

THEATREWORKS SILICON VALLEY  
ANNOUNCES CASTING FOR  
**21st ANNUAL NEW WORKS FESTIVAL**  
August 9-18, 2024  
Lucie Stern Theatre, Palo Alto

PALO ALTO, CA (1 August 2024) — **TheatreWorks Silicon Valley** has set the casting for its **21st Annual New Works Festival**, a unique program that offers an extraordinary opportunity for audiences to experience new plays and musicals in their early stages of development. Four new works will be brought to life in readings featuring Broadway and TV performers **Lauren Marcus** (Broadway’s *Be More Chill*, Netflix’s *Tick, Tick...Boom!*), **Stephanie Gibson** (Broadway’s *Rodgers + Hammerstein’s Cinderella* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*), **Shakina** (NBC’s “Connecting,” NBC’s “Quantum Leap,” Hulu’s “Difficult People”), as well as regional theatre actors **Molly Bell**, **Ashley Cowl**, **Will Dao**, **Miller Liberatore**, **Mikee Loria**, **Hayley Lovgren**, **Mary Jo McConnell**, **Jenny Nguyen Nelson**, **Lee Ann Payne**, **Jon Norman Schneider**, **Anna Marie Sharpe**, **Luisa Sermol**, and **Nicole Tung**.

Trailblazing trans activist/ powerhouse performer **Shakina** will take the stage as Joanne in **5 & Dime**, the rollicking new musical for which she wrote the lyrics. Based on Ed Graczyk's classic play and film *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* and featuring a book by **Ashley Robinson** (West End’s *Brokeback Mountain*) and music by **Dan Gillespie Sells** (*Everybody’s Talking About Jamie*, West End’s *Brokeback Mountain*), **5 & Dime** will receive readings in the 2024 New Works Festival ahead of its World Premiere at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley in summer 2025. Bay Area playwright/ composer/ performer **Molly Bell** will star in her madcap musical solo-show ***Molly Bell’s Hysterical***. Additional offerings in the New Works Festival include **Vichet Chum’s *Liebling***, a stirring new drama about two American writers confronting their separate German and Cambodian war-haunted heritages, and **Jordan Ramirez Puckett’s *A Driving Beat***, a poignant play about a mother-son cross-country road trip. The popular festival runs **August 9-18, 2024** at the **Lucie Stern Theatre**, 1305 Middlefield Rd., Palo

THEATREWORKS 2024 NEW WORKS FESTIVAL

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Alto. Festival passes (\$65 general) and single event tickets (\$25) can be purchased online at [theatreworks.org](http://theatreworks.org) or by calling **(650) 463-1960**.

Audiences of TheatreWorks' New Works Festival will also get the first peek at the extensive remodeling underway at the Lucie Stern Theatre. Final seating will not be in place during the Festival, patrons will be seated on padded temporary chairs. When TheatreWorks audiences return to the Lucie Stern Theatre in December 2024 for *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, it will be to the newly remodeled space, which will feature plush new seats and increased accessibility.

The Festival lineup is as follows:

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**READINGS:**

***5 & DIME***

**Book by Ashley Robinson**

**Music by Dan Gillespie Sells**

**Lyrics by Shakina**

**Based on *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* by Ed Graczyk**

**Directed by Giovanna Sardelli**

**Music Direction by Jacob Yates**

**8/11 @ 3pm • 8/14 @ 7pm • 8/17 @ 8pm**

**Cast**

Juanita - **Mary Jo McConnell**

Mona – **Lauren Marcus**

Joe – **Miller Liberatore**

Sissy – **Stephanie Gibson**

Joanne – **Shakina**

Stella Mae – **Hayley Lovgren**

Edna Louise – **Ashley Cowl**

New Works Festival audiences will help shape a premiere musical in the making as TheatreWorks stages readings of this rollicking country musical ahead of its World Premiere in the company's 2024/25 season. Set in a small Texas town in 1975, the all-female fan club of 50s heartthrob James Dean hosts a reunion commemorating the 20th anniversary of the actor's death, recalling the life-changing period when Dean, along with Elizabeth Taylor and Rock Hudson, were in nearby Marfa, Texas filming *Giant*. In a dime store alive with jukebox songs and

## THEATREWORKS 2024 NEW WORKS FESTIVAL

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downhome humor, the women share cherished illusions and faded dreams, until they are interrupted by a glamorous stranger ready to expose the truths of their sheltered lives.

The musical is based on the play, and later film, *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* by Ed Graczyk. Both the Broadway production and the film were directed by Robert Altman and starred Cher, Sandy Dennis, Kathy Bates, and Karen Black.

**Dan Gillespie Sells** (Music, he/him) wrote the music for the Olivier Award-nominated stage hit musical *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*, later adapted into a film by Amazon Prime Video. Sells wrote the songs for the stage adaptation of *Brokeback Mountain*, seen in the West End in 2023. He is the lead vocalist and frontman for the rock group, The Feeling.

**Ashley Robinson** (Book, he/him) penned the stage adaptation of *Brokeback Mountain*, wrote the book for *Fall of '94*, and book and lyrics for *Lockhart*. As an actor, he performed in the West End in *Merrily We Roll Along*, and as the titular role in *Floyd Collins*, as well as appearing onstage at The Old Globe Theatre, Irish Repertory Theatre, TheaterWorks Hartford, Southwark Playhouse, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Signature Theatre in Virginia, Maltz Jupiter Theatre, Lincoln Center Theater, and Roundabout Theatre Company.

**Shakina** (Lyrics, she/they) made television history on NBC's "Connecting" as the first transgender person to play a series regular on a network sitcom. She is currently a writer and director on NBC's "Quantum Leap." Shakina guest starred in Amazon Prime Video'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, and Logo 30. She is a two-time Drama League fellow and two-time *Out 100* honoree.

**Giovanna Sardelli** (Director, she/her) is TheatreWorks' artistic director. Her many directing credits at TheatreWorks include the West Coast Premiere of *Mrs. Christie* and the World Premiere of *A Distinct Society* in association with Pioneer Theatre Company, as well as *Nan and the Lower Body* (World Premiere), *They Promised Her the Moon*, Rajiv Joseph's *Archduke*, *The Lake Effect* (World Premiere), and *The North Pool* (World Premiere), *FINKS*, *Somewhere* by Matthew Lopez, and many more. She has directed World Premieres around the country of plays by Rajiv Joseph, 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 recently directed "Marvel's Squirrel Girl: The Unbeatable Radio Show!," a podcast series by Marvel Entertainment and Sirius XM.

**Jacob Yates** (Music Director, he/him) is a music director and classically trained cellist. His Broadway and Off-Broadway credits include work with *Cabaret*, *Wicked*, *Les Misérables*,

THEATREWORKS 2024 NEW WORKS FESTIVAL

4-4-4-4-4

*Spring Awakening*, *Home For The Holidays*, Ruben Studdard and Clay Aiken's christmas show, *Alice By Heart*, *Hadestown* (Tour/Broadway) and *Rock of Ages*. Currently, Jacob serves as the music director for the prologue for *Cabaret at the Kit Kat Club*. Jacob has also toured with *Disney Princess The Concert* and he has performed all over the world with Broadway and Television Stars. He will also be seen in the upcoming feature film *On A String*.

***MOLLY BELL'S HYSTERICAL***

**Book, Music, and Lyrics by Molly Bell**

**Performed by Molly Bell**

**Directed by Timothy Near**

**Music Direction by William Liberatore**

**8/10 @ 8pm • 8/16 @ 8pm • 8/18 @ 3pm**

***Molly Bell's Hysterical*** is an emotional rollercoaster through the life of playwright, composer, and acclaimed performer **Molly Bell**, inviting audiences to take a madcap musical ride through the terrors and triumphs of a suburban mother with too much on her mind. Struggling to balance family, career, a mysterious illness, and lingering dreams, she embarks on a transformative journey that will stir souls and touch hearts.

**Molly Bell** (Writer/ Performer, she/her) was recently seen as Rona Lisa Peretti in TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. She also performed in TheatreWorks' *Snapshots*, *A Little Princess*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Memphis*, and *Floyd Collins*. Other performance credits include Marin Theatre Company, Center Repertory Company, San Jose Repertory Theatre, and American Musical Theatre of San Jose. She also created *Real Housewives The Musical*, and co-wrote the musical *Becoming Britney* with Daya Curley.

**Timothy Near** (Director, she/her) is an award-winning director and actor. She won the Obie Award for her performance in Emily Mann's *Still Life* and a Theatre Bay Area Award for her direction of Athol Fugard's "*Master Harold*"...and the boys at Aurora Theatre Company. Near served as the Artistic Director at San Jose Repertory Theatre for 22 years, where she produced over 120 plays including 21 world premieres. Her work has been seen at the nation's leading theatres including the Public Theater, Guthrie Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Mark Taper Forum, Goodman Theatre, Alliance Theatre, and Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

**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 music directed 50 shows at TheatreWorks, including the World Premieres of *Being Alive: A Sondheim Celebration*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Prince of Egypt*, and *The Four Immigrants: An American Musical Manga*, as well as hit productions of *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *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.

**LIEBLING**

**Written by Vichet Chum**

**Directed by Jeffrey Lo**

**8/13 @ 7pm • 8/17 @ 3pm**

Cast

Sovanna – **Will Dao**

Leo – **Jon Norman Schneider**

Hanna – **Luisa Sermol**

Leena – **Jenny Nguyen Nelson**

Marguerite – **Nicole Tung**

Stage Directions – **Jake Fong**

With insecure futures ahead, two promising American novelists confront war-haunted heritages, Cambodian and German, hoping to salvage their personal lives in the process. Finding humor and hope in a rundown cottage, pie shop, and prestigious museum, this remarkable new drama captures their loves and losses, missteps, and muted memories.

**Vichet Chum's** (Playwright, he/him) plays have been workshopped/produced at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Alley Theatre, Ars Nova, Cleveland Play House, Magic Theatre, Fault Line Theatre, Weston Playhouse, Cleveland Public Theatre, All For One Theater, South Carolina New Play Festival, and many more. He received the 2023 Lucille Bulger Service Award, a 2018 Princess Grace Award in Playwriting with New Dramatists, the 2021 Laurents/Hatcher Award, a 2021 Edgerton Foundation New Play Award for the World Premiere of his play *Bald Sisters* at Steppenwolf Theatre Company (also seen at San Jose Stage Company), and a special state citation from the Massachusetts House of Representatives for his play *KNYUM* at Merrimack Repertory Theatre. He is currently a Usual Suspect at New York Theatre Workshop, a Sun Valley Writers' Conference Fellow, a curator for Space on Ryder Farm, a board member for The New Harmony Project, and a steering committee member for the Obie Award and Tony Award-winning organization AAPAC (The Asian American Performers Action Coalition). Chum's debut YA novel *Kween* was released this last fall with Quill Tree Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

**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*, *The Santaland Diaries*, and most recently *Tiger Style!*. 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 The Custom Made Theatre Company. Directing credits include *Chinglish*, *Hold These Truths*, *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin*, and *The Glass Menagerie* at San Francisco Playhouse; *Every Brilliant Thing* and *Red Bike* at Center Repertory Company; *Vietgone* and *The Great Leap* at Capital Stage; *Uncle Vanya* at the Pear Theatre; and *A Doll's House, Part 2* and *Eurydice* at Palo Alto Players (TBA Awards finalist for Best Direction), and many more.

THEATREWORKS 2024 NEW WORKS FESTIVAL  
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***A DRIVING BEAT***  
**By Jordan Ramirez Puckett**  
**Directed by Shannon R. Davis**  
**8/15 @ 7pm • 8/17 @ 12pm**

Cast  
Mateo – **Mikee Loria**  
Diane – **Lee Ann Payne**  
Reina – **Anna Marie Sharpe**  
Stage Directions – **Will Thompson**

A mother with a history. An adopted son who wants one. Set to the teen's hip-hop beat, their cross-country road trip is a voyage of discovery, identity, understanding, and the depths of love. Can a white mom and a brown son find common ground in their uncommon pasts? Sometimes it's the journey, not the destination.

**Jordan Ramirez Puckett** (Playwright, they/them) is a Chicana writer from the Bay Area, currently living in New York City. Their plays include *Transitional Love Stories*, *Huelga*, *En Las Sombras*, *To Saints and Stars*, *A Driving Beat*, *Las Pajaritas*, *Restore*, and *Inevitable*. These works have been produced and/or developed by Goodman Theatre, Playwrights Realm, San Diego Repertory Theatre, and San Francisco Playhouse, among others. Most recently, *A Driving Beat* was short-listed for the prestigious 2022 Yale Drama Series Prize. Ramirez Puckett is a student of the Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program at Juilliard.

**Shannon R. Davis** (Director, she/they) is a Bay Area director, storyteller, educator, and community connector. She participated in TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 2021 Writer's Retreat as part of Theatre of Yugen. Davis has also worked with New Native Theatre, American-Indian Community House, Native Writers Theatre, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, American Conservatory Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Aurora Theatre Company, American Repertory Theatre, California Shakespeare Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Ashland New Play Festival, Freestyle Love Supreme, Shotgun Players, Marin Shakespeare, Playwrights Foundation, and others. She served as the Director of Community Connections at American Conservatory Theater, a Guest Artist/Lecturer at U.C. Berkeley, a visiting professor at Saint Mary's College, and a member of California Shakespeare Theater's Artist Circle. She is a co-founder of Bay Area Native Theatre Artists (BANTA) as well as the Bay Area Theater Accountability Workgroup.

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**SPECIAL EVENTS:**

**FROM CLASSICS TO RAP SCRIPTS:  
UNLOCKING THE BEAT OF THE TELL-TALE HEART**

THEATREWORKS 2024 NEW WORKS FESTIVAL  
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8/9

**6pm - Welcome Dinner, 8pm - Keynote Address**

*Separate admission required: \$299 for welcome dinner and event; \$35 for event only.*

Bay Area artist **Carlos Aguirre** (guest star for Freestyle Love Supreme) kicks off the 2024 New Works Festival with a keynote address exploring creativity, adaptation, and hip hop. During this conversation, Aguirre will discuss working on his original rap and beatbox adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

Actor/musician/vocal percussionist/educator **Carlos Aguirre** has been performing and educating in the Bay Area for over 25 years. He has shared the stage with The Roots, Eryka Badu, Black Eyed Peas, Mary J. Blige, Jam Master Jay, and L.L. Cool J, and has recently been guest starring with Lin-Manuel Miranda's Tony Award-winning improvisational hip hop group Freestyle Love Supreme. Aguirre shares his experience by teaching at various schools and at-risk environments throughout the Bay Area.

**FOOD TRUCKS**

**8/17 @ 1-4pm**

*Food and beverage available for purchase.*

Between readings of *A Driving Beat* and *Liebling*, audiences can enjoy a selection of delicious offerings from local food trucks in the Lucie Stern Theatre courtyard.

**MEET THE ARTISTS**

**8/18 @ 12pm**

*Included in Festival Pass; \$25 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' Artistic Producer of the New Works Festival **Jeffrey Lo**.

**GIOVANNA SARDELLI'S BIRTHDAY PARTY**

**8/18 @ 5pm**

*Open to all Festival Pass holders*

In honor of Artistic Director Giovanna Sardelli's birthday and concluding a week full of thrilling new theatre, TheatreWorks will close the New Works Festival with a celebration following the final performance of *Molly Bell's Hysterical*.

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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-

## THEATREWORKS 2024 NEW WORKS FESTIVAL

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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, Min Kahng, Kimber Lee, Joe DiPietro, Rehana Lew Mirza, and many more.

**TheatreWorks Silicon Valley**, led by Artistic Director **Giovanna Sardelli**, 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 engagement programs 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 souls.

Sponsors for the **21<sup>st</sup> Annual New Works Festival** include **Edward Jones, PrintPapa, The Party Helpers**, and **J. Lohr Vineyards & Wine**. Media sponsor for TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 2023/24 season is *San Francisco Chronicle*.

### FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

**WHAT:** Hundreds of lovers of new theatre will gather this August for an advance look at tomorrow's hits at **TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 21st New Works Festival**. Returning to Palo Alto's Lucie Stern Theatre to celebrate the company's legacy for fostering new theatre, 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 and input from the audiences, 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. The New Works Festival will also include keynote talks with playwrights and directors, special events, food truck dining on select days, and more.



# THEATREWORKS 2024 NEW WORKS FESTIVAL

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This year's festival will include readings of four new works, including a first look at a World Premiere musical in the making, a madcap musical ride through motherhood, a stirring new drama about two writers confronting their separate Cambodian and German war-haunted heritages, and a poignant play illuminating identity through a mother-son cross-country road trip.

The festival will kick off with a dinner and conversation with Carlos Aguirre (Freestyle Love Supreme).

**WHEN:** August 9-18, 2024

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

**TICKETS:** For Festival Passes (\$65; \$60 for Season 54 subscribers) and single event tickets (\$25), the public may call **(650) 463-1960** or visit **theatreworks.org**.

Special events:

**FROM CLASSICS TO RAP SCRIPTS:**

**UNLOCKING THE BEAT OF THE TELL-TALE HEART**

\$299 for dinner and event

\$35 for event only

**MEET THE ARTISTS PANEL**

Included in Festival Pass, \$25 single event ticket

**GIOVANNA SARDELLI'S BIRTHDAY PARTY**

Open to all Festival Pass holders

**PRESS:** Contact Lauren Goldfarb, Carla Befera & Co.  
[lauren@cb-pr.com](mailto:lauren@cb-pr.com)

**PHOTOS:** Downloadable high-res photos are available here:  
<http://cbpr.co/press/newworks2024>