

# Playwrights Foundation

Bay Area Playwrights Festival 43 / 2020

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## Playwrights Foundation Announces Online Festival The 2020 Bay Area Playwrights Festival (BAPF) Artistic Teams

**Directors & Dramaturgs Named To Team With Festival Artists**

***Directors: Desdemona Chiang, Margo Hall, Nicholas C. Avila,  
Jessica Bird Beza and Dawn Monique Williams***

***Dramaturgs: Laura Brueckner, Leigh Rondon-Davis, Divinia Shorter  
and Heather Helinsky***

**2020 Bay Area Playwrights Festival**

**July 17-26, 2020**

**Online & Worldwide**

**SAN FRANCISCO** - The West Coast's premiere launchpad for exceptional plays and playwrights, Playwrights Foundation announces the artistic teams for the 2020 Bay Area Playwrights Festival (BAPF), featuring playwrights *Tyler English-Beckwith, Stefani Kuo (郭佳怡), Jordan Ramirez Puckett, Deneen Reynolds-Knott, and Noelle Viñas*. The 2020 Bay Area Playwrights Festival runs July 17-26, 2020 in an online format available worldwide .

***"BAPF brings together over 50 artists including top Bay Area talent with artists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and across the United States who will simultaneously, from around the world, tell these powerful stories on revolution, love, and self discovery that resonate deeply with our current times,"*** says Executive Artistic Director Jessica Bird Beza, ***"Although the Festival has been around for 43 years, it feels like we are producing it for the first time. We are excited by the possibilities this new format brings to widen access and deepen our community. We are also exploring new technology using VMix to livestream the readings for a higher quality presentation than the popular Zoom."***

All of the Festival plays explore the essential discovery of one's identity, the aspects that are given to you by the outside world and those you discover yourself. The playwrights navigate this journey in different ways. **Tyler English-Beckwith's *Mingus*** is an exploration of mentorship and the struggle for one black woman to find her voice. In **Stefani Kuo's 郭佳怡 *Final Boarding Call***, Hong Kong protests are the context for interconnected personal stories, the fight for freedom, and the need for hope. **Jordan Ramirez Puckett's *To Saints and Stars*** focuses on the intersection of science and faith and the power of a lifelong friendship. **Deneen Reynolds-Knott's *Babes in Ho-lland*** is a discovery of black identity and female connection. **Noelle Viñas's *Derecho*** explores magical realism and how fragmented identity can tear you apart.

**Confirmed directors for the festival are Desdemona Chiang, Margo Hall, Nicholas C. Avila, Jessica Bird Beza and Dawn Monique Williams. Each are seasoned, acclaimed theater artists, deeply connected within the Bay Area community. Laura Brueckner, Leigh Rondon-Davis, Divinia Shorter and Heather Helinsky will serve as dramaturgs.**

**The Festival offers public readings live streamed and hosted on Vimeo in addition to panel discussions on Facebook Live, Youtube, and directly on Playwrights Foundation's website. Tickets are available now on a sliding scale of \$5-45 for wider accessibility. Theatre Professionals Weekend will take place July 24-26. Freelance artists and theatre staff are encouraged to apply for free access passes via a form listed on the website by July 2.**

### ***The Plays and Teams***

***Babes in Ho-lland* by Deneen Reynolds-Knott**, a play about discovering black identity and female connection amidst a world that threatens to destroy it, will be directed by Dawn Monique Williams, Associate Artistic Director at Aurora Theatre Company in Berkeley who has worked across the US and abroad; and dramaturgy by Leigh Rondon-Davis, they are a performer, visual artist, and dramaturg from both NYC and the Bay Area.

***Derecho* by Noelle Viñas**, a magical realism play that explores how fragmented identity can tear you apart, will be directed by Bay Area Nicholas C. Avila, who has directed at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The Dever Center, La Jolla Playhouse, among others; and dramaturgy by Laura Brueckner, freelance dramaturg in the Bay Area and recent Literary Manager at Marin Theatre Company.

***Final Boarding Call* by Stefani Kuo 郭佳怡**, an interconnected personal drama on the Hong Kong protests, the fight for freedom, and our need for hope, will be directed by Desdemona Chiang, a veteran director at BAPF and whose work has been seen at the Guthrie Theater, Alley Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Oregon Shakespeare Festival; and dramaturgy by Heather Helinsky, a freelance dramaturg based in Philadelphia and current Literary Manager for Playwrights Foundation who works independently with 35-50 writers each year.

***Mingus* by Tyler English-Beckwith**, an exploration of mentorship within the college system for first generation students and the struggle for one black woman to find her voice, will be directed by Bay Area Margo Hall, award winning actor, director, playwright, and educator.

***To Saints and Stars* by Jordan Ramirez Puckett**, an exploration of the intersection of science and faith and the power of a lifelong friendship, will be directed by Jessica Bird Beza, Executive Artistic Director at Playwrights Foundation and Associate Director on the Broadway musical *Come From Away*; and dramaturgy by Divinia Shorter, a born and raised DMV dramaturg and writer who was previously Literary Associate at Adventure Theatre MTC.

### **ARTISTS BIOS**

**Jessica Bird Beza (Executive Artistic Director, Director, *To Saints and Stars*)** has served as Executive Artistic Director since October 2019 and held leadership positions at the following organizations: The Old Globe, La Jolla Playhouse, San Diego REP, and Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company. Jessica is committed to community-building, fostering diverse artists, and advancing the new

play field. She was the Associate Director on the Tony Award-winning new musical *Come From Away* and developed new work at Theatreworks Silicon Valley, American Conservatory Theatre, The Old Globe, La Jolla Playhouse, San Diego REP, Diversionary Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Ford's Theatre, among others. M.A. in Nonprofit Leadership and Management: USD. [www.jessicabird.net](http://www.jessicabird.net).

**Desdemona Chiang (Director, *Final Boarding Call*)** is a stage director based in Seattle, WA and Ashland, OR. Directing credits include Guthrie Theater, Alley Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, People's Light Theatre Company, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Baltimore Center Stage, California Shakespeare Theater, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Playmakers Repertory Company, Studio Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, ACT Theatre Seattle, American Shakespeare Center, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Book-It Repertory, Aurora Theatre Company, Seattle Public Theatre, Crowded Fire, Playwrights Foundation, among others. Awards/Affiliations: Princess Grace Award, Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise, SDC Gielgud Fellowship, Drama League Fellowship. BA: UC Berkeley. MFA Directing: University of Washington.

**Tyler English-Beckwith (Playwright, *Mingus*)** is a recent graduate of the Dramatic Writing MFA program at NYU. She holds a B.A. in African and African Diaspora Studies as well as a B.A. in Theater and Dance from The University of Texas at Austin. Originally from Dallas, Texas, Tyler currently resides in Brooklyn, NY. Her plays include *Mingus* for which she received the 2018 KCACTF Paula Vogel Playwriting Award, was a 2019 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference finalist, and was a finalist for the 2018 Goldberg Playwriting Prize. Her play *TWENTYEIGHT* received a world premiere in 2017 at The Vortex in Austin, Texas where it received Honorable Mention on The Austin Chronicle's Top Ten Plays of 2017. She is currently a member of Page 73's 2020 Interstate 73 Writers Group. Tyler recently wrote, co-directed and starred in a series of afro-futurist short films for Meow Wolf's narrative chapter, "The Rift" which can be seen online at [meowwolf.com](http://meowwolf.com) and in their flagship exhibit House of Eternal Return in Santa Fe, NM. Tyler hopes to create worlds, in her writing, where black women live beyond the basic means of survival and have the audacity to be autonomous.

**Heather Helinsky (Dramaturg, *Final Boarding Call*)** is a freelance dramaturg based in Philadelphia and current Literary Manager for Playwrights Foundation. Fifteen years experience as a professional dramaturg, working independently with 35-50 writers/year, focused on advocating for women/trans playwrights and BIPOC writers. She provides research, consultation, and workshops to playwrights, theater companies, and university programs. She's been a teaching artist for The Kennedy Center's ACTF for nine years. Summer 2020: also *Seven Devils*, *Hollins*, and *Jewish Plays Project*. Amongst other credits, original dramaturg on JT Rogers' *OSLO* for PlayPenn. Training: M.F.A. in Dramaturgy, A.R.T./Moscow Art/Harvard ('07) and O'Neill National Critics Institute ('16). Board member for LMDA.

**Stefani Kuo 郭佳怡 (Playwright, *Final Boarding Call*)** is a playwright/performer and native of Hong Kong and Taiwan. She received her B.A. from Yale and is an MFA Playwriting Candidate at the Yale School of Drama. She has been an awardee of the Jerome Fellowship at PWC, finalist for the National Playwrights Conference, Jerome fellowship at Lanesboro Arts Centre, Many Voices Fellowship at PWC, SPACE on Ryder Farm, Van Lier New Voices Fellowship, NAP Series, DVRF Playwrights' Program, semi-finalist for the Page 73 Playwriting Fellowship, Princess Grace Fellowship, Ground Floor at Berkeley Rep. Her play, *Architecture of Rain*, premiered at the Iseman Theatre at Yale and received a reading in the DVRF Roundtable and Checkmark Theatre Company series. She was commissioned to write a play for the Rubin Museum's *Spiral Magazine*, and is currently commissioned to write a play for Roundhouse Theater Company. Her play *delicacy of a puffin heart* was produced with the 2018 Corkscrew Theatre Festival and The Parsnip Ship. As a performer, she was most recently seen in Bedlam's production of *King Lear*. She is represented as a playwright by Kevin Lin at CAA and Jacob Epstein at Lighthouse Management. ([www.stefanikuo.com](http://www.stefanikuo.com)) (For more on Hong Kong [www.parachutehongkonger.wordpress.com](http://www.parachutehongkonger.wordpress.com))

**Jordan Ramirez Puckett (Playwright, *To Saints and Stars*)** is a Chicana playwright and lighting designer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She often writes about being caught between two identities and our intrinsic desire for human connection, no matter how brief. She recently participated in the 2018-2019 Playwrights Realm Scratchpad Series. Her work has also been produced and/or developed by 2Cents Theatre Group (Los Angeles, CA), Abingdon Theatre Company (New York, NY), Custom Made Theatre Co. (San Francisco, CA), Goodman Theatre (Chicago, IL), Harold Clurman Laboratory Theatre Company (New York, NY), Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, National Winter Playwrights Retreat (Creede, CO), Playwrights Center of San Francisco, San Diego Repertory Theatre, San Francisco Playhouse, among others. Her plays include *En Las Sombras*, *To Saints and Stars*, *A Driving Beat*, *Las Pajaritas*, *Restore*, and *Inevitable*. She has designed lights for the world premiere productions of *Bauer* by Lauren Gunderson, *77%* by Rinne Groff, and *1 2 3* by Lila Rose Kaplan, among others. She is a graduate of Northwestern University and the former Associate Artistic Director at San Francisco Playhouse. She is currently pursuing her MFA in playwriting at Ohio University. Website: [www.jordanramirezpuckett.com](http://www.jordanramirezpuckett.com)

**Deneen Reynolds-Knott (Playwright, *Babes in Ho-lland*)** is a member of Clubbed Thumb's 2019-2020 Early-Career Writers' Group and received a finalist grant from their 2018 Open-Application Commission. She is a New Georges affiliated artist and has developed work with Liberation Theatre Company's Writing Residency, Project Y's Playwrights Group, Rising Circle's INKtank Development Lab and Frank Silvera Workshop's 3in3 Playwright Residency. Her full-length play, *BATON*, was selected for the 2018 Premiere Play Festival and received a workshop reading at Premiere Stages, the 2017 Playfest at the Orlando Shakespeare Company, and was a finalist for the 2017 PlayPenn and Bay Area Playwrights conferences. Deneen's play, *ANTEPARTUM*, was presented at the 2020 Fire This Time Festival as part of their signature ten-minute play program. She received her MFA in film from Columbia University.

**Leigh Rondon-Davis (Dramaturg, *Babes in Ho-lland*)** is a performer, visual artist, and dramaturg from both New York City and the Bay Area. They attended Wellesley College and was a member of Oakland's Laney College Fusion Theatre Project. Leigh has performed at a number of local theaters, including: Cutting Ball, FaultLine, Curran, and Magic Theatre. They have also assistant directed and dramaturged at Shotgun Players, Ubuntu Theater Project, PlayGround, Aurora Theatre Company, Crowded Fire, and Magic Theatre. Leigh currently works for and is a Company Member at Ubuntu Theater Project and Shotgun Players, and is a staff member and Resident Artist at Crowded Fire Theater.

**Divinia Shorter (Dramaturg, *To Saints and Stars*)** is a born and raised DMV dramaturg and writer with a B.A. in Theatre from Towson University. Divinia was previously Playwrights Horizons' Literary Fellow, and is the Literary Associate at Adventure Theatre MTC. Dramaturgy credits include: DMV Q-Fest 2.0, Adventure Theatre MTC, Quarantined Theatre Company, and Towson University. A writer of many forms, she is currently working on a collection of sestinas, a novel, and a full length play. Her most recent article, "Run Me My Language", is available online through Playwrights Horizons' website.

**Noelle Viñas (Playwright, *Derecho*)** is a playwright, educator, and theater-artist from Springfield, Virginia and Montevideo, Uruguay. She is a resident playwright at Playwrights Foundation, was a 2019 Djerassi Resident Artist, and is an Emerson College alumna. Her play *Derecho* won the John Gassner Playwriting Award, was a 2019 Jane Chambers Award Honorable Mention, along with being a Semi-Finalist for both the Playwrights Realm Writing Fellowship and the 2019 Primary Stages Staged Reading Series. *La Profesora*, her one-woman show starring Virginia Blanco, was commissioned & produced by TheatreFirst and is currently in development for a podcast called *Abuelito* with We Rise Production. Past favorite jobs include being HowlRound's first student staff assistant at Emerson College, running Annandale High School's theater program alongside Theatre Without Borders in Virginia, and self-producing her play *Apocalypse, Please* in with Kevin Vincenti in San Francisco. She currently resides in Brooklyn, where she is an MFA Playwriting candidate at Brooklyn College under Erin Courtney and is a

proud member of the NYC Latinx Playwrights Circle.

**Dawn Monique Williams (Director, *Babes in Ho-lland*)** is Associate Artistic Director at Aurora Theatre Company. Recent directing credits include: *The Piano Lesson*, *Bull in a China Shop*, *TiJean and His Brothers*, *Earthrise*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *By the Way*, *Meet Vera Stark*, *The Secretaries* (Willamette Week's Top 10 Portland Theatre Productions of 2018), *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Dawn's worked in theatres abroad and across the US; awards include a Princess Grace Theatre Fellowship, a TCG Leadership U Residency Grant, and a Drama League Directing Fellowship. Dawn is a proud member of SDC.

**Playwrights Foundation, founded in 1976**, is today widely recognized as one of the top new play incubators in the U.S., dedicated to the creative development and career acceleration of diverse contemporary playwrights. Serving emerging and mid-career playwrights, from the Bay Area and around the country, PF has identified over 500 exceptional writers early in their careers and given them space, time and professional artistic collaborators to explore new theatrical ideas free from the pressures of the marketplace for over 40 years. Playwrights it has worked with have won every award in the theater including the Pulitzer, the Obie, the National Critics Circle Award, and many more. In 2017, on its 40th Anniversary, Playwrights Foundation was recognized with a Legacy Award for its substantial impact on the field. PF has received two Glickman Awards for best new play to premiere in the Bay Area through its Producing Partnership Initiative. Among the many PF-developed works that have premiered across the country, are Katori Hall's *The Mountaintop*, Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, Jihae Park's *Hannah and the Dread Gazebo*, Lauren Gunderson's *The Revolutionists*, Lauren Yee's *King of the Yees*, Bennett Fisher's *Damascus*, Mike Lew's *Teenage Dick*, and Mona Mansour's *We Swim, We Talk, We Go To War*, to name just a few.

**THE BAY AREA PLAYWRIGHTS FESTIVAL** is one of the oldest and most successful new play festivals for new works in their developmental stages in the US. Established in 1976 by Robert Woodruff, the festival has continuously discovered original and distinctive new voices in the theater, invested in the development of their work and launched their careers. Among the first crop of writers at the inaugural BAPF was the young Sam Shepard. Little did Woodruff know at that time how Shepard's work would shape the landscape of American theatre. Since then, over 500 prize winning, nationally significant playwrights got their first professional experiences at the BAPF. Examples include Pulitzer Prize winners Nilo Cruz and Annie Baker, MacArthur Award winners Anna Deavere Smith and Sam Hunter, recent Glickman award winners Peter Nachtrieb, Liz Duffy Adams, Aaron Loeb, Chris Chen, Lauren Yee, and Marcus Gardley, as well as the early development of works by David Henry Hwang, Paula Vogel, Claire Chafee and Anne Washburn. Additional playwrights include Katori Hall and Rajiv Joseph prior to their Broadway debuts and many others. The BAPF's ongoing success in discovering and supporting exceptional, newly emerging writers and launching their ground-breaking new work is its enduring legacy.

### **FESTIVAL AT A GLANCE**

**WHAT:** 2020 BAY AREA PLAYWRIGHTS FESTIVAL ([link](#))

**WHEN:** Friday, July 17 – Sunday, July 19 - Five play readings and special events  
Friday, July 24 – Sunday, July 26 - Five play readings and special events

**WHERE:** Vimeo

**TICKETS:** Sliding Scale tickets \$5-45 on sale NOW.

**INFO:** [playwrightsfoundation.org](http://playwrightsfoundation.org) 415-626-2176  
[www.facebook.com/playwrightsfoundation/](http://www.facebook.com/playwrightsfoundation/)

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