

RITA & BURTON GOLBERG MFA PLAYWRITING PROGRAM at HUNTER COLLEGE

FALL 2019
WRAP UP

We first wanted to acknowledge that we were all deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Rita Goldberg. We are eternally grateful for her fierce support of this program, our students, and the future of the American Theatre. Her spirit lives on in the plays and careers of the graduates of the Goldberg Program.

This semester featured the addition of a number of exciting new programs and initiatives in the Rita and Burton Goldberg MFA Playwriting Program. We welcomed a new class of playwrights, and their first semester classes were rigorous, invigorating, and inspiring.

Students took a course in Adaptation taught by Acting Director Christine Scarfuto, where they did a deep dive into Greek Tragedy, reading the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and contemporary adaptations by writers including Rachel Cusk, Charles Mee, and Wole Soyinka. They then wrote their own adaptations inspired by the form and content of Greek Tragedy. Playwright Karen Hartman (*Roz and Ray*, *Project Dawn*) taught a course in which the students wrote family dramas, looking to their own lives for inspiration. Students also took Theatre History I with PhD Robert Davis which covered the Greeks through the Restoration. The semester culminated in a presentation of *An Evening of Short Works* in which students presented excerpts of their work written over the course of this semester. The evening was a resounding success: we filled the Marvin Seiger Library with over 50 audience members, and students presented an evening thrilling work.



MASTER CLASSES



Roundtable with playwright and Pulitzer Prize Finalist Clare Barron.

In addition to their course work, students took two master classes this semester. These were intimate, intensive sessions meant to give students a depth charge of creative inspiration. The first was with Lauren Yee (*Cambodian Rock Band*, *The Great Leap*), recently announced by American Theatre magazine as one of the most produced playwrights in the country. Yee's plays have been staged at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Guthrie, Atlantic Theatre, and Steppenwolf Theatre Company, among others. She is Signature Theatre's newest Resident Playwright and winner of the Steinberg Playwright Award, Whiting Award, Horton Foote Prize, and the Kessler Prize. The second master class was with Pulitzer Prize Finalist Clare Barron, the author of *Dance Nation*, which premiered at Playwrights Horizons and was produced across the US and in Europe at theaters including London's Almeida Theatre and Steppenwolf in Chicago. Her honors include an Obie Award, Whiting Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award. After the workshop, Barron held a roundtable session with the undergraduate cast of Hunter Theatre Club's production of *Dance Nation*.

PLAY LABS



Play Lab with MFA candidate Susan Xu (Class of '22) with undergraduate actors.

This semester saw our first iteration of Play Labs, a new play development laboratory held in the Marvin Seiger Library in which playwrights were each given a three-hour session to develop new work with Hunter's talented undergraduate theatre students. Play Labs facilitated a new level of collaboration between the undergraduates and the MFA students that has not previously existed in the department. They were designed to give writers the opportunity to hear their work aloud and explore their artistic instincts in a supportive, low pressure environment, while simultaneously offering undergraduate students the chance to engage with new work and gain insight into the process of writing a new play.

DESIGN PANEL

In December, the Hunter MFA students were invited to participate in a panel on *Designing New Plays* at Playwrights Horizon's Theater School, along with the MFA students from Brown University and the playwrights from Clubbed Thumb Early Career Writer's group. Playwrights Erin Courtney and Lisa D'Amour moderated a panel with lighting designer Isabella Byrd (*Heroes of the Fourth Turning, Daddy, Plano*), set and costume designer Jian Jung (Soho Rep, Juilliard), and sound designer Ben Williams (*Gatz, The Sun Also Rises, The Wooster Group*). The panel focused on expansive thinking about design, dramaturgy, and collaboration in new work.

STUDENT/ALUMNI AWARDS AND PRODUCTIONS

Second year student John J. Caswell Jr. was just announced as a finalist for the prestigious Relentless Award established in honor of Philip Seymour Hoffman. Charly Simpson (Class of '16) is the 2019-2020 recipient of the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award from the Vineyard Theatre, and the co-recipient of the Dramatist Guild's Lanford Wilson Award. Her play *Behind the Sheet* was produced at Ensemble Studio Theatre earlier this season to great critical acclaim. T. Adamson's (Class of '16) play *The Straights* was produced at JACK in Brooklyn this past December. Lily Akerman (Class of 2017) will have her play *The Commons* produced at 59E59 Theaters in February-March as part of its 2020 Winter Season.

LOOKING AHEAD

For the upcoming semester, we welcome guest playwriting instructor Lisa D'Amour. Lisa is a playwright and interdisciplinary artist whose critically acclaimed play *Airline Highway* was produced on Broadway in 2015. Her plays have been produced by theatres across the country, including Playwrights Horizons, Clubbed Thumb, the Wilma Theater, and Woolly Mammoth Theater. She's an Obie Award winner and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and Susan Smith Blackburn Award, and has taught at Brown University, the University of Iowa, and Smith College, among others.

Wishing you all a healthy, happy start to 2020! Hope to see you at the Baker Theatre Building soon.



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