



Press Release
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San Francisco Playhouse launches weekly *Empathy Gym Fireside Chats* streamed live on YouTube

San Francisco, CA (April 2020) – San Francisco Playhouse announced their new *Empathy Gym Fireside Chat* series which will be streamed live for free on YouTube. Each week, Artistic Director **Bill English** invites playwrights to join him for a one-hour conversation about playwriting, business, and the future of theatre. Audience members can participate in the conversation by leaving a comment on YouTube.

The *Empathy Gym Fireside Chat* series will begin this Thursday, April 16th at 7:00 P.M. PST. Playwright **Aaron Loeb** will join Bill English for the series' first one-hour live discussion. Playwrights **Lauren M. Gunderson**, **Carey Perloff**, and **Lauren Yee** are confirmed to join **Bill English** as guests for the subsequent fireside chats on the following dates: April 23 (**Lauren M. Gunderson**), April 30 (**Carey Perloff**), and May 7 (**Lauren Yee**). The *Empathy Gym Fireside Chats* will each take place at 7:00 P.M.

The series can be streamed live at the following links:

Aaron Loeb, April 16 at 7:00 P.M. PST: <https://youtu.be/Fz95fPYITHc>

Lauren M. Gunderson, April 23 at 7:00 P.M. PST: https://youtu.be/uaJaGk3_uu4

Carey Perloff, April 30 at 7:00 P.M. PST: <https://youtu.be/RS6rT2eutJs>

Lauren Yee, May 7 at 7:00 P.M. PST: <https://youtu.be/srftAjllE>

"Playwrights are the prophets of our time, blessed with sensitive antennae that are able to gather essential insights from the tumultuous roar of our culture," said Bill English. "They absorb what is happening around them and channel it into words and stories that help us

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understand our world. And while we are unable to experience the joy of live theatre, it is the perfect time to introduce these incredible human beings to our theatrical family."

Aaron Loeb is an American video game executive and playwright. Loeb is best known as President of FoxNext Studios in Los Angeles, California, overseeing the development of mobile games. As a playwright, his work has been performed around the world. His full-length plays include *Ideation* (which premiered Off Broadway in 2016), *The Trials of Sam Houston*, *The Proud, Brown, First Person Shooter*, *Blastosphere* (with Geetha Reddy), and *Abraham Lincoln's Big, Gay Dance Party* (Off-Broadway premiere in 2010). Loeb received the Will Glickman award for Best New Play in the Bay Area for *Ideation* in 2013. He is the resident playwright of San Francisco Playhouse and a member of the Dramatists Guild, Inc.

Lauren M. Gunderson is the most produced playwright in America of 2017, the winner of the Lanford Wilson Award, the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award and the Otis Guernsey New Voices Award, she is also a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and John Gassner Award for Playwriting, and a recipient of the Mellon Foundation's 3-Year Residency with Marin Theatre Company. She studied Southern Literature and Drama at Emory University, and Dramatic Writing at NYU's Tisch School where she was a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship. Her work has been commissioned, produced and developed at companies across the US including South Coast Rep (*Emilie, Silent Sky*), The Kennedy Center (*The Amazing Adventures of Dr. Wonderful And Her Dog!*), Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The O'Neill, The Denver Center, San Francisco Playhouse, Marin Theatre, Synchronicity, Berkeley Rep, Shotgun Players, TheatreWorks, Crowded Fire and more. She co-authored *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* with Margot Melcon, which was one of the most produced plays in America in 2017. Her work is published at Playscripts (*I and You, Exit Pursued By A Bear, The Taming, and Toil And Trouble*), Dramatists (*The Revolutionists, The Book of Will, Silent Sky, Bauer, Miss Bennet*) and Samuel French (*Emilie*). Her picture book *Dr Wonderful: Blast Off to the Moon* was released from Two Lions / Amazon in May 2017. Laurengunderson.com and [@LalaTellsAStory](https://www.instagram.com/LalaTellsAStory)

Carey Perloff has resumed her award-winning playwriting career, after 26 successful seasons as Artistic Director of American Conservatory Theatre. Her play *The Fit* celebrated its world premiere as part of the San Francisco Playhouse Sandbox Series during its 2018/2019 Season.

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Her play *Kinship* premiered at the Theatre de Paris in October 2014 in a production starring Isabelle Adjani and Niels Schneider and was produced at the Williamstown Theater Festival last summer, starring Cynthia Nixon and directed by Jo Bonney. *Waiting for the Flood* has received workshops at A.C.T, New York Stage and Film, and Roundabout Theatre. *Higher* was developed at New York Stage and Film, won the 2011 Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation Theatre Visions Fund Award, and received its world premiere in February 2012 in San Francisco. *Luminescence Dating* premiered in New York at The Ensemble Studio Theatre, was coproduced by A.C.T. and Magic Theatre, and is published by Dramatists Play Service. *The Colossus of Rhodes* was workshopped at the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, premiered at Lucille Lortel's White Barn Theatre, and was produced at A.C.T. in 2003. Her newest play, *Bastiano Or The Transfiguration of Raffi*, was written on a Bogliasco Foundation Fellowship and recently received a Rough Reading with the Bay Area Playwrights Foundation, directed by Tony Taccone.

Lauren Yee is a playwright born and raised in San Francisco. She currently lives in New York City. Her *Cambodian Rock Band*, with music by Dengue Fever and others, premiered at South Coast Rep, with subsequent productions at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, Victory Gardens, City Theatre, Merrimack Rep, Signature Theatre, Portland Center Stage, and Jungle Theatre. Her play *The Great Leap* has been produced at Denver Center, Seattle Rep, Atlantic Theatre, Guthrie Theatre, American Conservatory Theatre, Arts Club, InterAct Theatre, and Steppenwolf, with future productions at Long Wharf, Cygnet Theatre, and Asolo Rep/Miami New Drama. Her play *King of the Yees* premiered at The Goodman Theatre and Center Theatre Group, followed by productions at ACT Theatre, Canada's National Arts Centre, Baltimore Center Stage, and San Francisco Playhouse. Other plays include *Ching Chong Chinaman* (Pan Asian Rep, Mu Performing Arts), *The Hatmaker's Wife* (Playwrights Realm, Moxie, PlayPenn), *Hookman* (Encore, Company One), *in a word* (Young Vic, SF Playhouse, Cleveland Public, Strawdog), *Samsara* (Victory Gardens), *The Song of Summer* (Trinity Rep, Mixed Blood), and *The Tiger Among Us* (Mu). She is the winner of the Doris Duke Artist Award, the Steinberg Playwright Award, the Horton Foote Prize, the Kesselring Prize, the ATCA/Steinberg Award, American Academy of Arts and Letters literature award, and the Francesca Primus Prize. She has been a finalist for the Edward M. Kennedy Prize and the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. Her plays were the #1 and #2 plays on the 2017 Kilroys List. Lauren is a Residency 5 playwright at Signature Theatre, New Dramatists member (class of 2025), Ma-Yi Writers' Lab member,

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former Princeton University Hodder fellow, and Playwrights Realm alumni playwright. TV: *Pachinko* (Apple), *Soundtrack* (Netflix). Current commissions include Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, Portland Center Stage, Second Stage, South Coast Rep. BA: Yale. MFA: UCSD.

Bill English is the co-founder of and artistic director of the Playhouse. In seventeen years, with Susi Damilano, he has guided its growth from a bare-bones storefront to the second-largest nonprofit theatre in San Francisco. Bill designed the first theatre space at 536 Sutter Street and personally reconfigured the barn-like 700-seat hall into our current gracious and intimate 199-seat venue. Along the way, he has served as director, actor, scenic designer, and sound designer, winning San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle nominations or awards in each of those categories. Bill is also an accomplished musician and builder. Milestone accomplishments include bringing Pulitzer Prize winner Stephen Adly Guirgis to the Bay Area by directing three of his plays, commissioning twelve playwrights (including Theresa Rebeck, Aaron Loeb, Lauren Gunderson, Lauren Yee, and Christopher Chen), and developing world premieres from workshops to Sandbox Series to our Mainstage Season and Off-Broadway, including the transfers of *Ideation* and *Bauer*, and presenting the very first production of *Grounded* by George Brant which later played at the Public Theater. He coined the phrase “the empathy gym” and it drives everything at the Playhouse.

San Francisco Playhouse

Founded in 2003 and now the second largest non-profit theater in the city, San Francisco Playhouse is the only mid-sized professional venue in downtown San Francisco—an intimate alternative to the larger more traditional Union Square Theater fare. Presenting a diverse range of plays and musicals, **San Francisco Playhouse** produces new works as well as re-imagined classics, “making the edgy accessible and the traditional edgy.” And with its bold Sandbox Series, dedicated to nurturing world premieres, the Playhouse has become a significant player in developing new works as well. **San Francisco Playhouse** is committed to providing a creative home and inspiring environment where actors, directors, writers, designers, and theater lovers converge to create and experience dramatic works that celebrate the human spirit.