

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Anthony King

May 03, 2018



From the 2017 Wagner New Play Festival production of "(w)holeness," written by Lily Padilla. Photo by Jim Carmody.

Wagner New Play Festival Showcases Top-Notch Student Work

Annual Department of Theatre and Dance event gives opportunity to all, from MFA playwrights and faculty to undergraduate actors, designers and assistants

With five different productions running May 8 to 19, the 2018 Wagner New Play Festival offers a unique look at the talent and power of UC San Diego graduate student playwrights.

And while each play is written exclusively by students, the festival displays the depth and strength of nearly the entire Department of Theatre and Dance. With several faculty members directing and producing, the MFA playwrights work hand in hand with graduate students in acting, directing and stage management, as well as costume, lighting, sound and scenic design.

The full-scale productions also feature undergraduate students, this year participating in the festival as actors, lighting designers, stage managers, production assistants and assistant directors. It is an all-encompassing, student-driven experience that has become an annual tradition for UC San Diego and the region.

“The Wagner New Play Festival gives our MFA playwriting students an incredible opportunity to not only showcase their stories, but to work closely with an entire team of collaborators who are committed to producing a groundbreaking festival for San Diego and the region,” said department chair Charles Means.

“What’s more, having faculty, guest artists and graduate students work closely with our undergraduates so intensely provides them invaluable exposure to theater production and the collaborative process essential to any field of study,” he said.

Renamed the Wagner New Play Festival in 2013 in recognition of the generosity of Arthur and Molli Wagner, the festival is a major draw for students to the playwriting program because it provides opportunity to develop and produce original work. Plays premiering at the festival often go on to win awards and be produced by theater companies in major cities around the world.

“There’s no other graduate program like it in the country, and that’s because of this new play festival,” 2017 MFA graduate Will Snider said of UC San Diego. His play “How to Use a Knife” premiered at the 2016 festival and then won the Barrymore Award for Outstanding New Play, among other honors.

The 2018 festival plays will run in repertory over the 11 days, meaning they will be produced on the same stages in UC San Diego’s Joan and Irwin Jacobs Theatre District on a rotating schedule. This gives guests the opportunity to see every single production over a short period of time—for example, theater industry leaders from across the United States will be on campus for three days to watch each play, lead seminars and meet individually with students.

Tickets for the 2018 Wagner New Play Festival are available from the [Department of Theatre and Dance](#), with discounted pricing for UC San Diego students.



From left, Claire Roberson and Mike Sears in the 2017 Wagner New Play Festival production of “Birds of North America,” written by Anna Moench. Photo by Manuel Rotenberg.

53% Of

Written by MFA student Steph Del Rosso

Directed by professor Jennifer Chang

Opening night: Tuesday, May 8

The president is coming to town, and the ladies of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania are beside themselves planning for the big event. Later, their husbands drink beer and talk smack. Much later, a group of 20-somethings gather in Brooklyn to plan a fundraiser... or is it a march? Or is it a ritual to absolve their own guilt? A play about complicity and the violence of the status quo, "53% Of" asks what happens when we stop equating white womanhood with goodness, and ignorance with innocence.

Mothers

Written by MFA student Anna Moench

Directed by Bea Basso

Opening night: Wednesday, May 9

Three moms, a stay-at-home dad and a nanny watch their kids play at Mommy-Baby Meetup. One mom is the queen bee and one is here to shake things up. The dad just wants to fit in, and the nanny doesn't say a word. When catastrophe comes, the five of them have to figure out how to survive a war and each other. "Mothers" examines the primal heartache of raising children in a disintegrating world.

SERE

Written by MFA student Ava Geyer

Directed by MFA student Dylan Key

Opening night: Thursday, May 10

When you're on SEAL Team 5 and a new guy joins your fire team, you invite him over for dinner. That's just what you do. But what if his wife shows up splattered in artichoke dip and doesn't seem to know when to shut up? It's T-minus two months to deployment, so you better hope this dude's chaos will clear itself up once real trouble hits. "SERE" (aka Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape) asks what it means to be a soldier in today's America and what it means to love one.

How to Defend Yourself

Written by MFA student Lily Padilla

Directed by professor Kim Rubinstein

Opening night: Friday, May 11

Seven college students gather for a DIY self-defense workshop after a sorority sister is raped. They learn to use their bodies as weapons. They learn to fend off attackers. They learn "not to be a victim." Learning self-defense becomes a channel for their rage, anxiety, confusion, trauma and desire—lots of desire. "How to Defend Yourself" explore what you want, how to ask for it and the insidious ways rape culture steals one's body and sense of belonging.

MFA One Acts

“Tambo and Bones”

Written by MFA student Dave Harris

Directed by MFA student Joseph Hendel

“The Clitorish”

Written by MFA student Mara Nelson-Greenberg

Directed by MFA student Nicholas Rapp

“Joshua”

Written by MFA student Ali Viterbi

Directed by professor Vanessa Stalling

Opening night: Saturday, May 12

“Tambo and Bones” interrogates the intersection of race and capitalism, and the connection between pain, profit and audience. “The Clitorish” explores “truthiness,” vaginas and how certain people manage to dictate the rules of the world. “Joshua” looks at that moment in time where life moves us from a place of youth and innocence into the place that will shape our adult selves.

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*