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Three UC San Diego Playwrights to Receive World Premieres at Prestigious Humana New Play Festival

The satire “Everybody Black” by current MFA student Dave Harris will simultaneously be staged at UC San Diego during the 2018 – 2019 season



Dave Harris' “Everybody Black” will be the first production with an all-Black cast to be staged at UC San Diego. “Everybody Black” will receive its world premiere at the 2019 Humana Festival of New American Plays. (Courtesy Dave Harris)

Three new works selected for this year’s prestigious Humana Festival of New American Plays were written by University of California San Diego playwrights, marking the first time three UC San Diego MFA students and alumni have had their work featured simultaneously.

Work by Department of Theatre and Dance alumni Emily Feldman ‘16 and Lily Padilla ‘18, and current MFA student Dave Harris are each featured. All three productions will be receiving their world premieres at the 43rd annual festival, organized by Actors Theatre

of Louisville and taking place March 1 – April 7 in Louisville, Ky.

“Being selected for the Humana Festival is an honor for any playwright, and having three UC San Diego students and alumni chosen in one year is a spectacular feat,” said Department of Theatre and Dance chair and playwright Allan Havis. “Their participation is a testament to both their hard work and talent, as well as our department’s dedication to nurturing and supporting up-and-coming artists.”

The world-renowned festival has historically introduced more than 450 plays to the public, and UC San Diego playwrights have been well represented. Last year, Department of Theatre and Dance playwriting professor Deborah Stein and MFA student Mara Nelson-Greenberg each had work selected. The 2018 festival was attended by more than 38,000 people from 41 states and 52 colleges and universities.

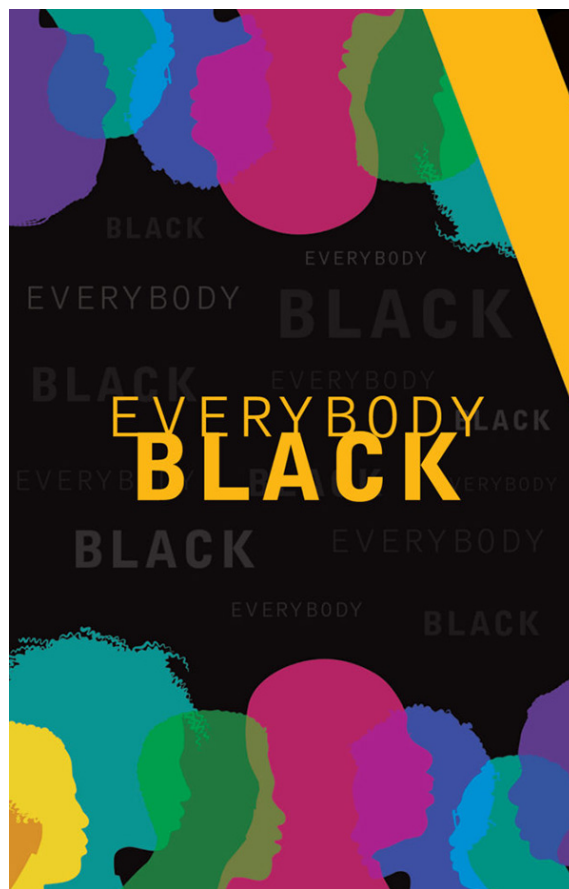
As a second-year MFA playwriting student, Harris said he was excited his first world premiere will take place at the Humana Festival. “Everybody Black” runs March 19 – April 7, and Harris said he can’t wait for the “massive” play — with nearly 40 characters, including Barack Obama and Aunt Jemima, as well as a full television sitcom, musical number and rap battle — to fill the 600-seat theater in Louisville.

“The play is all about storytelling, and how truth and capitalism intersect in the creation of history,” Harris said, surprised that this, of all his work, was selected. “It was a liberating play to write because it required me to delve into why I write plays, and how theater, power and racial hierarchy affect my desire to write. I’m interested in the comedy of violent forces, and I think this piece is less about the world as we know it and more about seeing where imaginations can take us.”

A UC San Diego staging will run simultaneously on campus, opening March 8 as the annual Quinn Martin production of the Department of Theatre and Dance 2018 – 2019 season.

One of the first productions in recent years with an all-Black cast to be staged at UC San Diego, Harris said “Everybody Black” pits history against the present “in hilarious and explosive ways.” It’s a satire that examines race, capitalism, identity and Black trauma through the imagination of a mad man, exploring how we chronicle and make sense of Black history.

“That structure [of the play] ended up influencing how I think about history,” Harris said. “Everything is a mess, but everything is also just a story, a construction. So for me, in the intense pressure and chaos of writing this play, there also came a freedom and clarity.



“Everybody Black,” March 19 – April 7, 2019 at the Humana Festival of New American Plays (Courtesy Actors Theatre of Louisville)



From left, MFA actors Michael Rishawn and Xavier Clark in “Tambo & Bones,” written by Dave Harris and staged at the 2018 UC San Diego Wagner New Play Festival. (Photo by Manuel Rotenberg)

“I was able to look at myself, my history, my relationships, the canon, and see that despite everything that has tried to stop us from laughing, from loving, from being selfish [and] from making mistakes, despite all of that, somehow we're still alive.”

A poet and playwright from Philadelphia, Harris is a member of The Working Farm at SPACE on Ryder Farm, both a Cave Canem and Callaloo poetry fellow, and the 2018 winner of The Rattle Poetry Prize. His first poetry collection, “Patricide,” will be published in May and, at UC San Diego, his most-recent work “Tambo & Bones” was staged during the 2018 Wagner New Play Festival.

“Everybody Black” was first written and workshopped in class during Winter Quarter 2018 with Department of Theatre and Dance head of playwriting Naomi Iizuka, Havis and Stein. Harris — who said he had four days to write the first draft — said he was grateful for the faculty members’

insight, as well as the support of his playwriting student cohort. Nelson-Greenberg, whose comedy “Do you Feel Anger?” was in the 2018 Humana Festival, is also a second-year playwriting student.

“This play wouldn't have been possible without the advocacy and talent of the Black actors here at UC San Diego,” he said, “and the advocacy of Naomi Iizuka.”

Also featured in the 2018 Wagner New Play Festival, Padilla’s “How to Defend Yourself” was developed under the mentorship of Iizuka, Havis and Stein, and director Kim Rubinstein. Originating with UC San Diego graduate and undergraduate actors and designers, “How to Defend Yourself” was further developed in the 2018 IGNITION New Play Festival at Victory Gardens Theater and the 2018 Ojai Playwrights Conference.



Lily Padilla's "How to Defend Yourself" was developed at UC San Diego with Theatre and Dance actors and designers. (Photo by Jim Carmody)

"I'm so grateful to the UC San Diego community for helping me give birth to this play," Padilla said. The alumna is a finalist for the [2019 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize](#) for this work, awarded annually to recognize women who have written works of outstanding quality. Fellow playwriting alumna Lauren Yee '12 is also a 2019 finalist, for her play "Cambodian Rock Band."

"I'm grateful for the wise, close mentorship of my faculty, the notes and support from my cohort of playwrights, and to the brilliance and bravery of Kim Rubinstein and the cast and crew of 'How to Defend Yourself,' who made the play what it is," Padilla said.

At the Humana Festival, "How to Defend Yourself" runs March 13 – April 7. The play examines the impact of rape culture on campus and beyond.

Feldman's co-written play "[We've Come to Believe](#)" opens the festival Feb. 24 and was commissioned by Actors Theatre of Louisville for their 2018 – 2019 Professional Training Company. A 2016 graduate from UC San Diego, Feldman is currently a member of Interstate 73 at Page 73, The Orchard Project NYC Greenhouse and Two River Theater's Emerging Playwrights Group, and is working on new commissions from Manhattan Theatre Club, Playwrights Horizons and Arena Stage.

The Humana Festival of New American Plays is underwritten by the Humana Foundation, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts and Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust. The annual festival has made a significant impact on the national theater landscape, and is recognized as a crucial incubator and launching pad for groundbreaking, new work, festival organizers said.

First held in spring 1977, the 2019 six-week festival will include a weekend of enrichment events for college students, and multiple weekends featuring staged productions, panel discussions and networking opportunities. Learn more about Harris, Padilla and Feldman's participation in the [2019 Humana Festival of New American Plays](#).

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