

San Francisco Playhouse announces SEVEN NEW COMMISSIONED PLAYWRIGHTS and updates to NEW WORKS PROGRAM

SAN FRANCISCO (June 2022) — San Francisco Playhouse (Artistic Director **Bill English**; Producing Director **Susi Damilano**) continued its commitment to developing new plays and nurturing the voices of active writers with the selection of seven playwrights comprising the fourth and fifth years of the company's Five-Year Commission Program.

The recipients of these commissions are **Claude Jackson, Jr.**, **Lee Cataluna**, **Hend Ayoub**, **Geetha Reddy**, **Ezra Reaves**, **Sam Hamashima**, and **Ruben Grijalva**. An eighth commissioned playwright will be announced soon.

Claude Jackson, Jr.'s play, ***Cashed Out***, will receive its world premiere in the Playhouse's upcoming 2022/23 Season. The play, which began as a ten-minute scene showcased in the Playhouse's popular live streaming *Zoomlet* series, is now a full-length drama that follows the life of Rocky Camu and her family on the Gila River Indian Reservation.

Lee Cataluna's play, ***Sons of Maui***, was also incubated in the *Zoomlet* series. After audiences' resounding response to this heartfelt tale of two Hawaiian brothers preparing for their father's memorial service, the Playhouse commissioned Ms. Cataluna to turn it into a full-length play.

Ruben Grijalva joins the commission program for the second time in three years after a whirlwind experience with his hit play ***Shoot Me When....*** First commissioned in January 2020, Mr. Grijalva submitted his first draft of the play in April, welcomed his first child in May, and the play was announced as part of the Playhouse's 20/21 Season in November. Filmed on stage for online streaming, the play was directed by Susi Damilano and premiered in May 2021. *Shoot Me When...* was awarded the **2022 Will Glickman Award** for Best New Bay Area Play. Grijalva's upcoming commission remains untitled.

"We are so proud of how far our New Works program has come, and of the role our theatre has played in the development of the American theatrical canon," said Bill English, Artistic Director. "Cultivating these new voices through our program has validated our feelings that playwrights are the prophets of our time."

Commissioned playwrights from the first three years of the program include **Theresa Rebeck**, **Aaron Loeb**, **Chelsea Marcantel**, **Christian Durso**, **Julie Hébert**, **Melissa Ross**, **Octavio Solis**, **Teddy**

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Hulsker, Julia Brothers, Brian Copeland, Ruben Grijalva, and Tori Keenan-Zelt. San Francisco Playhouse continues to develop these commissions with readings, workshops and virtual productions.

The **Sandbox Series of World Premieres**, the crown jewel of San Francisco Playhouse's New Works Program, remains on intermission. The program, which features fully staged productions with professional actors and designers, was forced to take a hiatus by the Covid-19 pandemic. It will return in a future season.

The **5-Year Commission Program**, which is a part of the Playhouse's acclaimed New Works Program, was established in 2018 dedicated to the creation of 20 new plays over the next five years. The goal of the program is to provide more structure and long-range planning to the company's already robust but informal commission program which has produced such plays as *Seared* by Theresa Rebeck, *Bauer* by Lauren Gunderson, *Pluto* by Steve Yockey, and *You Mean To Do Me Harm* by Christopher Chen. Playwrights engaged in the first two years of the program included Theresa Rebeck (*Seared*), Aaron Loeb (*Ideation*), Chelsea Marcantel (*A White Girls Guide to International Terrorism*), Christian Durso (a first commission), Julie Hébert (*Tree*), Melissa Ross (*An Entomologist's Love Story*), and Octavio Solis (*Mother Road*).

The **New Works Program** at San Francisco Playhouse includes monthly play readings, the 3-play *Sandbox Series* of world premieres, and the **5-year Commission Program**. The Playhouse's commitment to new works has been honored by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Edgerton Foundation, The Biller Foundation, The Zellerbach Foundation, The Hewlet and Gerbode Foundations and the American Theatre Wing. The program has achieved significant critical and commercial milestones: two Will Glickman Awards in the past four years; the *Sandbox Series* smash hit *Ideation*, which recently completed a successful Off-Broadway engagement in New York City; and George Brant's *Grounded*, which went on to international acclaim after its Sandbox premiere.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS



Claude Jackson, Jr.

Claude Jackson, Jr. is an attorney and currently the Director of his tribe's public defender's office. Five of his plays were featured in previous Native Voices at the Autry Short Play Festivals, including winning the festival in 2019 for his play *Cashed Out*. Claude and his brother Roberto wrote, produced and directed a feature film, *In Circles* and can be seen on Amazon Prime and other streaming outlets. Claude recently acted in the play *Native Nation* in Arizona, produced by Cornerstone Theatre Company and Arizona State University and

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Indian School, also produced by Arizona State University. He is married to Lea and they have three kids: Zaryk, Kaleb and Naiya.



Lee Cataluna

Lee Cataluna's recent work includes *What the Stars See at Night* for La Jolla Playhouse, *Home of the Brave* for Honolulu Theatre for Youth, and *Flowers of Hawaii*, which was workshopped at Native Voices at the Autry. She won the Von Marie Atchley Award for Excellence in Playwriting from Native Voices last fall. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from UC Riverside. She is of Native Hawaiian descent and lives in Honolulu.



Hend Ayoub

Hend Ayoub is an actor and writer, most recently seen in the world premiere production of *First Down* at NYC's 59E59 Theater. Additional theatre credits include: Broadway's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* with Robin Williams, as well as its previous run at Los Angeles's Mark Taper Forum; *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Arena Stage); *Kiss* (Yale Repertory Theatre); *Veils* (world premiere, Portland Stage; Barrington Stage). Television credits include *Homeland*, *Orange Is The New Black*, *The Looming Tower*, *Madam Secretary*, *Royal Pains*, *Feed the Beast*, *The Accidental Wolf*, Comedy Central's *The Watch List*, and recurring roles on *Transparent* and *Damages*. In Film, she co-starred in the Emmy Award-winning film *Death of a President* and the multi award-winning film *Private* and has just finished shooting a new film called *If You See Something*.



Geetha Reddy

Geetha Reddy is a playwright and filmmaker working in the Bay Area. Her plays include *A Mahābhārata* (Oakland Theatre Project) *Far, Far Better Things* (Shotgun Players/ TheatreFirst), *Hela* (with Lauren Gunderson, TheatreFirst), *Safe House* (SF Playhouse), *Blastosphere* (with Aaron Loeb, CentralWorks). Geetha's plays *Me Given You*, *Girl in a Box*, and *On a Wonderverse* were part of the Playwright's Foundation's 'In the Rough' reading series. *Safe House* and *On a Wonderverse* were featured in the Bay Area Playwrights Festival. She

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has been commissioned by TheatreWorks, SFPlayhouse, Oakland Theatre Project, Shotgun Players, Crowded Fire, the Gerbode Foundation, and PlayGround (3). Her plays have also appeared in the San Francisco Fringe Festival, the Santa Rosa Quickies festival, the Best of PlayGround Festival, the Just Theatre Lab series, the Crowded Fire Matchbox series, and the Theatreworks New Works Festival. Her short film *Obit* appeared at LA Shorts, NY Indie Fest, Bend Film Festival, the GI Film Festival and many others. Geetha is a member of the Dramatist's Guild, and alumni Resident Playwright at the Playwright's Foundation.



Ezra Reaves

Ezra Reaves (he/them) is a professional actor, comedian, experimental theater writer and performer, and ensemble member of the San Francisco Neo-Futurists. They have recently joined the cast of the GLAAD-nominated television show 4400 on the CW in the role of "Farraday". They've toured nationally and internationally with The Neo-Futurists, performed over 150 shows as the lead character in the immersive show *The Speakeasy* and performed locally at San Francisco Playhouse, Shotgun, ACT, NCTC, ZSpace and Magic Theater. In NYC they have performed at LaMama Experimental Theater and PS122. As a comedian, Ezra has opened for Janeane Garofalo, Bob Odenkirk, John Hodgman, Paul F. Tompkins and even shared the stage with Michael Ian Black at SF Sketchfest. Last year, Ezra Reaves and writing partner Amy Langer co-founded Tarot & Palm Theatre and wrote and produced a sold-out extended-run of the critically-acclaimed immersive show *The Program*. More at www.ezrareaves.com!



Sam Hamashima

Sam Hamashima (them+) is a contemporary playwright especially excited by puppetry, magical realism, and "everyday magic". Described as "serious whimsy" in the Washington Post, Hamashima creates theater for empowerment, healing, and discovery. Past commissions include *Supposed Home* (Seattle Public Theater) *Garden State* (Lyric Stage of Boston), and *Shoyu Tell* (Lexington Children's Theater). Produced and/or developed by John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, and National Queer Theater, among others. Proud Alum of the National YoungArts Foundation. BFA in Musical Theatre, University of Michigan. samhamashima.com @Sam Hamashima

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Ruben Grijalva

Ruben Grijalva is a San Francisco-based playwright exploring the boundaries of human agency in a world evolving faster than our minds. His short plays include *Anna Considers A Cocktail* (PlayGround Emerging Playwright Award), *Full Steam Ahead*, and *All The Worlds Are Stages* (PianoFight Short Lived VII Winner). His full-length plays include *Anna Considers Mars*, *Value Over Replacement* (O'Neill National Playwrights Conference Finalist, Edgerton Foundation New Play Award Winner), and *Shoot Me When...* (O'Neill Semi-Finalist, Will Glickman Award Winner). He lives in San Francisco's Sunset District with a Labrador named Retha, a human named Keli, and a tiny human named Genevieve, whose arrival served as the very hard deadline for the first draft of *Shoot Me When...*