



For immediate release

CENTER THEATRE GROUP'S COMMUNITY PLAY READINGS RETURN TO LOS ANGELES LIBRARIES

Three L.A. playwrights to present their new works at three libraries in Boyle Heights this spring in partnership with Center Theatre Group.

Through Center Theatre Group's Education and Community Partnerships' Community Play Readings, Boyle Heights libraries will be the first to experience new works from three local playwrights in March and May. The readings of these short plays will take place at the Benjamin Franklin Library, Malabar Library, and Robert Louis Stevenson Library.

The plays will include "Lola's Banig" written by Fran de Leon and directed by Giovanni Ortega, "The Exoneration of El Maestro" written by Anthony Aguilar and directed by Alejandra Cisneros, and "Sasha the Dragon Tamer" written and directed by Aja Houston.

"Making theatre a part of people's lives is why we go back to the libraries year after year, and the Boyle Heights libraries have been great partners in engaging the community," said Center Theatre Group's Community Partnerships Director Jesus Reyes. "Library patrons have been slow to return to their neighborhood library and I hope the Community Play Readings will attract them back – one play at a time."

Putting theatre at the center, Center Theatre Group works to connect community members and artists throughout L.A. by facilitating inclusive and thoughtful cultural conversations with free workshops, events, productions, discussions, and other activities that take place at traditional and nontraditional venues.

"We're so excited to welcome back Center Theatre Group's play reading series to the Malabar branch library," added Jessica Ko, Childrens Librarian at the Malabar Library. "These events are such a wonderful opportunity to gather our community together to enjoy an afternoon in the arts. The play readings are a great way to experience theatre performances in the neighborhood."

The readings include (in date order):

"Lola's Banig" by Fran de Leon, directed by Giovanni Ortega

4 p.m., Tuesday, March 28 at Malabar Library

4 p.m. Wednesday, March 29 at Benjamin Franklin Library

4 p.m., Thursday, March 30, 2023 at Robert Louis Stevenson Library

When Gina, a single working mom, sits down to a Filipino breakfast with her

daughter, Ligaya, flashbacks take them to a childhood in the Philippines when every Sunday was

spent with relatives at her Lola's house. Recounting days of *meriendas*, *chismis*, and *siestas* on hand-woven *banigs*, Gina realizes there are painful moments of her life that have been cast away into the recesses of her mind. It takes Ligaya to unlock Gina's memory and pass down long-forgotten family traditions. A bilingual presentation, English and Tagalog.

“The Exoneration of El Maestro” by Anthony Aguilar, directed by Alejandra Cisneros

4 p.m., Tuesday, May 16 at Benjamin Franklin Library

4 p.m., Wednesday, May 17 at Robert Louis Stevenson Library

4 p.m., Thursday, May 18, 2023 at Malabar Library

El Maestro believes he is the greatest luchador of all time. But after 50 years in the ring, time has slipped away from him and so has his life! Now, he faces the Aztec gods in the afterlife and must convince them of a second chance on earth. It's the fight of the century as El Maestro faces his greatest opponent, his own ego. A bilingual presentation, English and Spanish.

“Sasha the Dragon Tamer” written and directed by Aja Houston

4 p.m., Tuesday, May 23 at Benjamin Franklin Library

4 p.m., Wednesday, May 24 at Robert Louis Stevenson Library

4 p.m., Thursday, May 25, 2023 at Malabar Library

Sasha, a quirky wordsmith, struggles to adjust to being the new girl at Kingdom Academy. When she bests the most popular kid in school in a Spelling Bee, their ensuing argument earns them detention. But on their way, they fall into a magical portal that brings them face-to-face with a fearsome dragon. Sasha must think on her feet to avoid being eaten during her first week of school. Presented in English.

The Malabar Library is located at 2801 Wabash Ave., Los Angeles, 90033; the Benjamin Franklin Library is located at 2200 E. 1st St. Los Angeles, 90033; and the Robert Louis Stevenson Library is located at 803 Spence St., Los Angeles, 90023. For more information about the readings, email jreyes@ctgla.org. More information on Center Theatre Group's community programs can be found at CenterTheatreGroup.org/Community.

Center Theatre Group, one of the nation's preeminent arts and cultural organizations, is Los Angeles' leading nonprofit theatre company, which, under the leadership of Managing Director / CEO Meghan Pressman and Producing Director Douglas C. Baker, and in collaboration with the four Associate Artistic Directors, Lindsay Allbaugh, Tyrone Davis, Neel Keller, and Kelley Kirkpatrick, programs seasons at the 736-seat Mark Taper Forum and 1,600 to 2,100-seat Ahmanson Theatre at The Music Center in Downtown Los Angeles, and the 317-seat Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City. In addition to presenting and producing the broadest range of theatrical entertainment in the country, Center Theatre Group is one of the nation's leading producers of ambitious new works through commissions and world premiere productions and a leader in interactive community engagement and education programs that reach across generations, demographics, and circumstance to serve Los Angeles. **CenterTheatreGroup.org**

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March 23, 2023

BIOS:

Fran de Leon (*Playwright*). L.A. native Fran de Leon is an actor, writer, director, and motivational speaker born in Downtown Los Angeles, raised in Hollywood and Manila. Her one-person show, "Faces of America," toured to over 500 venues across 49 states, including keynote performances for the United Nations Associations, California and New York. She is the Co-Artistic Director of Will & Company, Director of New Talent for Playfair, a core ensemble member of Critical Mass Performance Group, and serves on the Advisory Board of Fil-Am Arts. Fran's work is currently featured on Center Theater Group's Digital Stage with "Valor," a documentary short of her research and process in writing a play about the Filipino-American veterans of World War II. Fran directed Sondheim's "Into the Woods," for Pasadena Playhouse in a landmark partnership with the Pasadena Unified School District that featured students working alongside theater professionals, performing at the Pasadena Civic in January 2023. Other companies with whom she has worked include: the Geffen Playhouse, South Coast Rep, Playmakers' Rep, Artists at Play, Playwrights' Arena and the Garry Marshall Theater. Additional writer/director credits include commissioned work for Center Theater Group, Segerstrom Center's Arts Teach, and TreePeople.

Giovanni Ortega (*Director*) (AEA, SAG-AFTRA, SDC) directed "The Last Firefly" for Center Theatre Group's Library Reading Series. "Allos: The Story of Carlos Bulosan," which he wrote was also part of the program & directed by Fran de Leon. Directing credits: Fringe Festival 2023 show "We Are Nothing without Hantu Hantu;" "My Dog Died; and other concerns" (Ensemble Studio Theatre); "Nicky," based on Chekhov's Ivanov; "Halo Halo, Angel from Manila" (Echo Theater), "Lena Passes" (Pasadena Playhouse), "Scrimmage" (East West Players), "The Hotel Play" (A.D., CTG/ Playwrights' Arena), "La Madre de Todos los Exilios" (La Casa Tercer Acto, Bogotá), "Cabaret," "Spring Awakening – The Musical," "Urinetown." He's been commissioned to write/direct for Poetry Festival Singapore: "Benches," "Palindromes," "Belonging," "Atlas & Nomads." Giovanni is the Artistic Director for FilAm Arts Teatro. giovanniortega.com

Anthony Aguilar (*Playwright*) is a playwright, actor, and teaching artist who was raised in Boyle Heights, California. His fairy tale, punk-rock musical, "Little Red" is published through YouthPLAYS and is the winner of the Distinguished Play Award from the American Alliance for Theatre & Education (AATE). He is also the creator of "El Verde," a series of plays about a Mexican immigrant factory worker turned superhero which has also been adapted into a comic book. He is also the co-writer for the romantic comedy podcast series, "Love and Noraebang" presented by Sonoro Media and the Mash-Up Americans. As a teaching artist, he has taught for organizations like Inner-City Arts, California State University, Northridge, and Disney on Broadway.

Alejandra Cisneros (*Director*) is a director and creative producer whose work lives at the intersection of community building and art making. Collaborations include El Verde, The Public Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Center Theatre Group, and Artists at Play to name a few. For more information, please visit alecisneros.com

Aja Houston (*Playwright/Director*) is a nomadic playwright and CTG teaching artist from Everywhere, USA due to an army brat adjacent childhood. Aja creates with passion, politics, and magic to boldly build off-kilter, uncanny worlds to tell monolith-breaking Black stories led by

multi-faceted Black women. Starting her career as an actress in London, NYC, and San Francisco she moved to L.A. shifting to writing, earning her MFA in Dramatic Writing from the University of Southern California. Her play “HERE” will be produced by the LA-based Ammunition Theatre Company in the fall of 2023. To learn more about Aja's work visit ajahouston.com