



**NATIONALLY ACCLAIMED NEW PLAY DEVELOPER
CELEBRATED THEATREMAKERS
WITH SIMULTANEOUS EVENTS IN FOUR CITIES
PLAYGROUND 30TH ANNIVERSARY GALA**

Events held September 16, 2024 in San Francisco, Los Angeles,
Chicago, and New York City

SAN FRANCISCO, LOS ANGELES, NEW YORK, CHICAGO (25 September 2024) — One of the nation’s oldest, most respected, and largest developer of new works for the theatre, **PlayGround** marked its third decade of incubating new plays by hosting simultaneous parties in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco on Monday, September 16, 2024. The *PlayGround 30th Anniversary Gala* events, which were also livestreamed, featured a starry array of playwright alumni, including many of the busiest names in theatre today. Notable gala attendees included **Tanika Baptiste, Carson Becker, Ben Cain, Josh Costello, Bridgette Dutta Portman, Howard Ho, Jully Lee, Mildred Inez Lewis, Aaron Loeb, Richard Perez, Shariba Rivers, Geetha Reddy, Jacob Marx Rice, Diana Simonzadeh, Jonathan Spector, Jon Tracy, and Jennie Webb.**

“I don't know if I would be a playwright today if it weren't for PlayGround,” said surprise guest Jonathan Spector, PlayGround alumni member and playwright of *Eureka Day*, which makes its Broadway debut this season. “I remember that first Monday Night reading. It was the first time I had my work read in front of an audience and hearing the audience laugh at what I wrote I was hooked.”

The *PlayGround 30th Anniversary Gala* celebrated the company’s launching over 350 significant new playwrights and more than 1,500 new plays onto the national theatre scene by playwrights including Lauren Yee, Jonathan Spector, Geetha Reddy, Diana Burbano, Cleavon

Smith, and hundreds of others. Highlighting the many accomplishments of its expanding company and prestigious alumni, this event came at a key moment, as the organization emerges post-pandemic with an expanded national presence and reach. Thanks to PlayGround's commitment to radical accessibility, the program now offers its signature short play program, Monday Night PlayGround, in four major theatre hubs: the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, with all programs offered admission-free and simulcast online in a first-in-the-nation partnership with SAG-AFTRA. The company has also forged deeper ties to the San Francisco Bay Area artistic community through a growing suite of locally presented programs at PlayGround's home theatre, Potrero Stage.

“We are so grateful to our PlayGround community for helping us raise the vital funds to continue our work developing new plays, launching some of the nation's most significant new writers,” said PlayGround Artistic Director Jim Kleinmann. “Thanks to these generous gifts, we will be able to continue offering Pay-What-You-Will and free programming to the communities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City, which collaborate in fostering innovative new voices in theatre today.”

PlayGround's 30th Anniversary Gala commemorated PlayGround's legacy by honoring 30 distinguished playwright alumni: **Linda Amayo-Hassan, Esther Banegas Gatica, Cass Brayton, Diana Burbano, Patricia Cotter, Bailey Jordan Garcia, Dana Leslie Goldstein, Prince Gomolvilas, Ruben Grijalva, Garret Jon Groenveld, Julianne Jigour, Nina Ki, Molly Olis Krost, Mildred Inez Lewis, Aaron Loeb, Daniel Martinez, Jr., Daniele Nathanson, Evelyn Jean Pine, Ken Prestininzi, Geetha Reddy, Jacob Marx Rice, Carolina Rojas, Jessica June Rowe, Jonathan Spector, Nicki Spencer, Tom Swift, Malachy Walsh, Jennie Webb, Christian Wilburn, and Maury Zeff.** Funds raised at the event enable PlayGround to create more opportunities for working artists across the country, establishing a national network for promising new voices.

The gala events included cocktail receptions, welcome from PlayGround Board Chair **Stephanie Prentice**, four-course gourmet meals, an excerpt from PlayGround member **Michael P. Adams'** *Love Language of Origin*, directed by PlayGround Artistic Director **Jim Kleinmann** and

performed by **Louel Señores, Isabel To, and Ron Campbell**, a Fund-a-Need auction that raised critical funds to support programming, followed by dessert and a closing toast.

PlayGround's 30th anniversary stands as a true celebration of the vitality and promise of the American Theatre. It also launches PlayGround's 30th anniversary season, which kicks off with the Monday Night PlayGround series presented in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, featuring 36 playwrights in each city developing new works. PlayGround's signature incubator program, running October 2024 through March 2025, will create more than 600 new short plays of which 144 will be staged by the four communities over the course of 24 public events, all performed in-person with professional actors, live on stage and simulcast.

The season also launches its Resident Playwrights Program, in which 12 selected playwright alumni are offered posts, including five commissions. The 30th anniversary season will also feature more than 100 public performances of works by PlayGround playwrights, offering the public a range of shows from fringe-style productions to a Hitchcock-inspired holiday event, new solo performances, developmental staged readings, and premieres of bold new full-length plays.

In the spring, Best of PlayGround will offer the public the top selections from the season, with performances in Los Angeles (April 14, 2025), New York (April 28, 2025), Chicago (May 5, 2025) and San Francisco (May 24-25, 2025). The company also presents the PlayGround Festival of New Works, featuring developmental staged readings and premieres, including bold new plays by top high school dramatists. The season wraps up with its Third Annual One PlayGround Festival, a two-and-a-half-day event and conference that brings together the national PlayGround community for workshops, panels, and performances, May 30-June 1, 2025. For more information on its 30th anniversary season, please visit playground-sf.org, playground-la.org, playground-nv.org, or playground-ch.org.

ABOUT PLAYGROUND

PlayGround was founded in 1994 by Jim Kleinmann, Brighde Mullins, and Denise Shama, beginning as a professional-academic partnership in residence at San Francisco State University (SFSU) and with initial sponsorship from SFSU's Creative Writing Program. Early participating artists included Prince Gomolvilas, Garret Jon Groenveld, Daniele Nathanson, Sandra Hunter, Colman Domingo, Kent Nicholson, Antigone Trimis, Mary Coleman, and Rhonnie Washington.

The fledgling organization moved to Project Artaud and A Traveling Jewish Theatre's new 80-seat black box theatre in 1996, at which time Kleinmann took on sole leadership as PlayGround's founding artistic director.

The company was in residence at Berkeley Repertory Theatre from 2003 until 2020, and has also presented at the San Francisco Main Library, Freight & Salvage, Zeum, A.C.T.'s Costume Shop, and Thick House, as well as co-producing with such notable Bay Area theatres as San Francisco Playhouse, Shotgun Players, Impact Theatre, San Jose Stage, and Magic Theatre, among others. PlayGround first brought its work to New York City with the 2008 co-production of Garret Jon Groenveld's *Missives*, followed by the 2009 NY International Fringe Festival hit co-production of Aaron Loeb's *Abraham Lincoln's Big Gay Dance Party*, and 2013 NY International Fringe Festival co-production of Katie May's *Manic Pixie Dream Girl*. PlayGround celebrated its 25th anniversary with a one-night program of original short musicals at NYC's Theatre Row in 2019.

PlayGround's first regional expansion came in 2012 with the launch of PlayGround-LA at West Hollywood's Zephyr Theatre. In 2018, it relocated to Hollywood's Broadwater Theaters (home of Sacred Fools Theater Company), where the company continues to present its Monday Night series. PlayGround expanded to NYC in 2021 and Chicago in 2022, with in-person performances (and simulcasts) beginning in the Spring of 2023, at NYC's Producers Club and Chicago's Theater Wit, respectively.

Over its 30 year history, PlayGround has grown into a leading national playwright incubator and theatre community hub, providing unique development opportunities for playwrights in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago through innovative programs such as the monthly Monday Night PlayGround staged reading series, annual PlayGround Festival of New Works, full-length play commissions, playwright residencies, and production support through the New Play Production Fund.

To date, PlayGround has developed and staged more than 1,500 original short plays through Monday Night PlayGround and the PlayGround Festival. PlayGround has also commissioned and/or developed several hundred new full-length plays by PlayGround alumni through its Commissioning Initiative, Playwrights Residency and Alumni Programs and, through its innovative New Play Production Fund, has directly facilitated the premiere of 40 full-length plays at theatres of every size, including many that have gone on to NYC and other major theater communities across the country.

In 2017, PlayGround launched Potrero Stage: PlayGround Center for New Plays, a 99-seat state-of-the-art performance venue to serve as a shared community resource for dozens of local companies and hundreds of artists. New programs in residence at Potrero Stage such as the Free-

Play Festival, Solo Performance Festival, and Innovator Incubator provide opportunities for local and national artists to showcase their work at little to no cost.

More than 350 early-career playwrights have gotten their start at PlayGround, including Lauren Yee, Jonathan Spector, Geetha Reddy, and Cleavon Smith, helping to expand and deepen the canon of American Theatre. PlayGround's alumni have gone on to win local, national, and international honors for their short and full-length work, including recognition at the Steinberg Awards, Glickman Awards, O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, and New York International Fringe Festival, among others. PlayGround serves one of the largest theatre artist networks in the nation, connecting hundreds of Bay Area, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York artists in support of a common vision: the development of bold and diverse new voices and new works.

This work has not gone unnoticed. PlayGround has received numerous awards, including Playwrights Foundation's Inaugural New Play Champion Award, San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle's Paine Knickerbocker Award for ongoing contributions to Bay Area theatre, and American Theater Wing's National Theater Grant. In 2016, Artistic Director Jim Kleinmann was recognized by Theatre Bay Area as one of the Bay Area's top 40 leaders. Three of PlayGround's commissioned plays have won the San Francisco Bay Area Critics Circle award for Best New Play, and three have had subsequent productions in NYC. Four of the past five Will Glickman Award winners for best new play are PlayGround alumni. When other theatre companies think of producing new work, PlayGround artists are often their first call. As a result of PlayGround's strong leadership, planning, and a willingness to take bold risks with high payoff, the new play ecosystem has been utterly transformed by PlayGround. For more information, visit playground-sf.org.

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos can be found here: cbpr.co/press/PlayGround30