What Is Core Playwrights?

Core Playwrights is a two-year incubator for four local playwrights to hone their skills and raise their profile. Our 2020-21 Class began their incubation in January. By March, the pandemic had rendered in-person collaboration impossible, and put an emotional and logistical chokehold on the arts. Nevertheless, our writers have met over Zoom monthly and sometimes twice-monthly, tenaciously bringing in new work and lifting each others’ work up.

Up Next at InterAct

In 2021, InterAct will stream free virtual presentations of the shows we had to postpone last season due to COVID.

Steal Her Bones by Thomas Gibbons: A tender meditation on loss, legacy and the conflict between faith and reason. After the death of her wife Diana – a renowned scientist and lifelong atheist – reclusive artist Ellen must choose whether to grieve in private or to engage in a public battle with a theologian who claims Diana accepted the existence of God in her final days. Streaming February 2021.

The Niceties by Eleanor Burgess: A “blisteringly smart” (Boston Globe) drama. Zoe, a Black college student, and her white history professor Janine square off over the role slavery played in the American Revolution. Heightened by protests and a social media frenzy, their taut and timely debate careens out of control and threatens to derail their careers and their lives. Streaming April 2021.

Stay In Touch

Visit https://www.interacttheatre.org/202021-season
**settle down by Briyana D. Clarel**  
Friday, December 18, 7 PM

Directed by: Katrina Shobe  
Featuring: Ciera Gardner, Danielle Leneé, Kishia Nixon & Dezi Tibbs  
Stage Directions: Danielle Coates

**Interview with the Playwright**

**What is your favorite kind of theatre?**

My favorite kind of theatre is very Black and very queer and musical and moving and hopeful. I love Musical Theatre™ and plays with music and movement. I love watching theatre that make me wish I were up onstage with the cast because they’re having such a good time. I love shows that make it safe for me to feel.

**Where did settle down come from?**

This play emerged from a tangle of my thoughts and emotions earlier this year, as I started writing this early in quarantine during a playwriting workshop. While this piece began as a retelling or a reimagined version of my experience of being investigated for racism in grad school, it evolved to be about chosen family, collective care, and honesty. It comes from my desire to see stories where we get to love and support each other through mess. I wanted to create an experience where the actors and the audience both get to slow down and be tender with one another.

You **challenge the characters of settle down to confront their problems by actively listening to each other instead of the way one might expect, centering each other instead of displaying trauma.**

**What led you to structure conflict in that way?**

I wanted this play to be a solution, something healing and helpful. I didn’t want to take people on a rollercoaster of upsetting conflict. There’s tension and there are arguments, but the focus is on how the moments where the characters slow down and show care toward one another. The conflict that launches the play is less central to highlight on how the characters cope and evolve. The characters and their relationships are more important than whatever institutional nonsense is going on. Theatre provides an opportunity to experiment with new possibilities and dream up new ways of living. I make art that helps us learn to love each other better, and I think this play does that.

**There’s a lot of food in settle down: your characters make food for each other, give food as gifts, or bond over treats. What is the significance of food in your work?**

I include food in a lot of my work because I love it. Food is real. It’s a necessity. It’s grounding. It’s also culture, emotion, and memory. It’s sensory, even if we can’t taste or smell the actual food. It reveals a lot about a person. Are they patient enough to cook a complicated dish? Do they follow recipes exactly or make it up as they go? Do they hate beets because of a traumatic incident? Also, as an actor I like getting to eat snacks on stage.

**What do you want people to take away from this play?**

I hope people (virtually) leave this play feeling motivated to show up for someone, including themselves. I hope people leave with smiles and warm fuzzy feelings. I also hope people are able to see themselves in this piece. I know a lot of queer people are over “coming out” stories, but there are still so many stories of coming into queerness that need to be shared. This is one of them.

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**Briyana D. Clarel** is a Black queer writer, performer, and educator passionate about musical theatre, mangoes, and memoirs. Briyana is the founder of The Starfruit Project, a platform supporting radical healing and brilliant growth through creativity. They are the Creative Nonfiction Editor for Homology Lit, a member of the sketch comedy teams The Rhubarbs and Mural Outrage, and a member of Ring of Keys. Briyana's writing is published in TAYO Literary Magazine, cavity, Black Youth Project, MELANINzine, and print anthologies. As a director, performer, and playwright, they have brought stories to life with the Painted Bride Art Center, OUTsider Festival, Shoe Box Theatre Collective, Cohen New Works Festival, Philly Improv Theater, Theatre Evolve, Dixon Place, Broad Views on Broadway, The Bridge PHL, Cabernet Cabaret ATX, Philly Free Fringe, Aroma Theatre Collective, and more. They are a 2016 recipient of the Acts of Greatness LGBTQ Youth Community Award and a 2018 ASTEP Artist as Citizen Fellow. Born and raised in South Jersey, they hold a BA in Sociology from Princeton University. They love blueberry pancakes, colorful combat boots, and dancing even when people want them to be still. [briyanaclarel.com](http://briyanaclarel.com), [newplayexchange.org/users/48264/briyana-d-clarel](http://newplayexchange.org/users/48264/briyana-clarel)
Val Dunn is a writer/deviser who creates plays, performance art, and rituals. Her work tackles issues of class and queerness while pushing against the limitations of form. Plays and theatrical texts: O, Possum! (New Pages, finalist Bay Area Playwrights Festival); Down in the Holler (Trustus Theater world premiere 2021), A Shock of Wheat (Philly Plays @ The Drake); Now More Than Ever (Philadelphia Fringe Festival); Johnny Depp: A Retrospective on Late-Stage Capitalism (Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Philly SoLow Fest, Philly Theatre Week); The Beauteous Majesty of Denmark (Washington College); and bite-sized-works-with-bite such as 100 Ways the World Could End and F**k Me Be Me Bette Porter. She is a member playwright of New Pages @ Azuka Theatre, Writers on the Rocks, and an alumna of The Foundry. She has received developmental support from the Orchard Project (Core Company), Signal Fire, Centrum, the Bearded Ladies Cabaret, and SANDBOX. Val holds a B.A. with honors in drama and English from Washington College where she received the Stewart Award for Drama, The Mary Martin Prize, The Jude & Miriam Pfister Poetry Prize, The William W. Warner Prize for Writing on the Environment, The Literary House Genre Fiction Prize, and was a finalist for the Sophie Kerr Prize in Literature. Val has also created zines about depression, the border crisis, late-stage capitalism, and flamboyant flamingos. valdunn.com, newplayexchange.org/users/13745/val-dunn
introduction

In this talkback, the playwright Stephanie Kyung Sun Walters discusses her play "Acetone Wishes & Plexiglass Dreams." She reflects on her creative process, the themes of the play, and her desire to bring the stories of her family and community to the stage.

What was the first play you ever wrote?

Stephanie reflects on the first play she wrote in high school, an adaptation of "Gilmore Girls," and describes it as a patchwork quilt-style exploration of grief. She also talks about the first play she wrote as an adult, "Koreatown Trilogy," and how it grew out of her need to understand familial trauma.

Where did this play come from?

Stephanie describes how "Acetone Wishes & Plexiglass Dreams" came from a desire to understand familial history and to explore the stories of her past. She emphasizes the importance of community and the significance of bringing these stories into the present.

What do you want people to take away from this play?

Stephanie shares her hope that the audience will take away something meaningful and relevant from the play. She acknowledges the didactic nature of the play and emphasizes the importance of the themes in the context of the storytelling.

"Acetone Wishes & Plexiglass Dreams" is a play that explores the intersection of contemporary grief and the legacy of the past. It is a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of our histories and the need to carry these stories forward.

"Acetone Wishes & Plexiglass Dreams" is a play that challenges us to confront the complexities of our past and to find meaning in our present. It is a testament to the power of storytelling and the importance of remembering the stories of our ancestors.

Theater Talkback: Interview with the Playwright

Stephanie Kyung Sun Walters is a Barrymore nominated actor, playwright, and teaching artist in Philadelphia. She is a graduate of The Foundry and Lead Artist on the Philly Asian Performing Artists' Playwrights Project. Her play, "Are You My Father or the Dream Ballet of North Korea," received a world premiere production with Simpatico Theatre Company and was featured on the 2020 Kilroys List and the 2020 Table Work Press Recommended list. Her play, "Acetone Wishes and Plexiglass Dreams," has been produced and developed with Asian Performing Artists/Asian Arts Initiative.

Stephanie's talkback is an opportunity for audience members to engage with the play and the playwright, to ask questions, and to share their own experiences and thoughts. It is a space for dialogue and exploration, where the audience and Stephanie collaborate to deepen their understanding of the play and its themes.

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Behind the Scenes Workshop

How to Kill a Water Bear by Paige Zubel

Directed by: Christine Freije
Featuring: Bon Baldini, Amy Boehly, Donovan Lockett & Bailey Roper

Interview with the Playwright

What is your favorite kind of theatre?

New works that are loud and unapologetic and you can tell they were written because the playwright or creative team HAD to say it; it was bursting out of them. Theatre created in community, whether that's community engagement, or a devising room, or something else entirely. Plays with bodies and identities that look like me and my friends and chosen family that were created by people who are members of those communities.

How to Kill a Water Bear is a reworking of a play you wrote a few years ago. What inspired you to come back to that original play?

How does it resonate with you differently now?

I wrote a one act called The Pull of the Moon in college. It’s a lot different from this play – TPotM had Erin and her boyfriend Kaleb, the professor was a man named Peter who we saw presenting a speech throughout, and there were no housemates. It went up in NYC, and the producers of that production were interested in turning it into a feature length film. As I began the screenplay adaptation process, my producers and I at one point decided to make the couple queer, and that reignited my excitement about this piece – the narrative of a sexual assault and trauma in heterosexual dynamics is widely known, as it should be, but I’ve yet to see this narrative in a queer plot line. I also think it’s important for queer representation to be able to show queer characters as flawed or even cruel people, without that being a reflection on the entire community. Mainstream media tends to have a token queer character, and because they’re the only one in the show or movie, there’s pressure for them to be perfect or the commentary is that all queer people are bad. As a queer writer, I have the opportunity to create a world that is entirely queer, and let these characters solely speak for themselves.

What do you want people to take away from this play?

My hope for this play, and any play I write, is that it inspires someone to have a conversation. What specifically that conversation is about can vary, and I’d be thrilled with whatever hits hardest for any one person. For me, this play makes me think about the ripple effects of traumatic experiences, and how a seemingly isolated incident can go on to impact so many others for so long a time.

When you joined Core Playwrights, you challenged yourself to bring in a new play to each meeting, often trying new genres. Why did you set that challenge for yourself? What have you learned from that exercise?

I’m so glad I set that challenge! I told myself I’d bring in a new play each meeting because it’s easy for me to get caught in the development loop, refining what I already have without creating new work. And I never write faster than when I’m on a deadline. I hadn’t finished a new full length first draft in a year, but since joining Core Playwrights I’ve written three, so it’s working. The genre exploration has been fun; this is a journey to figure out what my voice is as a writer. I’m still not sure what it is, and I honestly may never be. Core Playwrights felt like a safe place to fail gloriously at bringing in raw work that was way outside my wheelhouse. This play I approached with a more cinematic frame of mind, so it’s my first go at melding the stage and film and seeing what that result might look like.

Paige Zubel is a Philadelphia-based playwright and producer. Their plays have been developed and produced by 50+ companies internationally, including Berridge Conservatory (Amos and the Stars, France), Normal Ave (Dead Meat, NYC), and What If? Productions (A String Between Man and the World, NC). Her plays and prose have been published by houses including Smith & Krause, One Act Play Depot, and Hashtag Queer. In the 2018-2019 season, they were the National New Play Network Producer-in-Residence at InterAct Theatre Company. She is the Associate Artistic Director of Shakespeare in Clark Park and Resident Dramaturg of Paper Doll Ensemble. They are a graduate of PlayPenn's The Foundry.