

On June 24, 2019 PlayPenn invited J.T. Rogers and Ayad Akhtar to Philadelphia to cover everything from the nitty-gritty of playwriting to broader questions about the American and world theatre.

Below is a transcript of their conversation.

**Paul Meshejian:** So I'm going to give you a short, well not so short, bio for these two accomplished-

**J.T. Rogers:** Already, you're starting it.

**Paul Meshejian:** Already I'm starting. First of all, it should be noted that we share the same hairstyle. That is the whole reason. So Ayad Akhtar is the author of the play *Junk*, which is recently seen at Lincoln Center Broadway and it was ... The play was the winner of the 2018 Kennedy Prize for American Drama; also *Disgraced*, also seen at Lincoln Center Broadway. He had won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and received the Tony nomination for best play, *The Who and the What*, and *The Invisible Hand*, which won the Obie Award, the Outer Critic Circle Award, John Gassner Award and the Olivier and Evening Standard nominations.

**Paul Meshejian:** As a novelist, Ayad is the author of *American Dervish*, published in over 20 languages. He's the recipient of an award in literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the 2017 Steinberg Playwriting Award, the 2017 Edward Kennedy Award, as well as fellowships from the American Academy in Rome and McDowell Colony and the Sundance Institute, Ucross and Yaddo, where he serves as a board director. He's also a board trustee at PEN/America and at the New York Theater workshop.

**Ayad Akhtar:** Phew.

**Paul Meshejian:** Don't worry, it's competitive.

**J.T. Rogers:** Why couldn't I go first? It's unfair.

**Paul Meshejian:** Alphabetical order, my friends. JT Rogers' plays include *Oslo*, seen at Lincoln Center Theater then Broadway, the National Theater of London, the West End, and in productions internationally. *Blood and Gifts*, also at Lincoln Center and the National Theater in London, *The Overwhelming*, the National Theater, a UK tour and at the Roundabout Theater, I might add, all of which plays were developed here at PlayPenn. Also, *White People* Off Broadway and *Madagascar* in both the US and London. For *Oslo*, he won the Tony, the New York Critics Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, Drama Desk, Drama League, Lortel and Obie Awards and was nominated for the Olivier and Evening Standard Awards. They have that in common.

**Paul Meshejian:** His works have been staged throughout the United States and around the world. His essays have been published in the New York Times, The Guardian, and the New



































































**J.T. Rogers:** Champion of the young.

**Michele Volansky:** Paul, do you want to say anything?

**Paul Meshejian:** Only to thank our guests for this exhaustive conversation. Not exhausting, exhaustive. You're wonderful to sit down and talk with us. Your ideas are clear, articulate, stimulating, provocative. We appreciate your coming. Thank you.

**Michele Volansky:** We have another hour or so in the lobby-

**Paul Meshejian:** We have some wine and-

**Michele Volansky:** Beer and seltzer. Come and chat a little bit more.