



**PLAYWRIGHTS FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES  
COHORT FOR  
46th BAY AREA PLAYWRIGHTS FESTIVAL  
April 12-21, 2024**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (July 27, 2023) —**Playwrights Foundation**, the West Coast’s premier launchpad for exceptional new plays and playwrights, has announced the playwright cohort for the **46th Bay Area Playwrights Festival (BAPF46)** which will be presented in a hybrid festival with in-person readings **April 12 - 21, 2024** in San Francisco and on-demand recordings released post festival. Selected from over 600 applicants via a committee process with 150 readers (the majority of whom are also playwrights), five exciting new voices writing powerful new plays will receive public readings and workshops in the 2024 festival. Tickets to attend or stream the readings, priced on a sliding scale, will be available in February 2024. For more information the public may visit [playwrightsfoundation.org](https://playwrightsfoundation.org) or call **415-626-2176**.

The playwrights for the 46th Bay Area Playwrights Festival are Native Hawaiian playwright **Noa Gardner**, California playwright and filmmaker **Alicia Kester**, Bay Area performer and playwright **Aidaa Peerzada**, Harlem playwright and performer **Nia Akilah Robinson**, and **Jason Tseng**, a playwright with roots in New York City and Washington DC.

The five stories explore **courageous acts of belonging** from Noa’s gut-wrenching bilingual drama exposing a loud silence within three generations of Hawaiian women; Alicia’s interactive exploration of the displacement of Black communities after a natural disaster; Aidaa’s bilingual speculative history in which a granddaughter discovers her mysterious family legacy in a colonized land; Nia’s poetic time bending journey across centuries of Black bodies being robbed from their graves; to Jason’s forbidden love story at a Christian camp where two boys of color find solace amidst a world threatening to tear them apart.

As previously announced, the **Bay Area Playwrights Festival** will shift from an annual festival to a biennial hybrid festival in order to deepen the support for the playwrights and expand the pre-festival program, allowing staff to be more intentional and responsive to each playwright’s needs and increase the amount of time, care, and resources dedicated to the program.

Playwrights will have multiple development steps months prior to the public festival including a 3 day in-person retreat with their director and dramaturg as well as an internal table reading with actors. This allows the playwright to work on their script with collaborators over the course of six months in different stages with the goal of having a stronger script for the public readings. In addition, playwrights will receive additional support through playwright cohort meetings, networking opportunities, and more engagement with staff prior to the festival.

BAPF46 is scheduled to welcome in-person audiences over two weekends in San Francisco, CA from April 12-21, 2024, presenting each play once on both weekends. Playwrights will have time to actively re-write and work on their scripts in between readings. Audiences get the opportunity to impact the playwrights' future changes and be at the cutting edge of the new play process. Building on the success of Playwrights Foundation's online engagement, on demand recordings of the second public readings will be released post-festival in mid-May, allowing audiences around the globe to experience exhilarating new work by emerging theater artists. Additional conversations and artistic events will be curated around the public readings for deeper engagement.

“We celebrate the 46th Bay Area Playwrights Festival's impactful legacy by going deeper than ever before with a longer timeline to give playwrights greater agency and more space for artistic growth, building relationships, and play development, which will lead to even more impactful storytelling, “ said Executive Artistic Director, **Jessica Bird Beza**, “We are honored to uplift this dynamic cohort of five playwrights who are exposing the soul's deepest joys, pains, and desires in these powerful narratives uplifting communities not often, or ever, depicted in the American Theatre.”

In addition to the BAPF46 cohort, Playwrights Foundation has selected twelve honorable mention playwrights from the Finalist list: *otou-san* by **Sean-Joseph Choo**; *Seven Hoshi* by **Lisa Sanaye Dring**; *Are We There Yet?* by **Jahna Ferron-Smith**; *Have to Believe We Are Magic* by **Sara Guerrero**; *Superposition: A Crawling Play in Two Parts* by **Hasti Jafari**; *A Form of Flattery* by **Melissa Leilani Larson**; *My Home on the Moon* by **Minna Lee**; *Balikkayan Box* by **Jeffrey Lo**; *Optional Boss Battle* by **Nick Malakhov**; *Nanay* by **Molly Olis-Krost**; *R&B* by **Phanésia Pharel**; and *Maybe the saddest thing* by **Harrison David Rivers**.

“These twelve Honorable Mention writers are exciting voices whose theatrical innovations and compelling stories excited our readers and are ready for a fast-track to production. ” says Literary Manager **Heather Helinsky**. “Honorable Mention writers are offered one-on-one literary consultation with staff and will be featured at the festival in a one night only event.”

**Bay Area Playwrights Festival** is one of the oldest and most successful new play festivals for new works in their early stages. Established in 1976 by acclaimed director Robert Woodruff and now led by Executive Artistic Director **Jessica Bird Beza**, the festival has built a stellar reputation for uplifting original and distinctive new voices in the theater, investing in the development of their work, and launching storied careers. Among the first writers developed at the inaugural BAPF was the young Sam Shepard. Since then, more than 500 prize-winning, nationally significant playwrights have received their first professional experience at the BAPF. Among the American theater's brightest voices who are alumni of the festival are Pulitzer Prize winners Sam Shepard, Nilo Cruz, Jackie Sibblies Drury, Paula Vogel, and Annie Baker; MacArthur Award winner Anna Deavere Smith; Tony Award winner David Henry Hwang; and acclaimed playwrights Lauren Gunderson, Rajiv Joseph, Katori Hall, Christopher Chen, Lauren Yee, and Marcus Gardley. BAPF's ongoing success in supporting and amplifying exceptional, newly emerging writers and launching their ground-breaking new work is its enduring legacy.

In Summer 2024, Playwrights Foundation will open new applications for playwrights wanting to be considered for the 47th Bay Area Playwrights Festival in 2026. Interested playwrights can check Playwrights Foundation’s website next April for more details on exact requirements and application deadlines.

**The Festival lineup is as follows:**

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## **Nan**

**By Noa Gardner**

Alice finds herself back in a place where she thought she would never return—home with her mother Nan, whom she has not spoken to in fourteen years. Unresolved tensions play out as Alice tries to raise her own teenage daughter while struggling to provide for the whole family. These three generations of Hawaiian women overcome the past and cultural dissonance between them while balancing a life-or-death decision that hangs over their heads.

**Noa Gardner** (he/him) is a Native Hawaiian playwright born and raised in Kaimuki on the island of O’ahu and a graduate of the MFA Dramatic Writing program at the University of Southern California. Noa is interested in presenting a body of work through his plays that speak to different facets of Hawaiian culture, presenting to an audience (sometimes for the very first time) a glimpse into the deep interior lives of Hawaiian people. Currently, Noa lives on O’ahu and is a student at the University of Hawai’i Mānoa seeking a second undergraduate degree in both Hawaiian Language and Hawaiian Studies. His day jobs include transcribing Hawaiian language tapes/interviews as well as working as an educational assistant at a Hawaiian language immersion school. He was a National Finalist for the Gary Garrison Ten Minute play award (2016), recipient of South Coast Repertory’s Elizabeth George commission (2021), a semi-finalist of the Eugene O’Neil (2021), and has had his one act and full-length plays read in collaboration with the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, the Son of Semele Ensemble, the Los Angeles Theatre Company, Artists at Play, and the Pasadena Playhouse.

## **Water Spirits**

**By Alicia Kester**

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Denise returns to her family home to find more than just her memories and belongings submerged beneath water. Her crisis is interwoven with Black ancestry, and history flits across the stage, exposing old and new vulnerabilities and perspectives. As Denise watches her community fall apart, she faces the threat of being displaced from a home that has nourished her family for generations. Can Denise stay rooted when everything seems to be slipping away?

**Alicia Kester** (she/her) is a Black, mixed-race playwright, poet, fiction writer, and filmmaker. She draws on both her Yoruba and Louisiana Creole heritages, as well as her queer, disabled, and first-generation identities to address themes of migration, familial constructs, tribalism, environmentalism, the physical and/or racialized

body, and current events. She often explores speculative genres, infusing magical realism, absurdism, or futurism within her writing. In 2021 she completed a residency with the CPH Queer Theatre Festival, where she wrote two short plays that were produced in Denmark. She has also completed residency programs with 3Girls Theatre and Monson Arts and has an upcoming residency with The Hambidge Center. She was a semifinalist for the Garry Marshall Theatre New Works Festival and the Eugene O’Neill Playwrights Conference. She is a former VONA scholar and a recipient of grant funding from the Center for Cultural Innovation, among others.

## **Children of the Wise**

**By Aidaa Peerzada**

When his anti-colonial activism lands him on a watch list, Rafi Peer is forced to flee British ruled India in 1919. Almost a century later, his American granddaughter returns to Rafi’s native land, now Pakistan, in search of meaning on a study abroad trip. Nadia discovers the truth of her Grandfather’s mysterious legacy, a family she’s never known, and comes closer to finding her own artistic purpose.

**Aidaa Peerzada** (she/her) grew up between the suburbs of Baltimore, Maryland and the suburbs of Lahore, Pakistan. She is interested in the phenomenon of erasure in popular history; her work focuses on reimagining cultural mythology to inform the present. Workshops of her original work include: SHINING, at The New Roots Theater Festival (SFBATCO) and Catalyst (C3T). ONE GOOGOL AND ONE with The San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Company. She co-wrote the book and story for the original musical SUNFLOWERED, which premiered at Northern Sky Theatre in 2022. Aidaa’s regional credits as an actor include Magic Theatre, Word for Word, Marin Theater Company, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, American Players Theatre, and Quantum Theatre. Aidaa is part of the creative staff at the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Co. Aidaa studied at the Baltimore School for the Arts and went on to receive her BFA in Drama from Carnegie Mellon University.

## **The Great Privation: How to flip ten cents into a dollar**

**By Nia Akilah Robinson**

Grave Robbing. Black Bodies. The Robbing of Black Bodies for medical research. Black Bodies commodified even after death... Missy Freeman and her daughter Charity try to protect their loved one’s soul from grave robbers who are stealing corpses for scientific advancement from a Black established church graveyard during the colder months of the nineteenth century. What will happen to the Philadelphian relatives in the twenty-first century around that same unmarked graveyard at night?

**Nia Akilah Robinson** (she/her) is a playwright and actor who reps Harlem with all her might. She is a graduating second year playwright at The Juilliard School. Nia has been awarded the 2023 Miranda Family Fund Commission, 48th OOB Festival, New York Stage & Film Artist-In-Residence, National Black Theatre Soul Series, Residency at The Pocantico Center through YoungArts, NYSCA Grant Awardee (CCCADI), Film

& TV Mentorship by Mitzi Miller (VP of Warner Bros. Entertainment). Nia is shortlisted for the 2023 Theatre503's International Playwriting Award. Her work has been seen and developed with The Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep, GPTC, SPACE on Ryder Farm, EST, Waterwell, Classical Theater of Harlem, Urbanite, and New Georges. She has been a MacDowell & Travis Bogard Eugene O'Neill Foundation Fellow. She was a finalist for the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, Blue Ink Playwriting Award, and NYTW 2050 Artistic Fellowship. She is a member or alumna of EST's Youngblood, I-73 at Page 73, The Orchard Project, The Wish Collective, and TheBlackHERthePen. <https://www.niaakilahrobinson.com>

## **Fear & Wonder**

**By Jason Tseng**

In a forbidden love story, Jabez and Ryan, two boys of color, navigate a Christian summer camp together in the early 2000s. Their friendship quickly grows into a budding romance that they try to keep alive after returning home. Challenged by their parents, the hazards of landline phones, and their faith, they are forced to secrecy. Finding solace in each other and their shared love of Harry Potter, the reality of their two worlds threaten to keep them apart as the feelings of otherness and teenage angst plague them.

**Jason Tseng** (they/them/ta) is a queer, non-binary Chinese-American playwright based in New York City, originally hailing from the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Their plays have been presented and developed by Flux Theatre Ensemble, Judson Arts, Mission to dit(Mars), Theatre COTE, Inkubator Arts, Second Generation, Downtown Urban Arts Festival, LA Queer New Works Festival, BIPOC Playwrights Festival at Boise Contemporary Theater. They are a Creative Partner of Flux Theatre Ensemble, a member of The Civilians's 2019/2020 R&D Group, a member of Mission to dit(Mars)'s Propulsion Lab, and their plays have been honored as a Finalist and Semi-Finalist at The Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Semi-finalists for the New American Voices Playwrights Festival and the Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. Jason's full-length plays include Rizing (World Premier, Flux Theatre Ensemble), Like Father, Same Same, Ghost Money, Fear and Wonder, and The Other Side. [www.jasontseng.co](http://www.jasontseng.co)

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**PHOTOS:** Downloadable high-res photos are available here:  
<https://playwrightsfoundation.org/about/press-room/>