

# GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

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### CAST ANNOUNCED FOR WEST COAST PREMIERE OF THE BROADWAY PRODUCTION OF “FAT HAM” AT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

FEATURING NIKKI CRAWFORD, CHRIS HERBIE HOLLAND, BILLY EUGENE JONES, ADRIANNA MITCHELL, MARCEL SPEARS, BENJA KAY THOMAS AND MATTHEW ELIJAH WEBB

“FAT HAM” WRITTEN BY JAMES IJAMES

SAHEEM ALI’S BROADWAY PRODUCTION OF “FAT HAM”  
DIRECTED BY SIDEEQ HEARD

PREVIEWS BEGIN MARCH 27 - OPENING NIGHT IS APRIL 4

LOS ANGELES (January 9, 2024) – Geffen Playhouse today announced the full cast for its West Coast premiere of the Broadway production of five-time Tony Award nominee and 2022 Pulitzer Prize for Drama winner *Fat Ham*, written by **James Ijames** (*Kill Move Paradise*, *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington*). The Geffen Playhouse West Coast premiere of **Saheem Ali’s** (*Merry Wives*, *Goddess*) Broadway production of *Fat Ham* will be directed by **Sideeq Heard** (*The Hot Wing King*, *A Curious Thing*), who also served as associate director for the Broadway production.

The cast includes **Nikki Crawford** (*The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington*, *Stormy Weather*) as Tedra; **Chris Herbie Holland** (*White Noise*, *The Box*) as Tio; **Billy Eugene Jones** (*Purlie Victorious*, *A Soldier’s Play*) as Rev/Pap; **Adrianna Mitchell** (*Snowfall*, *What to Send Up When It Goes Down*) as Opal; **Marcel Spears** (*The Neighborhood*, *The Mayor*) as Juicy; **Benja Kay Thomas** (*Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven*, *Bootycandy*) as Rabby; and **Matthew Elijah Webb** (*YELL: a “documentary” of my time here*, *A Raisin in the Sun*) as Larry.

Previews for *Fat Ham* begin Wednesday, March 27, 2024, in the Gil Cates Theater at Geffen Playhouse. Opening night is Thursday, April 4, 2024.

Meet Juicy, a young, queer Black man with a Shakespearean-sized dilemma. When the ghost of his dead father shows up at his family’s BBQ wedding reception demanding his murder be avenged, does the poetic and sensitive Juicy have it in him to do the deed, or will he “to thine own self be true?” See what the *New York Times* calls “a hilarious yet profound tragedy smothered in comedy,” in this Pulitzer Prize–winning take on *Hamlet*, direct from Broadway to L.A.

*Fat Ham* is produced in association with No Guarantees, Public Theater Productions & Rashad V. Chambers. *Fat Ham* first premiered in 2022 at The Public Theater as a co-production between National Black Theatre and The Public Theater. *Fat Ham* made its Broadway premiere on April 12, 2023.

## **FAT HAM**

Written by **James Ijames**

Original Direction by **Saheem Ali**

Directed by **Sideeq Heard**

Produced in Association with No Guarantees, Public Theater Productions & Rashad V. Chambers

**Previews:** March 27, 2024 – April 3, 2024

**Opening Night:** April 4, 2024

**Closing Night:** April 28, 2024

## **CAST**

**Nikki Crawford** as Tedra

**Chris Herbie Holland** as Tio

**Billy Eugene Jones** as Rev/Pap

**Adrianna Mitchell** as Opal

**Marcel Spears** as Juicy

**Benja Kay Thomas** as Rabby

**Matthew Elijah Webb** as Larry

## **PRODUCTION TEAM**

Associate Producer **Marcel Spears**

Scenic Designer **Maruti Evans**

Costume Designer **Dominique Fawn Hill**

Lighting Designer **Bradley King**

Sound Designer **Mikaal Sulaiman**

Illusions Designer **Skylar Fox**

Wig, Hair & Makeup Designer **Earon Chew Nealey**

Fight Director **Lisa Kopitsky**

Broadway Choreography **Darrell Grand Moultrie**

Choreography Stager **Abdur-Rahim Jackson**

Production Stage Manager **Alyssa Escalante**

Assistant Stage Manager **Lauren Buangan**

Original Casting Director **Kate Murray, CSA**

Casting Director **Phyllis Schuringa, CSA**

## **PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE**

Monday, Tuesday      No performance

Wednesday – Friday      8:00 p.m.

Saturday                  3:00 and 8:00 p.m.

Sunday                      2:00 and 7:00 p.m.

## **LOCATION**

Gil Cates Theater at Geffen Playhouse

10886 Le Conte Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024

## **TICKET INFORMATION**

Tickets currently priced at \$30.00 - \$129.00. Available by phone at 310.208.2028 or online at [www.geffenplayhouse.org](http://www.geffenplayhouse.org). Fees may apply.

All Geffen Playhouse productions are intended for an adult audience; children under ten years of age will not be admitted.

Rush tickets for each day's performance are made available to the general public one hour before showtime at the box office. \$35.00 General/\$15.00 Student.

## **COLLEGE AUDIENCES**

Through a variety of events and other opportunities, Geffen Playhouse welcomes college students to experience the live storytelling presented on our stages. We are proud of our association with UCLA's School of Theater, Film, and Television, and open our doors to all college students throughout Los Angeles. More information is available at [www.geffenplayhouse.org/college](http://www.geffenplayhouse.org/college).

## **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

### **James Ijames (Playwright)**

James Ijames is a playwright, director, and educator. James is the recipient of the F. Otto Haas Award for an Emerging Artist, two Barrymore Awards for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Play, two Barrymore Awards for Outstanding Direction of a Play, a Pew Fellowship for Playwriting, the Terrance McNally New Play Award, Kesselring Honorable Mention Prize, the Whiting Award, a 2019 Kesselring Prize for *Kill Move Paradise*, a 2020 and 2022 Steinberg Prize, and the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Drama. He received a B.A. in Drama from Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA and a M.F.A. in Acting from Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. James is an Associate Professor of Theatre at Villanova University. He resides in South Philadelphia.

### **Saheem Ali (Original Director)**

Saheem is a proud immigrant from Kenya. He received a Tony Award nomination for directing the Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Fat Ham* on Broadway, an Obie Award for Sustained Excellence in Directing, Drama Desk and Lucille Lortel nominations for *Fat Ham's* off-Broadway run at The Public Theater, where he serves as the Associate Artistic Director/Resident Director. His production of *Merry Wives* (Shakespeare in the Park) was recorded for PBS's *Great Performances* and was the subject of the documentary *Reopening Night* on HBO. Productions include *Buena Vista Social Club* (Atlantic Theatre Company); *Goddess* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre); *Nollywood Dreams* (MCC Theater); *Romeo y Julieta*, *Shipwreck*, and *Richard II* (radio plays). Other productions: *Fires in the Mirror* (Signature Theatre), *The Rolling Stone* (Lincoln Center Theater), *Passage* (Soho Rep), *Sugar in Our Wounds* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *Tartuffe* (PlayMakers Repertory Company), *Where Storms Are Born* (Williamstown Theatre Festival), and *Kill Move Paradise* (National Black Theatre). He is a Usual Suspect at New York Theatre Workshop, a Sir John Gielgud SDCF Fellow, and a Shubert Fellow.

### **Sideeq Heard (Director)**

Sideeq Heard is a multi-hyphenate actor and award-winning director. He was the Associate Director of the Tony Award-nominated Broadway production *Fat Ham*. Currently, he serves as the Associate Artistic Director at *JAG Productions*. He was awarded "Best Director" for the short film *Here Is a Man* at the 2023 Oscar-qualifying film festival Reel Sisters of the Diaspora. Recent directing credits include: *Men Like Us*, a new digital series created by Sideeq set to premiere Summer 2024; *Rhyme Deferred* by Kamilah

Forbes at Howard University; *The Waiting Room*, an original play devised with Artreach Inc. premiering at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center; *A Curious Thing* written by Jeremy O'Brian at JAG's Theatre on the Hill festival; *Word Becomes Flesh* by Marc Bamahuti Joseph at NYU's Freeplay Festival; a staged reading of *Fat Ham* at the American Airlines Theatre with Arts in the Armed Forces. He had the privilege of serving as Assistant Director to Carl Cofield on The Classical Theatre of Harlem's award-winning adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, and Saheem Ali at The Public Theater's off-Broadway production of *Fat Ham*. B.F.A. Howard University, M.F.A. NYU Grad Acting. [www.sideeqheard.com](http://www.sideeqheard.com)

### **Nikki Crawford (Tedra)**

Tony-nominated and Obie Award winner for her iconic portrayal of "Tedra" in James Ijames' celebrated 2022 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fat Ham*, first at The Public Theater and then at the American Airlines Theatre. Between The Public and Broadway iterations of *Fat Ham*, starred in James Ijames' *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington* at Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Guest star roles include recurring role on Sony's *Cruel Intentions*; *NCIS: Los Angeles*; *9-1-1*; *NCIS*; *United States of Al*; *Selena: The Series*; and a starring role in Lifetime's *A Country Christmas Harmony*. In the theater world, she was handpicked by the legendary Mike Nichols to open the Vegas company of *Spamalot* for which she was named Vegas Showstopper of the Year. Also starred opposite Leslie Uggams in *Stormy Weather* at the Pasadena Playhouse playing "Young Lena Horne" and winning the NAACP Theatre Award. B.F.A., Carnegie Mellon University School of Drama.

### **Chris Herbie Holland (Tio)**

Chris Herbie Holland is thrilled to be working at the Geffen! Broadway: *Fat Ham*. Off-Broadway: *Fat Ham* (Obie Award, AUDELCO nomination). Regional credits include *White Noise* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre and *The Box* at Z Space. Holland holds an M.F.A. from NYU Grad Acting and a B.A. from Dartmouth College. British American Drama Academy alum. For the Holland's and Helems'. Thank you, Cabinet. Mom, I did it! IG: @chrisherbieholland

### **Billy Eugene Jones (Rev/Pap)**

Broadway credits: *Purlie Victorious*, *Fat Ham*, *A Soldier's Play*, *The Book of Mormon*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *The Big Knife*, *The Mountaintop*, *Passing Strange*, *Radio Golf*, and *Gem of the Ocean*. Off-Broadway credits include: *Fat Ham* (The Public Theater, Obie Award), *On Sugarland* (New York Theatre Workshop, Obie Award, AUDELCO Award for Best Actor, Drama Desk nomination for Best Actor), Manhattan Theatre Club, Roundabout Theatre Company, New York Shakespeare Festival, Atlantic Theatre Company, The Classical Theatre of Harlem. Regional: Goodman Theatre, Arena Stage, Yale Repertory Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Huntington Theatre Company, CalShakes, Actors Theatre of Louisville. Billy is a graduate of Yale School of Drama.

### **Adrianna Mitchell (Opal)**

Adrianna Mitchell made her Broadway debut playing "Opal" in the Tony-nominated, Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fat Ham* after originating the role at The Public Theater. Her other off-Broadway credits include *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* at Playwrights Horizons and *runboyrun* at New York Theatre Workshop. Selected regional credits include *Noises Off* (Two River Theater); *Romeo & Juliet* (as "Juliet") and *The Taming of the Shrew* (Chautauqua Theater Company); *Measure for Measure* (Actors' Shakespeare Project); *Hamlet* and *A Christmas Carol* (American Conservatory Theater). Television: Mitchell heavily recurred on *Snowfall* (FX) and booked a series regular role on the pilot *Harlem's Kitchen*, opposite Delroy Lindo and Sheryl Lee Ralph (ABC). Select guest star roles: *Queens* (ABC); *Bull*, *The Good Fight*, and *Evil* (CBS); *The Blacklist* and *Lincoln Rhyme: Hunt for the Bone Collector* (NBC); and *Little America* (Apple TV+). Mitchell's a proud graduate of Spelman College, Phi Beta Kappa; American Conservatory Theater (M.F.A.); British American Drama Academy.

**Marcel Spears (Juicy)**

Marcel Spears starred as “Juicy” in the Pulitzer Prize–winning play *Fat Ham* on Broadway, following an acclaimed run at The Public Theater. On television, Spears currently co-stars in the CBS comedy *The Neighborhood* opposite Cedric the Entertainer, after co-starring in the ABC comedy *The Mayor*. Other theater includes *Othello* (Classic Stage Company), *Ironbound* (Geffen Playhouse, West Coast premiere), *At the Old Place* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* (The Old Globe), *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (Two River Theater, directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson), *Judy (Page 73)*, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Classic Stage Company), *Trouble in Mind* (Guthrie Theater), and his NY stage debut in Classic Stage’s Young Company production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* directed by Tyne Rafaeli, for which he was awarded the Rosemarie Tichler Fund Grant. Film: *Always a Bridesmaid*. Marcel is a New Orleans native and holds an M.F.A. in Acting from Columbia University.

**Benja Kay Thomas (Rabby)**

Benja Kay Thomas originated the role of “Rabby” in the Pulitzer Prize–winning play *Fat Ham*, directed by Saheem Ali, both on Broadway and at The Public Theater. Also on Broadway, Thomas stood by for Phylicia Rashad in *Skeleton Crew*, directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson. Select theatre credits include *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven* by Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright Stephen Adly Gurgis, directed by John Ortiz (Atlantic Theater Company); *Miller, Mississippi* by Boo Killebrew (Long Wharf Theatre); *Booty Candy* and *Barbecue* by Robert O’Hara (Playwrights Horizons). She is a two-time Obie Award winner and a recipient of an AUDELCO Award. Film: *A Love Song* (Sundance), *Detective Chinatown 2*. Television: *FBI* (CBS), *Gotham* (Fox), *Friends of the People* (TruTV). When she is not performing, Thomas is passionate about photography, writing, and keeping alive the tradition of the card game Bid Whist. Hear more about Benja Kay Thomas on the podcast *My Fourth Act!* Proud member of AEA and SAG/AFTRA.

**Matthew Elijah Webb (Larry)**

Matthew Elijah Webb is a Detroit-raised actor, writer, and creative. Theatre credits include *Fat Ham* (as “Larry”) at Studio Theatre of DC, and *Fat Ham* (u/s “Juicy,” “Larry,” “Tio”) on Broadway and off-Broadway at The Public Theater. He has developed new works with playwrights a.k. payne, Rudi Goblen, and Jeremy O. Harris. He holds his M.F.A. in Acting from the Yale School of Drama. Instagram: @matthewelijahwebb

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**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/CEO Gil Cates, Jr., Artistic Director Tarell Alvin McCraney and Board Chair Adi Greenberg. 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](http://www.geffenplayhouse.org)

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