

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE SELECTS SIX PLAYWRIGHTS FOR “THE WRITERS’ ROOM”

The New Initiative under Artistic Director Matt Shakman Will Develop New Work by Local Writers

LOS ANGELES (August 29, 2018) – Geffen Playhouse today announced its selection of six local writers to participate in the launch of the inaugural cycle of The Writers’ Room, a forum for engagement and collaboration between Los Angeles playwrights. The participants for 2018/2019 are **Angelica Chéri, Dipika Guha, Chelsea Marcantel, Brian Otaño, Liza Powel O’Brien and Matt Schatz.**

The program marks a significant milestone in the evolution of Geffen Playhouse under Artistic Director Matt Shakman, whose vision for the theater emphasizes world premiere productions and the development of bold, relevant work by the local artistic community. He is supported in realizing this vision by newly named Associate Artistic Director Amy Levinson, who was most recently Literary Director for Geffen Playhouse, as well as Dramaturg.

“We had a remarkable pool of talented, passionate playwrights apply for The Writers’ Room – it was nearly impossible to select only six,” said Shakman. “Los Angeles is an exciting home for both established and emerging writers, and we can’t wait to get started down the creative path with this team.”

The one-year residency begins September 2018 and will be led by Geffen Playhouse Manager of New Play Development Rachel Wiegardt-Egel.

In addition to the feedback of their fellow writers, members will receive dramaturgical support from the Geffen’s artistic staff and the opportunity to further develop their work with directors and actors, culminating in a reading series that may be open to the public.

The Writers’ Room is made possible through the generous support of Patricia Kiernan Applegate.

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ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

Angelica Chéri

Angelica Chéri is a playwright, musical theater bookwriter/lyricist and screenwriter. The plays of her “Prophet’s Cycle Trilogy” include *The Seeds of Abraham* (Signature Theatre, Billie Holiday Theatre, mentored by Lynn Nottage), *The Sting of White Roses* (North Carolina Black Repertory Company, National Black Theatre Festival) and *Crowndation; I Will Not Lie to David* (National Black Theatre, I AM SOUL Residency). Other plays include *Berta, Berta* (world premiere at Contemporary American Theater

Festival) and *Learn to Speak Doll*, a children's play (Peppercorn Theatre commission). Angelica and collaborator Ross Baum received the Richard Rodgers Award for their musical *Gun & Powder*, also selected for the 2018 NAMT Festival of New Musicals. *Gun & Powder* has been developed at Goodspeed Opera, the NYU Center for New Musicals and the 2017 SigWorks Lab. Angelica received her B.A. in Theatre from UCLA, M.F.A. in Playwriting from Columbia University and M.F.A. in Musical Theatre Writing from NYU.

Dipika Guha

Dipika Guha's plays include *Yoga Play* (South Coast Repertory, upcoming at Gateway Theatre Vancouver, Moxie Theatre & SF Playhouse), *The Art of Gaman* (Upcoming at Theatre 503 London, Relentless Award semifinalist) and *Unreliable* (upcoming at Kansas City Repertory Theatre). Recent works includes contributions to *You Across From Me* (Humana, Actors Theatre of Louisville), *Azaan*, a play for Oregon Symphony Orchestra, *Elizabeth* for McCarter Theatre Center's Princeton and Slavery Project and *In Braunau* for Playwrights Horizons Theatre School. Dipika's current commissions include South Coast Repertory, Manhattan Theatre Club/Sloan, Barrington Stage and Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She was a Hodder Fellow at the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University and the inaugural Shakespeare's Sister Playwriting Fellow with the Lark Play Development Center, A Room of Her Own and Hedgebrook. Dipika earned an M.F.A from the Yale School of Drama under Paula Vogel and a B.A. in English Literature from University College London. She's currently writing for *Sneaky Pete* on Amazon.

Chelsea Marcantel

Chelsea Marcantel is an L.A.-based writer, director, and collaborator. Reared by Cajuns in southwest Louisiana, Chelsea has lived and made theater among the tribes of the Midwest, Appalachia, the Mid-Atlantic and now the West Coast. In 2016, she completed a Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Fellowship at The Juilliard School. Her plays include *Airness*, *Everything is Wonderful*, *Ladyish*, *Devour* and *Tiny Houses*. They have been produced around the United States and Canada. Chelsea currently holds commissions from San Francisco Playhouse and Delaware Theatre Company. As a writer, she is extremely interested in humans as small-group primates and what happens when the rules and value systems of our chosen groups cease to serve us. She reads a lot of books, watches a lot of documentaries and listens to a lot of interviews. Chelsea is an avid self-producer, an enthusiastic member of The Writers Guild of America and The Dramatists Guild, and co-hosts a podcast called "Hugging and Learning."

Brian Otaño

Brian Otaño is a bi-coastal playwright and television writer. Most recently, he co-wrote *You Across From Me*, the 42nd Humana Festival Professional Training Company show at Actors Theatre of Louisville. Other plays include *The Dust*, *Tara*, *Zero Feet Away* and *The Dooley Street Trilogy: Between the Sandbar and the Shore*, *What We Told the Neighbors* and *The Myths We Made*. Brian's plays have been developed and workshopped with Roundabout Theatre Company, Ars Nova, New York Theater Workshop, Atlantic Theater Company, IAMA Theatre Company, Celebration Theatre and Milagro Theater Portland. Residencies & Fellowships: Center Theatre Group's Writing Cohort (2018-2019), New Dramatists Van Lier Fellowship, P73's Interstate 73 Writers Group, New York Theater Workshop 2050 Fellowship, Ars Nova's Playgroup, numerous creative residencies with Space on Ryder Farm, Launch Pad New Work Series at UCSB, Disney ABC TV Writing Program (finalist/alternate), NHMC TV Writers Fellowship. Education: B.F.A. in Dramatic Writing (SUNY Purchase).

Liza Powel O'Brien

Liza Powel O'Brien is a playwright whose work has appeared at Ojai Playwrights Conference, The Blank Theater, Unscreened LA, Naked Angels, The Lark, C Magazine, and Hedgebrook. She has an MFA in Fiction from Columbia University's School of the Arts and spent nine years as an advertising copywriter in Seattle and New York. Liza serves on the reading committee for Ojai Playwrights Conference and as a board member at The Lark Play Development Center in New York. She moved to Los Angeles with her family in 2009 and is thrilled to be a part of the Geffen Playhouse's inaugural year of The Writers' Room—a sorely-needed addition to a city with a community of playwrights that seems to be growing by the day.

Matt Schatz

Matt Schatz is a writer and composer. His full-length plays and musicals include *The Burdens* (2019 City Theatre production, 2018 Austin Film Festival Playwriting Award runner-up, 2017 Lanford Wilson Award Nominee, 2016 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference), *An Untitled New Play By Justin Timberlake* (Pittsburgh CLO's 2018 Spark Festival, 2017 O'Neill Playwrights Conference finalist), *Georama* (with Hyler/Herrick, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Great River Shakespeare Festival, New York Musical Festival), *Love Trapezoid* (Astoria Performing Arts Center), *Dunkfest '88* (Ars Nova), *Where Ever It May Be* (EST/Ryder Farm, 2018 Spark Festival) and *The Tallest Building in the World* (Luna Stage). Awards include the Kleban Prize in Musical Theatre and the Outstanding Lyrics Award at NYMF. Television development: eOne, Fox Television Studios, Fullscreen, TBS, USA. Member: ASCAP, Dramatists Guild, EST, Writers Guild of America. Alumnus: BMI Musical Theatre Workshop, Playwrights Union, Youngblood, Interstate 73, Carnegie Mellon, University of the Arts. Commissions: Actors Theatre of Louisville, EST/Sloan Foundation, Jill Furman Productions, Seattle Repertory Theatre. Matt was born in Camden, NJ and currently lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Jenna.

ABOUT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays, provocative new works and second productions, the not-for-profit organization continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates and is currently helmed by Executive Director Gil Cates, Jr., Artistic Director Matt Shakman and Board Chair Howard Tenenbaum. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains extensive education and community engagement programs, designed to involve underserved young people and the community at large in the arts.

www.geffenplayhouse.org

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