

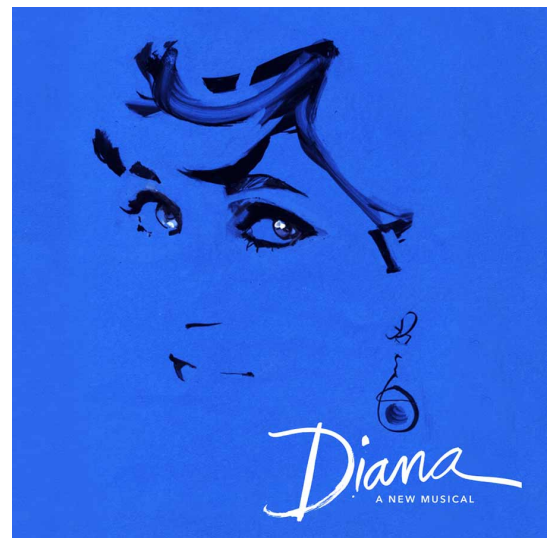
By Anthony King      Feb 21, 2019

## Theatre and Dance Students Gain Real-World Experience on New La Jolla Playhouse Musical, ‘Diana’

**In addition to ensemble roles for three MFA actors, sound designer Stephen Jensen and stage manager Tyler Larson work diligently to bring production to life**

The highly anticipated world-premiere musical “Diana” began previews at La Jolla Playhouse Feb. 19, and joining the award-winning cast and crew on the production are five MFA students from the UC San Diego Department of Theatre and Dance — both on stage and behind the scenes.

Ensemble actors for “Diana” include third-year students Nicole Javier, Allyn Anthony Moriyon and Enrico Nassi. Tyler Larson, a second-year stage management student, is working with stage manager Martha Donaldson. Stephen Jensen, a second-year student in sound design, is assisting Gareth Owen, who led sound design for Broadway’s “Come From Away.”



*“Diana” runs Feb. 19 – April 7. (Courtesy La Jolla Playhouse)*

“The relationship with La Jolla Playhouse is strengthened by these key opportunities for our students and we are grateful for the continued support of the Playhouse creative and administrative staff who not only recognize the intelligence and skill of our students, but who take chances on up-and-coming artists, designers and theater professionals,” said Allan Havis, Department of Theatre and Dance chair. “I look forward to seeing their efforts come to life on stage with the rest of San Diego.”

Directed by Christopher Ashley, “Diana” is the story of Diana Spencer, the assistant kindergarten teacher who, in 1981, married the Prince of Wales and overnight became one of the most famous women in the world. The Playhouse notes: Facing an entrenched monarchy and unprecedented media scrutiny, Princess Diana surprises everyone — including herself — as she grows into a global phenomenon and manages to change the world.

The extended production runs through April 7, and features a sweeping contemporary score.



*The full “Diana” cast and crew, including five UC San Diego students, outside the Mandel Weiss Theatre on Feb. 9. (Photo by Jim Carmody/ Courtesy La Jolla Playhouse)*

Stephen Jensen is a second-year MFA student in sound design, helping to bring that score, and more, to life. A Bay-area native, he received his BFA in sound design for theater from University of Southern California, where credits include “Evita,” “Angels in America” and “Antigone X,” among others. He won the Richard M Spencer Memorial Award for design in 2017, and the Aileen Stanley Memorial Award for design in 2016.

Jensen said his work on “Diana” to date has included traveling to New York City to help put together the sound system for the production before it was sent to La Jolla. At that time, he worked closely with Matt Peploe of Gareth Owen Sound, and Playhouse sound supervisor Lane Elms. As the show has taken shape in technical rehearsals, Jensen works for the production’s sound designer Owen, as well as Peploe.

“This experience is a great opportunity to meet some of the best in musical theater,” Jensen said. “It also gives me a chance to get hands on experience with gear that is normally [beyond] budget and scale for UC San Diego productions.”

At UC San Diego, Jensen was designer for the 2018 production of “A Raisin in the Sun.” Expanding his experience, he also served as the sound design intern for American Repertory Theater’s pre-Broadway production of “Jagged Little Pill,” the Alanis Morissette-led musical that will receive its Broadway debut fall 2019. An incredible experience, Jensen said it was the largest new production he had ever worked on at the time.

“Both Gareth Owen, the sound designer for ‘Diana,’ and Jonathan Deans, the sound designer for ‘Jagged Little Pill,’ are consistently driving the technologies of sound design forward,” Jensen said. “It is interesting to see how they work with their partners in the industry to get the tools they need, and how they develop their own tools for the job. They work with different companies and have different approaches to design, so the custom tools and hardware they are asking for are very different.”



*From left, actors Janet Fiki and Kimberly Monks in the 2018 production “A Raisin in the Sun.” MFA student Stephen Jensen was sound designer on the show. (Photo by Manuel Rotenberg)*

Tyler Larson is a second-year MFA student in stage management who earned his BFA from Texas State University. UC San Diego credits include “Strange Men,” part of the 2017 Wagner New Play Festival, and the assistant role for “Waiting for Godot” and “Vieux Carre.”

He is currently doing his residency on “Diana,” where he has been responsible for maintaining and managing the script through the rehearsal process. Working directly with the stage management team, he has also collaborated with the directing team, the writing and music teams, and the cast, as well as the prop, wardrobe and deck crews.



*Center, Enrico Nassi in the 2018 production of “Othello.” Nicole Javier and Allyn Anthony Moriyon were also in the production, and all three appear in “Diana.”  
(Photo by Manuel Rotenberg)*

“Due to the real world application, this experience is deeply valuable to me,” Larson said. “The academic environment mirrors professional practices as best as they can, so to be able to get this first-hand experience with the process is amazing.” Mandisa Reed, a 2017 MFA graduate in stage management, is also working on “Diana.”

The stage management curriculum in the Department of Theatre and Dance embraces the practical and theoretical, acknowledging that the most fertile ground for learning is where the two intersect. Professor Lisa Porter, head of the stage management area, said she shows students how to set intentions and goals that

allow the cultivation of a supportive space for creative collaboration.

“The tools they learn in the classroom give these students strategies to use in real-world productions and environments,” Porter said. “La Jolla Playhouse productions give the students the opportunity to put complex skills to work and help them gain insight into the professional world of a stage manager.”

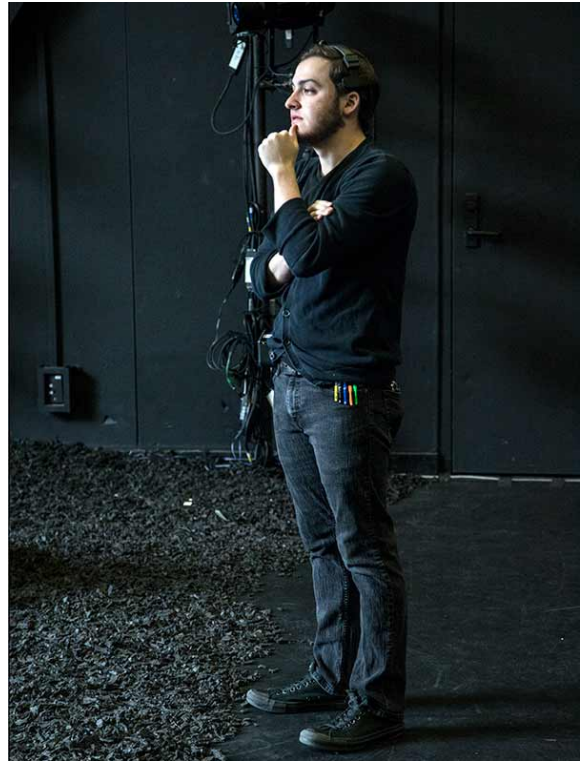
MFA actor Javier agreed, saying working on “Diana” feels like a “launching pad,” showing what a career could be after graduation. “Being a part of ‘Diana’ has given me the opportunity to learn the stamina — both mental and physical — in producing a new musical,” she said. All three actors in the production will graduate in June.

“Working on Diana is a process where — from the creative team through all the members of the cast — you’re confronted with two simple questions: How did they make something so beautiful and what can I learn from what I just saw?” Nassi said, whose UC San Diego credits include “Baby Teeth,” “Othello” and “The Clitorish,” at the 2018 Wagner New Play Festival.

With choreography by Kelly Devine and the writers behind the Tony Award-winning musical “Memphis” — Joe DiPietro and David Bryan — “Diana” stars Jeanna de Waal (Broadway’s “Kinky Boots,” “American Idiot”) in the role of Diana, with Erin Davie (Playhouse/Broadway’s “Side Show”) as Camilla Parker Bowles, Roe Hartrampf (Off-Broadway’s “Bad Guys”) as Prince Charles and Tony Award-winner Judy Kaye (Broadway’s “The Phantom of the Opera”) as Queen Elizabeth.

“What a gift to have assembled such an extraordinary cast and creative team to launch this new musical,” Ashley said. “I can’t think of a better way to wrap up our season than with Joe and David’s stunning work about a truly remarkable woman.”

The La Jolla Playhouse production of “Diana” runs Feb. 19 – April 7. For ticketing information, visit [La Jolla Playhouse](#).



*MFA student Tyler Larson served as the assistant stage manager for the 2017 production “Waiting for Godot.” (Photo by Manuel Rotenberg)*

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