W R I T E R ’ S  B L O C K

An Original Ensemble Play

NOV 4–6
8:00 PM

NOV 7
2:00 PM

NOV 11–13
8:00 PM

SPANOS THEATRE
Tickets and more | 805-756-4TIX | pacslo.org/tickets
$12 Students, faculty/staff, seniors | $20 General admission
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

The College of Liberal Arts
and
The Theatre and Dance Department

present

WRITER’S BLOCK
An Original Ensemble Play

Director
Hala Baki

Costume Designer
Thomas John Bernard

Scenic & Lighting Designer
Brian Healy

Technical Director
Clint Bryson

Stage Manager
Becky Van Zant

Assistant Stage Manager
Heidi Le Huynh

Costume Shop Manager
Laina Annette Babb

Music Composer
Shashank Aswathanarayana
CAST

NOVELLA ................................................................. Nicki Butler
BOSS ........................................................................... Taylor Wendell Lozano
STACEY ........................................................................ Maya Sjoblom-Powell
DEBBIE .......................................................................... Ashley Tokarzewski
MAE .............................................................................. Layli Veach

SETTING

StoryCorp, a storytelling company outside the space-time continuum

Running time is approximately 70 intermission-free minutes on Earth, but since we exist outside of time, we can’t really be sure

DIRECTOR’S NOTES

When our slated production of Haroun and the Sea of Stories was suddenly cancelled during the second week of rehearsals, our team had to navigate a rough patch of disappointment and anxiety. We processed through our emotions as well as the intellectual and creative dilemmas that this situation raised for us. We asked questions like: What are the stories that shape us? Who has the right to tell them? How do truth and fiction intersect in them? What’s the point of stories that aren’t even true? We arrived at one guiding theme: the value of storytelling for our humanity. It was the one that had stuck with us as we studied Haroun and the one that catapulted us into Writer’s Block. Over the course of two intense weeks, we created an original play that was inspired by the stories we love and by those questions we were pondering. We imagined a fantasy world that was intimately tied to our reality, in which stories are created outside of human control in a process of imagination passing from one Spark to another. In essence, we raise yet another question with this concept: Who thought of it first? Perhaps it’s none of us or all of us. Imagination comes to life when ideas are in dialogue, when cultures and languages and people interact, when we become aware of our myriad intersections within this world—seen and unseen. Writer’s Block uses comedy to grapple with the emotional and intellectual complexities of storytelling. It also highlights how our institutions can both enable and constrain our creative process, even asking audiences to weigh in on this issue and help determine the ending of our play. It’s been a pleasure for me to dive into this experience with my students and to discover the humor, pain, and passion for art that we share despite our differences. I hope you walk away from this show with a light heart, an open and curious mind, and a renewed faith in the power of stories to rescue us from ourselves.

— HB
Crew

Dramaturgs ................................................................. Anna Cohen, Weihan Du
Outreach ................................................................. Heidi Le Huynh, Courtney Ann Kaia

Assistant to Lighting Designer ......................... Genevieve Bjork-Nelson, Rachel Kupfer-Weinstein
Assistant Scenic Design ............................................. Clare Cantus
Assistant to Scenic Designer/Props ...................... Hannah Drechse, Megan Hunt, Jackie Yeung
Light Board Operator ................................................. Genevieve Bjork-Nelson
Sound Board Operator .............................................. Max Gardenswartz
Light and Sound Tech/Follow Spot Operator ............. Theo Puleston
Props/Stagehand ......................................................... Michelle Pellegrin
Props/Stagehand ......................................................... Maryellen Wood
Stagecraft (TH230/330) Scenic Builders and Painters........ Genevieve Bjork-Nelson,
Jenna Brock, Colin Elman, Elena Estrada, Max Gardenswartz, Zoe Gray, Keegan Huth, Heidi
Le Huynh, Owen Lazar, Violet Maguire, Wendy McCullough, Michelle Mede, Javon Murphy,
Theo Puleston, Stephen Shoemaker, Maya Sjoblom-Powell, Sarah Smith, Becky Van Zant,
Jacqueline Yeung

Assistant Costume Designer ............................................ Rylee Terry
2nd Hand Assistant Draper ............................................ Madeline Webb
Costume Construction (TH225/325) & Wardrobe Crew ........ Marie Frances,
Kacie Hennessy, Max Kennel, Lucie Labrecque, Taylor Lozano, Ella Marchal, Alexis Morse,
Nichole Riffenburgh, Advaita Sai Shankar Bhavanasi, Claire Wiater
Costume Shop Assistants ............................................ Aldo Rominger, Rylee Terry

Special Acknowledgments
Asst. Prof. Ramón Esquivel for lending us his playwriting magic. Kira Weiss (Cello/Vocals)
and Shravan Murlidaran (Keyboard/Vocals) for their musical talents.

Cal Poly Theatre & Dance Department Faculty and Staff (Fall 2021)

Rebecca Anderson
Laina Annette Babb
Hala Baki
Thomas John Bernard
Clint Bryson
Jude Clark-Warnisher
Ramón Esquivel
Brian Healy

Kathleen Helm
Karina Hendricks-Bolen
Andrew Philpot
Diana Stanton
Don Stewart
Philip Valle
Michelle Walter
Dramaturgical Notes

The role of the dramaturg is to provide detailed research about the historical, cultural, and social context of the play as well as a thorough analysis of the text for the cast and production team. However, the dramaturg’s role shifts greatly when working to devise a play from the ground up. To create *Writer’s Block*, the cast, director, and dramaturgs all contributed concepts, but no two ideas were exactly the same; it was like a highly disordered puzzle. Our role as dramaturgs involved working with the cast and crew to ensure that these ideas were incorporated smoothly to create one coherent storyline. We studied the plot, the individual characters, and the relationships between these characters to ensure that the arc of the play made sense from start to finish, pointing out any plot holes or confusing details. Through this detailed analysis and by serving as advocates for the audience, we helped establish an understandable and enjoyable production for audience members of all ages. Given our unique opportunity to craft a full play from scratch, it was important to us all that our production centered around a message that would be of value to our campus community. We were inspired greatly by *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and its beautiful and magical portrayal of a quest to save storytelling. As we wrote and rewrote what would become *Writer’s Block*, we cycled through numerous potential messages that eventually drew us to the central concept of “the magic of storytelling.” In this production, we focus not only on the beauty of stories themselves, but also the importance of diverse voices in creating and telling these stories, which is certainly valuable as we strive to establish an educated and inclusive campus culture. Our greatest hope is that this production can provide inspiration and encouragement for new and diverse works to be presented on this stage in the future.

— AC, WD

Up Next... Winter 2022 Mainstage Theatre Production

**Working**


This 2012 musical revival amplifies the American worker’s story, highlighting the hopes, dreams, dignity, and sense of purpose shared by the modern workforce. *Working* is based on Pulitzer prize-winning author Studs Terkel’s best-selling book. This sincere and captivating musical weaves together a collection of monologues and songs written by various composers/lyrists, including Lin-Manuel Miranda (*Hamilton*), Stephen Schwartz (*Wicked*), Craig Carnelia, and James Taylor.

**Winter Quarter 2022**

Thursday, February 24 – Saturday, February 26 @ 8:00pm; Sunday, February 27 @ 2:00pm

Thursday, March 3 – Saturday, March 5 @ 8:00pm
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- Support for student success in areas of career development & travel/field trips
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