

GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

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GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES WRITERS FOR 2025/2026 CYCLE OF “THE WRITERS’ ROOM”

Initiative Develops New Work by LA-Based Writers

LOS ANGELES (September 4, 2025) – Geffen Playhouse today announced its selection of LA-based writers to participate in the 2025/2026 cycle of The Writers’ Room, a forum for engagement and collaboration between Los Angeles playwrights. The participants are **Diana Yifei Dai, Louis Reyes McWilliams, Zharia O’Neal, Frank Paiva, Ryn Stafford** and **Habib Yazdi**.

The Writers’ Room is a product of Geffen Playhouse’s commitment to supporting new plays and specifically to fostering bold, relevant work by the vibrant artistic community of Los Angeles. During this twelve-month residency, playwright members gather monthly to share their work and receive feedback from their peers in a forum facilitated by Geffen Playhouse Literary Manager & Dramaturg Olivia O’Connor. The 2025/2026 cycle of The Writers’ Room will begin in September 2025.

At the conclusion of the residency, each playwright will have the opportunity to further develop their completed draft in a culminating reading produced by the Geffen.

Playwrights who have developed work as part of The Writers' Room include: Juan José Alfonso, Ashley August, Boni B. Alvarez, Vivian J.O. Barnes, Meghan Brown, Diana Burbano, Jennifer Chang, Angelica Chéri, Paris Crayton III, Inda Craig-Galván, Sunny Drake, Lisa Sanaye Dring, Weston Gaylord, Inara George, Keiko Green, Dipika Guha, Christina Ham, Chloé Hung, Donald Jolly, Alexandra Kalinowski, Tova Katz, Andrew Zepeda Klein, Katie Lindsay, maatin, Chelsea Marcantel, Samah Meghjee, Ramiz Monsef, Paloma Nozicka, Matthew Paul Olmos, Brian Otaño, Nicholas Pilapil, Liza Powel O'Brien, Alexis Roblan, Matt Schatz, Michael Shayan, Ruby Rae Spiegel, T. Tara Turk-Haynes, James Anthony Tyler and Ali Viterbi.

The Writers’ Room is made possible through the generous support of the William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

Diana Yifei Dai (they/she)

Diana Yifei Dai is a playwright and filmmaker based in Los Angeles, CA. Originally from China, they moved to the U.S. alone at age 14 to pursue dreams of being a professional storyteller. They are passionate about history, human migration, and queer representation, and their work often explores the boundaries of Americanness. Diana is currently developing their first full-length play. Previously they worked on *Duncanville* (Fox) as a production supervisor. They hold a B.F.A. from

Florida State University's College of Motion Picture Arts. They live with their fiancée and their two cats.

Louis Reyes McWilliams (he/him)

Louis Reyes McWilliams is a Latino writer, director, and actor based in Los Angeles. His plays have been produced at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, Trinity Repertory Company, The Actors Company, and Stanford University. His short film *Little Footsteps*, which he wrote, directed, and starred in, has played at film festivals across the country, including the Chelsea Film Festival, Rhode Island International Film Festival, and LA Shorts International Film Festival. He currently has a feature in development with Assemble Media. As an actor, his credits include roles on network television and in award-winning films, as well as Off-Broadway, Shakespeare in the Park with The Public Theater, and regional productions with Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The Huntington, The Old Globe, Pasadena Playhouse, Trinity Repertory Company, and the Williamstown Theatre Festival. He is a graduate of Stanford University and holds an M.F.A. from the Brown University/Trinity Rep programs in Acting & Directing.

Zharia O'Neal (she/her)

Zharia O'Neal is a playwright, poet, and storyteller hailing from the British Virgin Islands. She writes b/Black comedy that investigates goodness, memory, and the sh*t she's afraid to ask out loud. O'Neal is a 2023 Artist-in-Residence at Headlands Center for the Arts, 2022 William S. Yellow Robe Jr. Playwright-in-Residence at Sound Theatre Company, Humanitas Play LA Prize Winner, and a USC International Artist Fellow. She is a part of Geffen Playhouse's 2025/2026 Writers' Room. Her works have been commissioned by Diversifying the Classics and Sound Theatre Company and include: *Roost* (O'Neill National Playwrights Conference Semifinalist), *Seven Stage Circle* (Princess Grace Award Finalist, Ashland New Plays Festival Finalist), and *Fling*. M.F.A.: Dramatic Writing, University of Southern California.

Frank Paiva (he/they)

Frank Paiva writes comedy with heart. Born and raised in Seattle, they are a Nickelodeon Writing Program alum and a GLAAD List writer. They are a staff writer on the animated TV show *Wylde Pak*. Frank spent 15 years living in New York as a theatre artist, entertainment reporter, and tour guide. Acting credits include two world premieres by Taylor Mac, two years as a Bat at the Flea Theater, and Eugène Ionesco's *The Killer* at Theatre for a New Audience with Michael Shannon. Now based in Los Angeles, Frank was a finalist for the ATX TV Festival's Pitch Competition and a member of the IAMA Theatre Company's Emerging Playwrights Lab. They are particularly interested in queer history and increasing opportunities for performers of size. Frank's *New York Times* essay "A Prince Charming for the Prom (Not Ever After, Though)" was performed by Tituss Burgess on the *Modern Love* podcast. www.frankpaiva.net

Ryn Stafford (she/they)

Ryn Stafford is a performer and writer from Saint Paul, Minnesota. Informed by her family's oral tradition, she developed an obsession with story through plays, comic books, slave narrative, novels, and history. She holds a B.F.A. in Dramatic Writing from New York University. She has developed her plays at New York Theatre Workshop, Outside In Theatre, The Philosophical Research Society, and In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre. In addition to writing, she also engages with theater through puppetry. An alum of Monkeybear's Harmolodic Workshop, she has performed alongside her original puppets internationally. She has held residencies with Pocoapoco arts & cultural organization in Oaxaca, Travelers' Rest State Park and Open AIR in

Montana, and TruArtSpeaks in Saint Paul. She has participated in the Small Axe Project Conference in Trinidad and in her friends' poetry publications.

Habib Yazdi (he/him)

Habib Yazdi is an Iranian-American playwright and filmmaker. He produced and directed the PBS series *United States of Comedy* and is a recipient of South Coast Repertory's Elizabeth George Commission. His comedic play about the 1953 American coup in Iran, *Ajax*, was developed at The New Group and Bay Street Theater; it premieres at Boise Contemporary Theater in spring 2026. A Sundance and Islamic Scholarship Fund Building Bridges Fellow, Habib has participated in the Warner Bros. Discovery Access Directors Program, Mentorship Matters writing lab, New York Stage and Film workshop, and Gotham Week. His short films have screened at festivals worldwide—including St. Louis, Brisbane, Brooklyn, Vail, and Pan African—and at venues such as the Barbican Centre, de Young Museum, and Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. Habib earned his M.F.A. from NYU Tisch School of the Arts, where he received the Oliver Stone Screenwriting Award and the Goldberg Play Prize. He is currently developing a site-specific play for Montana Repertory Theatre's *Plays on Tap*.

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 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

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