



PlayPenn Proudly Announces Six Finalists for its New Play Development Conference; Conference to include four additional readings by graduating members of The Foundry

A new submission and play selection process leads to greater equity, diversity, and inclusion of plays and playwrights selected as the artist-driven nonprofit continues to transform

Philadelphia, PA (June 2, 2022) -- After a new rigorous play submission and selection process, [PlayPenn](#) today announced the final six plays and playwrights that will be featured at the nonprofit organization's restructured annual [Conference](#). The three-week conference will be hosted at The Drake in Philadelphia between July 5 and July 24.

Following are the synopses of each of the six selected plays and information about the playwrights.

1. ***The Pigeon* by Brie Knight** - Nina, Constantine, Irina, and Trigorin may all be familiar characters to you. They live eternally dissatisfied with their lives. But in this new dark comedy we find the characters in an adjacent universe in the middle of the apocalypse. With the world threatening to break open, will they finally fulfill their desires? Or will happiness once again escape them when they are sucked into a black hole?

Brie Knight (she/her) is an African-American playwright based in Philly. She is a graduate of The Foundry and an award-winning playwright whose works have been featured at InterAct Theatre, Eagle Theatre, The Philadelphia Women's Theatre Festival, and universities and festivals around the country.

2. ***Gente Del Sol* by Santiago Tonauc Castro** - Valeria and Leonardo are at a crossroads. Leonardo, afraid of losing his relationship, seeks professional help. Unsatisfied with western medicine, Leonardo seeks a second opinion from someone that can speak to Mexican culture and indigenous practices. Valeria does not feel capable of leaving Leonardo in his time of need but finds herself falling for Fern. This new play uses magical realism to explore the intricacies of personal identity, sexuality, and transracial relationships.

Santiago Tonauc Castro (he/him) is an Indigenous and Latinx queer trans playwright based in Philly. He was a finalist with YoungArts Foundation, was a writer for the Kimmel Center's *Songs We Left Behind*, and is a published poet with *Toho Journal*, *Tilted House*, and *Queerbook*.

3. ***Fat Muslim Girls* by Ken Kaissar** - In this drama risqué, photographs of female college students are found in the desk of Edgar, a college professor, at fictional McCabe University. His colleague, Dr. Diane Patterson, becomes the self-appointed seeker of justice for Zayna, a female student who took and shared the photographs of herself and her friends. Diane writes letters and gives interviews to keep the story alive, but she fails to take two major details into account: all of the photographed students

are overweight, and all are of Middle-Eastern descent. The public becomes less concerned with justice for one student, and more concerned with body shaming and threats of global terrorism.

Ken Kaissar (he/him) is an Israeli-American playwright based in Philly. He has had plays produced or developed by Philadelphia Theatre Company, Delaware Theatre Company, Phoenix Theatre Company, Fusion Theatre Company, Jewish Repertory Theatre, Urban Stages, and Passage Theatre.

4. ***All the Emilies in all The Universes* by Ian August** - This world bending drama takes us on a journey with Emilie and Jeff, a couple struggling with the devastating loss of their stillborn child. Emilie exists in four parallel timelines. But when an unexpected bend in the space/time continuum brings these four grieving Emilies together, they realize that infinite possible realities means that somewhere, "somewhen," their lost son was born alive. The four Emilies vow to travel through infinite dimensions, risking permanent erasure from the multiverse, to find the baby boy they thought they'd lost forever. *All the Emilies in All the Universes* is a play about coping with grief, the act of pursuing self-acceptance, and finding the truth hidden in yourself in the ever-expanding multiverse around you.

Ian August (he/him) is a queer Caucasian playwright based in Philly. He is a graduate of The Foundry and his play *Brisé* was a selection at the Great Plains Theater Conference, a Finalist at the 2019 Seven Devils Playwrights Congerence, and a Finalist at the 2020 Lark Playwrights week.

***Goddess at The Lucky Lady Motel* by Nimisha Ladva** - After a death in the family, Mummy-ji, a first generation South Asian immigrant, and her son, Ravi, clash over almost everything. Most of all, they are at odds over two things: Ravi's wish to marry Seema, a Ph.D. candidate from a different caste, and how to keep their family's motel business afloat. Can Mummy-ji confront her own caste bigotry and misogyny to make amends with her son or will she lose everything she has loved? Ladva's play explores whether the generational divide can ever be broached—even by the Goddess.

Nimisha Ladva (she/her) is a South Asian playwright based in Philly. She is a current member of The Foundry. An excerpt of her play was selected by Bechdel Group, and she was selected for the Kennedy center Playwriting Intensive. She was a finalist for the 2022 Red Bull Short Play Festival, and SPACE at Ryder Farm.

5. ***Whispers of My Sister* by Stephanie Kyung Sun Walters** - Something's not right with Yoon-Ah. The normally indomitable matriarch has been jumping at shadows and blurring memories from Korean burial grounds with her suburban American kitchen. Her daughters are convinced it's all in Yoon-Ah's head—until a figure materializes in the light of the refrigerator. Who will see the ghosts of the past? And how long will the ghosts stay? 2022 McNally Award winner Stephanie Kyung Sun Walters explores the impact of inherited trauma within immigrant families. Through magical realism the past meets the present, as two generations of sisters attempt to reconcile the past by meeting the past head on.

Stephanie Kyung Sun Walters (she/her) is a Korean-American playwright based in Philly. She is a graduate of The Foundry and is the 2022 Philadelphia Theatre Company Terrence McNally Award Recipient. She's a recent alumna of InterAct Theatre Core Playwright, a current American Theatre Group PlayLab artist, and serves as the Lead Artist on the Philly Asian Performing Artists' Playwrights Project.

There will be four additional readings at the Conference by graduating members of [The Foundry](#). Those playwrights include: Carl(os) Roa (they/them), Geo Decas O'Donnell (he/they), Kevin Esmond (he/him), and Julie Zaffarano (she/her).

PlayPenn brings back its renowned Conference for playwrights after the directors and additional Conference advisors re-worked its parameters for the application and selection process.

The changes took place under the leadership of PlayPenn's [new artistic director, Che'Rae Adams](#) (she/her), and its two new associate artistic directors, [Susan Dalian](#) (she/her) and [Santiago Iacinti](#) (they/them).

"A big change this year is our blind submission policy that was altered to pave a way for equity, diversity, and inclusion," said Adams. "As an organization, we value the multiplicity of voices in our community and believe the collaborative process of storytelling deepens connections and communal understanding in ways that enrich us all."

Adams said the new PlayPenn staff, advisors, and board members have worked hard to remove all inequitable barriers that have historically prevented people from fully engaging in the process.

As the Conference was re-introduced this year, [the submission process](#) was only open to writers who were born and/or raised in Philadelphia, who were educated here, or who at any time had an address within a thirty-mile radius of the city.

Another element added to the review process was to match the demographics of the playwrights with the demographics of the readers. The Artistic Staff felt that this would give the plays the best possible chance of advancing to the next round. All readings were blind until the final round.

The six finalists have been invited to develop their plays through in-depth workshops with directors, actors, dramaturgs, and interns, as part of the Conference. Over the course of the three-week period, two public readings of each play will be presented to the public free of charge. Ticket information for the Conference will be available soon at the [PlayPenn website](#).

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About PlayPenn

PlayPenn is a Philadelphia artist-driven organization dedicated to the development of new plays and playwrights. PlayPenn fully supports the needs of the writer and the demands of the play in an ever-evolving process within which playwrights can engage in risk-taking, boundary-pushing work. To learn more about PlayPenn, its leadership, and the New Play Development Conference, please visit playpenn.org.

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