

For immediate release

**CENTER THEATRE GROUP ANNOUNCES
LINEUP FOR L.A. WRITERS' WORKSHOP FESTIVAL**

The Kirk Douglas Season will begin with a historic new works festival with an all-women cohort of 10 writers this September

Los Angeles audiences will have the opportunity to experience new theatre thanks to Center Theatre Group's **L.A. Writers' Workshop Festival** which will take place over the course of two weekends, September 9-11 and September 16-18, 2022 at the Kirk Douglas Theatre. For the first time in the history of Center Theatre Group's L.A. Writers' Workshop, all 10 playwrights in the group will have their work presented at the Culver City-based theatre.

Since its inception in 2005, Center Theatre Group has supported a cohort of playwrights to help them author new plays with the L.A. Writers' Workshop. This year 10 women — **Jami Brandli, June Carryl, Penelope Lowder, Lisa Ramirez, Jessica Ko, Pia Shah, Judy Soo Hoo, Julie Taiwo Quarles, Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera, and DeLanna Studi** — have worked together over the past months under the guidance of Center Theatre Group Associate Artistic Director Luis Alfaro to write 10 plays, which will be presented for the first time in front of audience members.

"By focusing on writers, all women, telling stories from their individual community perspectives, has resulted in plays that center women and Los Angeles in their narratives," said Center Theatre Group Associate Artistic Director Luis Alfaro. "The story of Los Angeles is as diverse as these 10 playwrights that are expressing its hopes and dreams, and even more!"

The L.A. Writers' Workshop Festival includes a variety of stories from women playwrights ranging from female magicians, the exploration of American singer / songwriter and activist Nina Simone, the kinship of teachers, trademarking African culture, as well as Cherokee circular storytelling, to name a few.

Plays by Judy Soo Hoo, Penelope Lowder, Jessica Ko, Pia Shah, and Lisa Ramirez will be read September 9 to September 11, 2022 followed by June Carryl, Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera, Julie Taiwo Quarles, DeLanna Studi, and Jami Brandli on September 16 to September 18, 2022. The complete lineup and details about each new work are listed below.

Tickets — \$10 for a reading or \$30 for a Festival Pass — are currently on sale for the L.A. Writers' Workshop Festival and are available at CenterTheatreGroup.org or 213-628-2772.

The L.A. Writers' Workshop is made possible in part by Warner Bros. Discovery and the National Endowment for the Arts.

What Lies Behind the Tree
By Judy Soo Hoo
8pm, Friday, September 9

Working with concepts of memory, grief, and loss, Judy Soo Hoo's "**What Lies Behind the Tree**," delves into Libby's journey to find her lost sister while also caring for her elderly father, Walter who has Alzheimer's. Stories are told from not only Libby and her father but from Dwayne, a researcher who is leading an experiment to cure Alzheimer's, Victor, Dwayne's assistant and Tally, a home health aide to Walter.

"The community of writers led by Luis Alfaro has been inspiring and empowering. One of my favorite sayings (I am paraphrasing) from the workshop is 'Drama is the business of emotions.' It's been the year of writing dangerously in that I dug deep into the personal and the painful," said playwright Judy Soo Hoo. "This year I embraced truth in the telling of the story, emotionally, psychologically, and psychically. It was food for writing well. I have learned much from Luis and my fellow writers about the process and the writing. It was like being embraced in a group hug. I trust that we will be part of each other's lives moving forward."

Judy Soo Hoo's most recent collaboration with Center Theatre Group was "Sandi Koto" of the San Gabriel Valley for the Center Theatre Group's Community Stories in partnership with Company of Angels. Growing up as a Chinese American in New Mexico, her writing is attuned to the struggles, desires, and hopes of characters living on the margins. Credits include "Texas," "Solve for X," "Refrigerators," "At Risk," "Taking Flight: The Katherine Cheung Story," and "The Future is Janice." Judy has won the EWP/AT&T New Voices Play Award, Yukon Pacific Play Award, ARC (Artists' Resource for Completion) grant from the Durfee Foundation, and a PEN/WEST Emerging Voices Fellowship. Excerpts of Judy's plays have been published in "Bold Words: A Century of Asian American Writing" (Rutgers University Press), "Best Stage Scenes," and "Best Male Stage Monologues" (Smith & Krauss).

Barbara George
By Penelope Lowder
4pm, Saturday, September 10

The challenge to decode the human condition will be on display with "**Barbara George**." This 90-minute nightmare follows a Crenshaw realtor, Barbara "Gorgeous" George, who needs to figure out how she can stay visible in a community where she is slowly being erased. Lowder's new work will reflect topics she has covered in the past such

as race, relationships during the Jim Crow period and the spooky supernatural elements that encompass them.

“This tightknit group of women helmed by our brilliant guide Luis Alfaro has impacted my writing greatly,” shared playwright Penelope Lowder. “This group has challenged me to create beyond the boundaries of thought, structure, character, story, and so much more.”

Penelope Lowder is a playwright, screenwriter, and novelist. Lowder’s play, “West Adams,” was selected as an L.A. Times Critic’s Choice for its production at Skylight Theatre 2020. Her work, “Reaching Autonomy,” was performed at Company of Angels’ Page to the Stage series. Black Women State of The Union produced her plays “15 Minutes” and “The Follicle Prison War” at Skylight Theatre in Los Feliz. Her short work, “Show Me To Shonda” made its West Coast premiere at the Leimert Park Theatre Festival. In 2020, her one act “Water” was produced by Skylight Live and she served as a co-writer on Skylight Live’s web series “Benton Way.” She was commissioned by Lower Depth Theatre Ensemble to write a ten-minute work for their voting rights series, “Unit hope Just Wants to Vote.” She is a contributing writer to “Pathway To The Ballot Box” at Historic Huguenot Street which will be produced this year in New York. In 2019 Lowder’s short film “15 Minutes” premiered in many festivals winning numerous awards. Her debut novel, “Three Seconds of Hell,” a collection of short stories of her father’s experiences in a 1950’s southern motorcycle gang was published in 2017. She is a current member of Skylight Playwrights Lab, SkyLAB. She was a former recipient of the Marvin Miller/Guy Hanks Screenwriting Fellowship, Los Angeles Theatre Center Playwrights Residency, Audrey Skirball Kenis Playwrights Lab. Lowder holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Southern California School of Drama.

**Sifting Through Ashes In A Zen Garden...
But That’s Japanese Not Korean, So Never Mind
By Jessica Ko
8pm, Saturday, September 10**

“**Sifting Through Ashes In A Zen Garden... But That’s Japanese Not Korean, So Never Mind**,” is a fantastical tale about a woman who, upon receiving her grandmother’s ashes in the mail, must contend with the literal ghost of her newly awakened ancestor and ultimately her family’s legacy. This play will encompass stories from family members, ancestors, and even Whitney Houston.

“I feel like I’m still processing the magnitude of what it means to count myself as a peer in this cohort of brilliant playwrights, even though it’s now been a full year of meeting every two weeks consistently and mostly over Zoom. I’m eternally grateful to Luis Alfaro for seeing my potential as a playwright, which I have been doing here and there through the years, but not pursuing it as a career path alongside acting. I could never have fathomed that I would be offered this kind of opportunity from a renowned theatre to further develop myself as a writer, let alone seek it out for myself,” explained playwright Jessica Ko. “Luis knew me primarily as a performer, but because of that, he also knew I may have stories of my own to tell, that my skills and instincts as an actor absorbing and embodying other

people's language are inherently transferrable into writing narratives and creating new worlds of my own. So he invited me to join this special group of humans, which has truly changed my life and now reshaped the trajectory of my artistic journey. Together with Luis, all of us have created such a safe space to nurture and develop our stories and voices, and I particularly feel so lucky to have received such encouragement, wisdom, inspiration, and deep friendship from each of them. I am still relatively new to Los Angeles having moved right before the pandemic, as well as playwrighting, so I'm extremely honored to be introduced into the greater L.A. artistic community as a playwright and artist as part of Center Theatre Group's festival of new work."

Jessica Ko spent four seasons at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where she played the lead Dou Yi in the US premiere of Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's "Snow In Midsummer," Rosalind in "As You Like It," and originated the role of the Shapeshifter in the world premiere of Jiehae Park's "Hannah and the Dread Gazebo." She most recently filmed "The Cymbeline Project," a transmedia 10-episode series premiering this fall on OSF's digital stage. Other theatre credits: Berkshire Theatre Group, Cleveland Play House, Chautauqua Theatre Company, Trinity Repertory Company, Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, The Flea Theater, Urban Stages, Gallery Players, Brooklyn Bridge Park—the latter with which she partnered to bring free outdoor Shakespeare to its programming through her co-founded theatre company, Random Access Theatre. In addition to being a faculty artist for Middlebury College's Beyond the Page education initiative, she co-launched The Blueprint, a network of professional BIPOC-led artists dedicated to providing comprehensive and holistic training to emerging artists of color. She earned her M.F.A. in Acting from Brown University/Trinity Rep, where she also developed as a writer. She is honored and proud to be making her professional debut as a playwright through Center Theatre Group, with special thanks to Luis Alfaro.

TEAR!

By Pia Shah

4pm, Sunday, September 11

Pia Shah's "**TEAR!**" takes on motherhood, childbirth, and marriage, giving a voice to what is sometimes taboo to say aloud. This new work continues topics Shah has explored as her short film, "The Shower" tackling the conflicting emotions of motherhood through the perspective of two friends at a breaking point at one on their baby showers.

"This group has meant having an artistic home during one of the most tumultuous and emotional periods of my life, having an infant in a pandemic. I have been nourished, bolstered, witnessed, and challenged by this group," added playwright Pia Shah. "It has been such a special privilege to come together consistently during this fragmented time to make each other feel whole and help each other have a space in which to create anew."

Pia Shah was born in New Jersey and raised in Mumbai. Her first short film, "The Shower," which she wrote, produced, and starred in, won the Jury Award for Best Short Film at the 2021 South Asian Film Festival of America. She has acted at several theatres, most recently starring opposite Alfred Molina in "The Father" at Pasadena Playhouse. She originated the role of Leela in "Orange" at South Coast Repertory. TV/Film credits include

Duplass Brothers' "Room 104" (HBO), "Good Trouble" (Freeform), "Grey's Anatomy" (ABC), "Dirty John" (Bravo). "Grass," her fully improvised feature film, an arthouse stoner comedy, won the Best Narrative Feature award at the Austin Asian American Film Festival, and was acquired by Comedy Dynamics and streamed on Netflix. Pia has workshopped dozens of new plays at theatres around the country including Ojai Playwrights Conference, Geffen Playhouse, Kansas City Rep, Seattle Rep, Chalk Rep, Sacred Fools, Play On!, Audible, Boston Court, East West Players, Colorado New Play Festival, and Circle X.

All Fall Down
By Lisa Ramirez
8pm, Sunday, September 11

Politics and playwriting intersect in "**All Fall Down**," Lisa Ramirez's semi-autobiographical memory play that harkens to larger themes of addiction and internal racism. "All Fall Down" follows a family of five as they navigate what it means to be a unit all while the chorus of the past reflects on society today.

"Spending the year with these incredible writers with Luis Alfaro at the helm has been one of the most supportive, provocative, generative times in my writing career," shared playwright Lisa Ramirez. "We have met every other Saturday morning to share our lives, our work, and to hold each other up. This experience will stay with me forever. I now have ten playwriting sisters and one brother in Luis."

Lisa Ramirez's plays include "Exit Cuckoo (nanny in motherland)," Working Theater, NYC (Colman Domingo, director); "Art of Memory," 3-LD, NYC (Tanya Calamoneri, director); "Pas de Deux (lost my shoe)," Cherry Lane, NYC; "To the Bone," Cherry Lane (Lisa Peterson, director), Pulitzer Prize Nominee, Helen Merrill Playwriting Award, Drama Desk Nominee; "Down Here Below," Oakland Theater Project; "In the Mountains," Workshop Theater; "sAiNt jOaN (burn/burn/burn)," OTP. Currently working on the pilot "FIFTY," and the adaptation of "To the Bone." As an actor, she has performed extensively at theatres on both the East and West Coast such as the Cherry Lane, Vineyard Theatre, Atlantic Theatre, Berkeley Rep. Ramirez was the first Latina Angel in a major U.S. production in "Angels in America" at Berkeley Rep and recently completed a sold-out run of TS Eliot's "The Waste Land" in a drive-in theatre version at Oakland Theater Project.

Girl Blue
By June Carryl
8pm, Friday, September 16

Drawn to the intersections of race, gender, and ethnicity, "**Girl Blue**" explores the mind of artist and activist Nina Simone. Capturing two iconic years, 1968 and 1977, stories unfold at the center of The Troubadour night club in Los Angeles and the Airport Ramada Inn hotel in New York City with this five-person play.

"Luis from the very beginning cultivated and nurtured a way of thinking about ourselves and our work together that lives in the doing. And that journey has given me so

much courage,” said playwright June Carryl. “To be in process in the company of these amazing humans and discovering myself, and my voice has been nothing short of a blessing. And to get to share where we landed at the end? It is truly a gift.”

June Carryl's plays include “Florence and Normandie” (Golden Tongues – Diversifying the Classics Initiative - UCLA and Playwrights Arena); “Proud Boy” (developed at Echo Theater Lab); “N*gga B*tch” (Boston Court Theater’s 17th Annual New Plays, developed at Vagrancy Theater’s Blossoming Project); “The Good Minister Harare” (Playwrights Arena Summer Series, ADAA Saroyan/Paul Award) “Consortium” (Lower Depths Theatre Ensemble BIPOC Vote Plays), “Tow” (Coourage Theatre’s NOMAD PROJECT), “The Life and Death of” (Vagrancy Theatre), COLOSSUS (Semi-Finalist, O’Neill National Playwrights Conference), and “Stone Angels” (Finalist, the Killroys). Part One of her collaboration with composer Jason Barabba about Aunt Jemima premiered as part of Overtone Industries inaugural “Original Vision” Opera Development Series. Favorite theatre roles include Fraulein Schneider, “Cabaret” (Nominee, Best Featured Actress, Ovation Awards, Celebration Theatre) and Gerty Fail, “Failure: A Love Story” (Nominee, Best Ensemble, Coourage Theatre). TV and film “Mindhunter,” “Helstrom,” “Y: The Last Man,” and “Back Roads.”

Blind Thrust Fault

By Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera

4pm, Saturday, September 17

Inspiration from earthquake-prone Los Angeles and 17 years of teaching high school come to life in “**Blind Thrust Fault.**” This timely pandemic work when the profession of teaching has become even more challenging today shares stories from different educational professionals ranging from an English teacher turned to a school administrator, a Spanish teacher from the neighborhood, an art teacher and swim coach, a biology teacher, and students and parents alike.

“Being in the workshop has meant fighting imposter syndrome so that I could become a playwright. This process, these women, our fearless leader, and the Center Theatre Group staff have welcomed me into this world and made me feel like I AM a playwright. I’ve long believed and always say that while writing sometimes happens in isolation, the process requires community,” shared Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera. “I’ve had that as a fiction writer and this Center Theatre Group workshop cohort has been that as I develop my dramatic skills. I know I still have a lot to learn (and unlearn) and am confident we will continue our collaboration long after the festival. I am so honored we have this opportunity to share our works-in-progress with the larger community.”

Chicana Feminist and former Rodeo Queen, **Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera** (she/her) writes so the desert landscape of her childhood can be heard as loudly as the urban chaos of her adulthood. She is obsessed with food. She received her B.A. in Sociology, Communication Studies, and Chicana/o Studies from UCLA. While engaging high school students with socially conscious literature, she completed her teaching credential at California State University Dominguez Hills and earned an M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Antioch University Los Angeles. She is currently a PhD candidate in Creative Writing and

Literature at the University of Southern California where she is a Wallis Annenberg Fellow. She has been an editor at Ricochet Editions, VIDA Review, and Border Senses. She is a Macondista and works for literary equity through Women Who Submit, an organization that empowers women and nonbinary writers to send out creative work.

Yoj™

By Julie Taiwo Quarles
8pm, Saturday, September 17

Inspired by her Nigerian father and her American mother along with the interactions between the West and Africa, “**Yoj™**” is about two couples debating the trademarking of African culture. This new work follows the Reeds, a bookstore owner and Yoj descendant and a professor of Africana studies and blues, and the Wells, an adjunct professor of African and African American literature and a pastry chef and owner of “Afro Artisanal” pastry business.

“This workshop has been such a blessing and a joyful experience. I have never felt such tremendous camaraderie in a workshop group. I feel that we have all bonded so much, sharing our life journeys over the past year while crafting such an interesting mix of plays,” explained playwright Julie Taiwo Quarles. “It's a true delight to join with each of my fellow playwrights as she deals with the joys and challenges of her piece, and I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to commune with this group and share such an important platform space at Center Theatre Group. Luis has been an immensely powerful, encouraging, and inspiring force and advocate for us, and I wouldn't change a thing about this process. It has been an unexpected highlight of a very complicated year for me.”

Julie Taiwo Quarles is a Los Angeles-based playwright, English professor, and identical twin with roots in central California and Nigeria. With storytelling inspired by areas of focus in her research and teaching, she sees her dramatist and instructor identities as complementary. Her most recent playwriting looks at Africa in conversation with the West through the albinism experience and cultural ownership, her research explores August Wilson's colorblind casting and representational authenticity arguments in relation to contemporary Black performance, and her instruction includes English composition and language-learning, American pop culture, and creative writing. She teaches at Pepperdine University and resides in L.A. with her husband and son, her two favorite music men.

julietaiwoquarles.com

'I' is for Invisible

DeLanna Studi
4pm, Sunday, September 18

Cherokee circular storytelling comes to life in DeLanna Studi's “**'I' is for Invisible,**” which tackles the stories of the many murdered and missing Indigenous and Native women as well as a new Oklahoma law that has restored reservation jurisdiction to Native tribes.

This six-person play follows five Native citizens and one non-Native from those in their teens to their 60s.

“I love being in a group of fierce women who inspire and challenge me,” said playwright DeLanna Studi. “This group creates a safe space for us to dream and fail, and failing is a luxury not often given to women or people of color.”

DeLanna Studi is a proud citizen of the Cherokee Nation. She has over 25 years of experience as a performer, storyteller, educator, facilitator, advocate, and activist. Her theatre credits include the First National Broadway Tour of Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize winning play “August: Osage County,” Off-Broadway’s “Gloria: A Life” at the Daryl Roth Theatre, “Informed Consent” at The Duke on 42nd Street and regional theatres (Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Portland Center Stage, Cornerstone, and Indiana Repertory Theatre). DeLanna originated roles in over 20 world premieres including fourteen Native productions. A pivotal moment in her career was writing and performing “And So We Walked: An Artist’s Journey Along the Trail of Tears” based on retracing her family’s footsteps along the Trail of Tears with her father. “And So We Walked” has been produced throughout the country and was the first American play chosen for the Journees Theatrales de Carthage in Tunisia, Africa. As a playwright, she has been commissioned by The Theatre Company, Theatre For One (New York and Chicago) and a new play for Period Piece. In film and television, DeLanna can be seen in the Peabody Award-winning “Edge of America,” Hallmark’s “Dreamkeeper,” “Goliath,” “Shameless,” and “General Hospital.” She is a recipient of the Butcher Scholar Award, Mapfund Grant, and Cherokee Preservation Grant. Since 2007, she has served as the chair of the SAG-AFTRA National Native Americans Committee. She is honored to be the new Artistic Director of Native Voices at the Autry.

The Magician’s Sister
By Jami Brandli
8pm, Sunday, September 18

“**The Magician’s Sister**,” follows the story of two sisters, one of whom is a struggling female magician, interspersed with the stories of real, historical female magicians and on-stage magic. Not only will there be theatre magic, but magic tricks in this play as it is set in a variety of locations around the world, and in the memory and mind of multiple dimensions and fantasies.

“This journey has meant many things to me so far, but I want to highlight our extraordinary process. Since last summer, we’ve had our ‘playwright Zoom sessions’ every

other Saturday — which have been supportive, nurturing, transformative and challenging in all the right ways. But our sessions are not only about workshopping pages and writing exercises. They're also about checking in with each other. The way Luis conducts our 'checking in with each other' is uniquely intentional and he has created a true sense of community, of family. And to be quite honest, 'checking in' has been vital to my creative process over the last year," said playwright Jami Brandli. "It's been a true privilege to create and be in community with my incredible cohort and to watch each playwright's idea blossom into a complex play with a singular voice. I am forever grateful to Center Theatre Group and Luis — our incomparable and fearless leader — for the amazing gifts of this workshop while giving me a new theatre home. I'm looking forward to celebrating our voices at the festival."

Jami Brandli is honored to have been a member of Center Theatre Group's L.A. Writers Workshop. She's grateful to Luis Alfaro, her cohort, and Tiffany Slagle for their support (and patience) while she developed "The Magician's Sister." Jami's plays include "M-Theory: a play told in 11 dimensions," "Technicolor Life," "The Romeo and Juliet Senior Citizens Project—A Comedy, O: A Rhapsody in Divorce," and "BLISS (or Emily Post is Dead!)" — named on The Kilroys List and a LA Times Critics' Choice. Her work has been produced/developed at New Dramatists, New York Theatre Workshop, Kitchen Dog Theater, Moving Arts, The Road, Inkwell Theater, among other venues. Selected awards: 2019 Humanitas Prize PLAY LA winner, John Gassner Memorial Playwriting Award, Ashland New Plays Festival, Aurora Theatre's GAP Prize. Jami teaches at Lesley University's low-residency M.F.A. program and is represented by the Michael Moore Agency. For more info, visit jamibrandli.com and her NPX profile.

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