**, 1305 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto. Festival passes (\$60 general) and single event tickets (\$20) can be purchased online at **theatreworks.org** or by calling **(650) 463-1960**. The kickoff dinner and Shakina performance are fundraisers with special event pricing (\$50-\$325) outlined below.

“Since its inception, TheatreWorks has served as a Silicon Valley incubator, fostering new plays on their journeys to become the theatrical favorites of the future,” said **Giovanna Sardelli**, TheatreWorks Artistic Associate and Director of New Works. “This summer, I’m delighted to welcome many remarkable artists to TheatreWorks for this time-honored tradition. This year’s Festival will serve as a celebration of our Tony recipient company’s bright and glorious future

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while honoring our two decades of providing this space for the next generation of creative talents to flourish.”

The Festival lineup is as follows:

READINGS:

**HAPPY PLEASANT VALLEY:
A SENIOR CITIZEN SEX SCANDAL MURDER MYSTERY MUSICAL**
Book, Music, and Lyrics by Min Kahng
Directed by Jeffrey Lo
Music direction by William Liberatore
Supported by TheatreWorks Silicon Valley Commissioning Fund

8/12 @ 8pm • 8/16 @ 7pm • 8/19 @ 8pm

Vlogger “Self-Made” Jade Kim is in hot water for making ageist remarks on her channel. When she learns that her grandmother June is about to get kicked out of Happy Pleasant Valley Senior Apartments, Jade gladly comes to the rescue...while of course recording and broadcasting her heroine-ism to burnish her own reputation. What Jade doesn’t count on is the cause of June’s eviction threat: her “active-living” sex life, which seems to be killing the men she sleeps with. June swears that she and her libido are being framed, and enlists Jade’s help in tracking down the real murderer.

Happy Pleasant Valley seeks to explode the myth that the enjoyment of sex stops after a certain age, and will explore themes of generation gaps, ageism, and finding connection and relevance in the digital age – all with a little bit of good old-fashioned murder thrown in.

Happy Pleasant Valley: A Senior Sex Scandal Murder Mystery Musical is the recipient of a Kurjan/Butler commission from TheatreWorks Silicon Valley (Tim Bond, Artistic Director; Debbie Chinn, Executive Director; and Giovanna Sardelli, Director of New Works)

Min Kahng (Book, Music, & Lyrics, he/him) is an award-winning playwright, composer, lyricist and creative coach whose works include *The Four Immigrants: An American Musical Manga*, which debuted in TheatreWorks’ 2016 New Works Festival and received a hit production at TheatreWorks in 2017 that won seven San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards, including “Entire Production – Bay Area.” Kahng’s other works include *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, *Jin vs. The Beach*, *GOLD: The Midas Musical*, and *The Adventures of Honey & Leon*. Kahng is MacDowell Fellow, a Travis Bogard Fellow, and an alumnus of the Playwrights Foundation Resident Initiative, Berkeley Repertory Theatre’s Ground Floor, and Djerassi Resident Artists Program. Kahng is an NEA Grant Recipient, a Jonathan Larson Grant Finalist, a Richard Rodgers Award Finalist, and a Dramatists Guild committee member.

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Jeffrey Lo (Director, he/him) is a Filipino-American playwright and director who helmed TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's productions of *Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Language Archive*, and *The Santaland Diaries*. 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, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The Bindlestiff Studio, City Lights Theater Company, and Custom Made Theatre Company. Directing credits include works at San Francisco Playhouse, Center Repertory Company, Capital Stage, Hillbarn Theatre, Los Altos Stage Company, Palo Alto Players. Lo is a company member of Ferocious Lotus Theatre Company and San Francisco Playground, and is the Casting Director/Literary Manager at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley.

William Liberatore (Music Director, he/him) is TheatreWorks' Resident Musical Director and has worked as a Choir Director at Gunn High School for more than thirty years. Liberatore has conducted more than forty shows at TheatreWorks, including the World Premieres of *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Prince of Egypt*, and *The Four Immigrants: An American Musical Manga*, as well as hit productions of *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Tuck Everlasting*, *Fun Home*, *Rags*, *The Life of the Party*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Once on This Island* (TBA Award), *Crowns*, *Ragtime*, and *Pacific Overtures*. He has been a frequent recipient of the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award for Best Musical Direction.

NERVE
By Minita Gandhi
8/13 @ 3pm • 8/19 @ 3pm

Jyoti, a recent widow with ailing health, finds the future of her well-being in her daughters' hands. A multigenerational and multicultural journey that explores the legacy and the love language of food, *Nerve* is a dark comedy meant to be an aromatic and visceral experience, with the recipes being shared and cooked on stage, as well as served to the audience.

Minita Gandhi (Playwright, she/they) is a Los Angeles-based artist who was born in Mumbai, India. Gandhi's plays include *Muthaland* which premiered at 16th Street Theatre, and was featured at Oregon Shakespeare Festival for CAATA, Florida Studio Theater, Victory Gardens Theater, Silk Road Rising, and PCPA TheaterWorks. *Daal and Duty* and *The Sun and all its Sighs* were featured in the American Blues Theater's Ripped Festival. *Nerve* was originally developed at The Ground Floor writing residency at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in collaboration with her mother Jyotsna Gandhi. Gandhi is a 2022 NYSAF Pfaelzer Award finalist, and is currently working on an opera commission as a member of Minnesota Opera Company's New Works cohort.

MADELEINES
Written by Bess Welden
Directed by Leslie Martinson
8/17 @ 7pm • 8/20 @ 3pm

2022 Winner of the National Jewish Playwriting Contest

Debra, a struggling food writer, has returned to her childhood home in Ohio's rust belt to care for her declining mother Rose, an exacting cookie baker. When Debra's very successful older sister arrives for Rose's funeral, shared memories and old sibling grievances boil to the surface. As the sisters confront their loss, a startling secret about their mother's most-treasured Passover recipe emerges, which changes everything they thought they knew about their family. Spiced with poetry and smatterings of Yiddish and Spanish, *Madeleines* tells the story of a family of Jewish women grappling with how to love each other through haunted pasts, shared grief, and the solace of baking together.

Bess Welden (Playwright, she/her) won the 2022 National Jewish Playwriting Contest with her play *Madeleines*, which was also a finalist for the 2021 Bay Area Playwrights Festival. *Death Wings*, her play with songs, won the 2020 Maine State Prize of the Clauder Competition for New England Playwrights and was recently produced at The Theater Project and Meetinghouse Arts in Maine. A finalist in the 2020 National Jewish Playwriting Contest, her play *Refuge Malja* premiered at Portland Stage Company in 2018. She has toured extensively with her solo comedies *Passion of the Hausfrau* and *Big Mouth Thunder Thighs*. Welden was a 2022 Creative Community Fellow with National Arts Strategies.

Leslie Martinson (Director, she/her) is TheatreWorks' former Associate Artistic Director, and served as a director and administrator at TheatreWorks for over thirty years. She has directed many hit productions at TheatreWorks, including *The 39 Steps*; *Frost/Nixon*; *The Four Immigrants: An American Musical Manga*, for which she received the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award for Direction; as well as *Calligraphy*, *Proof*, *Water by the Spoonful*, *Warrior Class*, the Regional Premiere of *Time Stands Still*, the 2012 West Coast Premiere of *The Pitmen Painters*, and the company's acclaimed 2010 production of *Superior Donuts*. Martinson was a member of Lincoln Center Directors' Lab, a member of the La MaMa International Directing Symposium, and has served on Theatre Bay Area's Theatre Services Committee. In 2009, she was awarded an Individual Artist Fellowship in Stage Direction from the Arts Council of Silicon Valley for artistic achievement and community impact.

LOW EXPECTATIONS
By Michael Gaston
Directed by Giovanna Sardelli
Music Direction by Daniel Pearce
8/15 @ 7pm • 8/19 @ 12pm

In 2009, actor Michael Gaston was encouraged by his boss to write about his family. So, he did. Slowly. Thirteen years later, he produced two pieces, a monologue and a short story, and wove them into a play. The monologue is all true. The short story is not. The true story starts with one relative's Union Army service, then another's immigration to America from Belfast during the Great Depression, then heads to Tulsa, Hollywood, New York City, and finishes in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas. The short story starts in Northern California and stays there. Both are about a lot of things, a whole lot of things, but, mostly, they're about the measurable healing power of empathy, kindness, and love. With the help of director Giovanna Sardelli and an

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original score written and performed live by Daniel Pearce, Gaston brings these stories together with *Low Expectations*.

Michael Gaston (Playwright and Performer, he/him) is a film, television, and theatre actor. He has appeared in the films including *Bridge of Spies*, *W*, *Inception*, *Sudden Death*, *Ransom*, *First Reformed*, *Cop Land*, *Thirteen Days*, *The Crucible*, *Double Jeopardy*, *High Crimes*, *Sugar*, *Body of Lies*, and *The Crucible*. His TV credits include “Chicago P.D.,” “The Man in the High Castle,” “Jack Ryan,” “Madam Secretary,” “The Good Wife,” “The Leftovers,” “Unforgettable,” “Jericho,” “Blind Justice,” “24,” “For Life,” “Blindspot,” “Five Days at Memorial,” “Fleishman is in Trouble,” “Mayor of Kingstown,” “The Mentalist,” “Fringe,” and “Prison Break.” He performed on Broadway in *Lucky Guy* and *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, and has appeared onstage at The Public Theater, Playwrights Horizons, and New York Shakespeare Festival.

Giovanna Sardelli (Director, she/her) recently directed the World Premiere of Kareem Fahmy’s *A Distinct Society* for TheatreWorks and Pioneer Theatre Company. She will direct the West Coast Premiere of *Mrs. Christie* in TheatreWorks’ 2023-24 Season, scheduled to perform October 4-29, 2023. (See full bio below)

Daniel Pearce (Music Director and Original Score, he/him) is an actor, musician, and visual artist. He appeared on Broadway in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* and *Machinal*, and has performed with The Public Theater, Long Wharf Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, McCarter Theatre Center, and Geva Theatre Center. His film and TV credits include *Salt*, *Godzilla*, *The Last Thing Mary Saw*, “The Good Fight,” “Law & Order,” “Criminal Intent,” and “All My Children.” He received the Lunt-Fontanne Fellowship for excellence in acting.

SPECIAL EVENTS:

FESTIVAL KICKOFF WITH DAVID HENRY HWANG AND RAJIV JOSEPH

8/11 @ 8pm

Separate admission required: \$325 for dinner and event; \$75 for event only.

Pulitzer Prize finalist playwrights **David Henry Hwang** (*Yellow Face*, *M. Butterfly*, *Chinglish*, *Soft Power*) and **Rajiv Joseph** (*Archduke*, *Describe The Night*, *The Lake Effect*, *The North Pool*, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*) launch the 20th Anniversary New Works Festival with a dinner and thrilling conversation discussing their creative processes and the work behind bringing great new plays from page to stage. All proceeds from this fundraiser event will support TheatreWorks in its continued mission to bring engaging new art to Bay Area audiences.

David Henry Hwang (Playwright) is a Tony Award winner (and three-time nominee), a three-time OBIE Award winner, a Grammy Award winner (and two-time nominee), and a three-time Finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama. His stage work includes the plays *M. Butterfly* (TheatreWorks 1992 & 2006), *Chinglish*, *Yellow Face* (TheatreWorks 2009), *Golden Child*, *The Dance and the Railroad*, and *FOB*, as well as the Broadway musicals *Aida*, *Flower Drum Song*

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(2002 revival) and *Disney's Tarzan*. His screenplays include *M. Butterfly*, and he is currently penning the live-action feature musical remake of *Disney's The Hunchback of Notre Dame* as well as an Anna May Wong biopic to star actress Gemma Chan. For television, he was a Writer/Consulting Producer for the Golden Globe-winning television series "The Affair" and is now creating two television series, "Billion Dollar Whale" for Westward/SKG and another for Netflix. Called America's most-produced living opera librettist, he has written thirteen libretti, including five with composer Philip Glass, as well as *Dream of the Red Chamber* with Bright Sheng, twice presented to acclaim and sold-out houses at San Francisco Opera. He co-wrote the Gold Record-winning "Solo" with the late pop music icon Prince. A professor at Columbia University School of the Arts, Hwang is a Trustee of the American Theatre Wing, where he served as Chair, and sits on the Council of the Dramatist Guild. Recent honors include his 2022 induction onto the Lucille Lortel Playwrights' Sidewalk and his 2021 induction into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His musical *Soft Power*, a collaboration with composer Jeanine Tesori, opened in New York at the Public Theatre, where it received a 2020 Grammy nomination for Best Musical Theatre Album and was a Finalist for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Drama.

Rajiv Joseph came to national attention when his celebrated hit *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* became a finalist for the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and received an Outstanding New American Play Award from the National Endowment for the Arts. With direction by Moisés Kaufman, *Bengal Tiger* was a sensational hit at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Los Angeles in 2009 and moved to the Mark Taper Forum in 2010 where *The New York Times* described it as a "boldly imagined, harrowing and surprisingly funny drama." The show made its Broadway debut starring Robin Williams in March 2011. Seen in TheatreWorks' 2014 New Works Festival, Joseph's play *Describe the Night* won the 2018 Obie Award for Best New American Play for its production at Atlantic Theatre Company helmed by Giovanna Sardelli. His play *Guards at the Taj* was a 2016 Obie Winner for Best New American Play and 2016 Lucille Lortel Winner for Best Play. Other plays include *Archduke* (which made its Northern California Premiere at TheatreWorks in 2019), *The Lake Effect* (TheatreWorks 2015), *The North Pool* (TheatreWorks 2011), *Grotesque Playground Injuries*, *The Monster at the Door*, *Animals Out of Paper*, and *Mr. Wolf*. Joseph has been awarded artistic grants from the Whiting Foundation, United States Artists, and the Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust. He received his BA in Creative Writing from Miami University and his MFA in Dramatic Writing from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. His newest play *King James* about basketball star LeBron James made its World Premiere at Steppenwolf Theatre Company and recently opened Off-Broadway at New York City Center Stage.

SHAKINA

8/18 @ 7pm

Separate admission required: \$150 for show and after party; \$50 for show.

Known for creating and fostering bold new work, actor and transgender activist **Shakina** (NBC's "Connecting," NBC's "Quantum Leap," Hulu's "Difficult People") will dazzle Festival audiences with a special performance, followed by an electrifying after party

Shakina made television history on NBC's "Connecting..." as the first transgender person to

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play a series regular on a network sitcom, and she is currently a writer and director on NBC's "Quantum Leap." Shakina can also be seen guest starring in Amazon's GLAAD Award-Winning "Transparent" musical finale, which she helped write and produce, and Hulu's "Difficult People" as the iconic trans truther, Lola. Her play *Chonburi International Hotel and Butterfly Club* premiered on Audible in 2020 in collaboration with Williamstown Theatre Festival and was recognized with a 2021 Drama League Award for Best Audio Theatre Production. She is the Founding Artistic Director of Musical Theatre Factory, where she helped to develop hundreds of new musicals including Michael R. Jackson's Tony and Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Strange Loop* and her own autobiographical glam rock odyssey, *Manifest Pussy*. Recognitions include The Lilly Award for Working Miracles, Theatre Resources Unlimited Humanitarian Award, The Kilroys List, Logo 30, and two-time Drama League fellow and two-time OUT 100 honoree.

MEET THE ARTISTS

8/20 @ 12pm

Included in Festival Pass; \$20 Single Tickets

The Festival's featured playwrights and composers share their anecdotes and insights into creating brave new works for American theatre. Audiences are invited to bring questions and become a part of the conversation with writers who are shaping the theatre. This conversation will be moderated by TheatreWorks Casting Director/ Literary Manager **Jeffrey Lo**.

TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's **New Works Festival** has launched many new works onto TheatreWorks' main stage and to national productions, including Broadway's Tony Award-winning Best Musical *Memphis* and the 2018 Obie Award winner for Best New American Play, Rajiv Joseph's *Describe The Night*. The Festival has given playgoers their first looks at new works by such luminaries as Andrew Lippa, Stephen Schwartz, Wendy Wasserstein, Marsha Norman, Christopher Chen, Rachel Sheinkin, David Hein and Irene Sankoff, Rajiv Joseph, Duncan Sheik, Rogelio Martinez, Kimber Lee, Joe DiPietro, Rehana Lew Mirza, and many more.

TheatreWorks' Artistic Associate and Director of New Works **Giovanna Sardelli** has directed and developed plays throughout the country. Sardelli's many directing credits at TheatreWorks include this season's *A Distinct Society*; as well as the World Premiere of *Nan and the Lower Body* (2022), *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* (2021), the Northern California Premiere of *They Promised Her the Moon* (2020), Pulitzer Prize finalist Rajiv Joseph's *Archduke* (2019), *FINKS* (2018), *The Velocity of Autumn* and *Crimes of the*

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Heart (2016), Joseph's *The Lake Effect* (2015), *Somewhere* by Matthew Lopez (2013), and the World Premiere of Joseph's *The North Pool* (2011). She is an award-winning director who has worked on numerous plays by Rajiv Joseph including the World Premiere of *Archduke* (Mark Taper Forum) and *Guards at the Taj* (Geffen Playhouse; 2016 Ovation Award for Best Production of a Play) and the World Premiere of the Obie Award-winning play *Describe The Night* (2014 New Works Festival, Alley Theatre, Atlantic Theater Company in NYC). She has directed World Premieres of plays by Theresa Rebeck, Lynn Rosen, Joe Gilford, Jeff Augustine, Lauren Yee, Zayd Dohrn, Melissa Ross, Lila Rose Kaplan, Matthew Lopez, and Zoe Kazan, among others. Sardelli directed "Marvel's Squirrel Girl: The Unbeatable Radio Show!," a podcast series by Marvel Entertainment and Sirius XM. Sardelli will direct the West Coast Premiere of *Mrs. Christie* in TheatreWorks' 2023-24 Season, scheduled to perform October 4-29, 2023.

TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, led by Artistic Director **Tim Bond** and Executive Director **Debbie Chinn**, presents a wide variety of contemporary plays and musicals, revitalizes great works of the past, and serves more than 100,000 patrons per year. Founded in 1970 by **Robert Kelley**, TheatreWorks has grown from a truly original Silicon Valley start-up to become one of the nation's leading professional non-profit theatre companies. TheatreWorks was honored as the recipient of the 2019 Regional Theatre Tony Award. TheatreWorks also champions new work, offering artists support and a creative home as they develop new stories for the American theatre. Offstage, TheatreWorks' arts education programs in local schools and arts engagement programs in Silicon Valley neighborhoods uplift its audiences and strengthen community bonds. Onstage and off, TheatreWorks welcomes the mosaic of people that embody the Bay Area and beyond, celebrating the transformative power of theatre to ignite imagination, inspire conversation, and enliven our souls.

Media sponsor for TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons is *San Francisco Chronicle*.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

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WHAT: Hundreds of lovers of new theatre will gather this August for an advance look at tomorrow's hits at **TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 20th Anniversary New Works Festival**. Returning to Palo Alto's Lucie Stern Theatre to celebrate the company's legacy for fostering new plays and musicals, this unique festival offers audiences an extraordinary opportunity to experience new plays and musicals in their early stages of development. With multiple performances of each work, playwrights and composers are able to revise and refine their shows during the festival, allowing audiences to view the exciting evolution of brand-new pieces of theatre.

This year's festival will include readings of four new works, including a new musical about sex and murder in a senior living community from the creator of *The Four Immigrants: An American Musical Manga*, the 2022 National Jewish Playwriting Contest-winning play about grief and baking, an intergenerational dark comedy about legacy, and a solo show with music exploring the measurable healing power of empathy. The festival will kick off with a dinner and conversation with playwrights **David Henry Hwang** and **Rajiv Joseph**. Actor/activist **Shakina** (NBC's "Connecting," NBC's "Quantum Leap," Hulu's "Difficult People") will perform.

WHEN: **August 11-20, 2023**

WHERE: **TheatreWorks at Lucie Stern Theatre**, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

TICKETS: For Festival Passes (\$60; \$55 for Season 53 subscribers) and single event tickets (\$20), the public may call **(650) 463-1960** or visit **theatreworks.org**.

Special events:

FESTIVAL KICKOFF WITH DAVID HENRY HWANG & RAJIV JOSEPH

\$325 for dinner and event

\$75 for event only

SHAKINA

\$150 for show and after party

\$50 for show only

MEET THE ARTISTS PANEL

Included in Festival Pass, \$20 single event ticket

PRESS: Contact Lauren Goldfarb, Carla Befera & Co.
lauren@cb-pr.com

PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<http://cbpr.co/press/newworks2023>