

PLAYWRIGHTS'  
CENTER

IN THE LAB

# CELL SURFACE

By **Dominic Taylor**

JANUARY 22, 2021



"When COVID happened, I was really interested if I placed these people in these boxes, like digital Petri dishes or something. In this examination, I want to lean into this technology to see what it can illuminate about this collision of Black people using digital tools I never considered."

—Dominic Taylor

# CELL SURFACE

by **Dominic Taylor**

Director

**Shá Cage**

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**Ben Lohrberg**

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**Hayley Finn**

Associate Workshop Producer

**Julia Brown**

Technical Consultant

**Peter Morrow**

Actors

**ShaVunda Brown**.....Dr. Roger Arliner Young

**Godfrey L. Simmons Jr.\*** .....Dr. Ernest Everett Just

\*Appearing through an Agreement between this theatre, the Playwrights' Center, and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

## UP NEXT

**THIS MUCH I KNOW**

by **Jonathan Spector**

Wednesday, Feb 3 at 7:00 pm CST

**THE LOYALS**

by **Allison Gregory**

Wednesday, Feb 17 at 7:00 pm CST

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# AN INTERVIEW WITH DOMINIC TAYLOR BY HAYLEY FINN

**Hayley Finn:** How did you get to learn about Ernest Just and Roger Young and what attracted you to their story?

**Dominic Taylor:** So this is a long story but I'll make it short. My sister went to Dartmouth years ago and I knew that Ernest Everett Just was the first black graduate from Dartmouth. I wrote a commission for Ensemble Studio Theatre's Sloan Fellowship. I wanted to write about Ernest Just because what I knew about him was that he was the first black graduate of Dartmouth and Dartmouth didn't want to hire him. He was treated poorly at his graduation. So I was gonna write about Ernest Just. I knew he wrote this textbook called, *Biology of the Cell Surface* which was really important for people who study biology. He was a smart dude. So I went in to do that.

Anyway, as I'm doing research for what I think is my play on Ernest Just, I discovered, starting in 1929, he did research at the Marine Biological Lab in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. And then I find—so strange—I find the grant applications or the residency applications from 1929 to 1936. Every one was completed by Roger Young. And then I said, "Oh who's Roger Young? His graduate assistant?" I made a gendered assumption with the name Roger, so I thought it was a man. And then for some reason, I don't know what made me do it, I just went and googled Roger Young, and saw that it was a woman. I was like, "What? Wait a second. So for seven consecutive years, this woman was his graduate assistant helping him?" And then I started to research who she was. She's the first black woman to get a Ph.D. from U Penn in sciences.

I thought I was going to do a play about a black man who was unjustly treated by Dartmouth and by systems. I became fascinated by a black man who had some power who was unjustly treating a black woman. And then it became a series of things.

There's this wonderful book called *Black Apollo of Science* about Ernest Just which is a great biography. But in it, I realized Roger Young is mentioned in like a paragraph or two paragraphs. In the actual book *Biology of the Cell Surface*, which I know this woman worked on, she's not mentioned at all. She's not mentioned in a forward, in an acknowledgment... graduate student, nothing! She's not mentioned. And those are the two things that triggered the writing of this play because I was like, "What? How did that

happen?" You know, you work with somebody for half a dozen years—seven years, that I know of particularly—and you're not mentioned? I mean, it's just crazy. And so yeah, there's all that stuff. That's how I got into these two people.

**Hayley Finn:** It's an incredible story. I'm curious to know what prompted you to make the play a Zoom play, and that you structured it that way. What you're mining out of the theatrical form that's inherent to Zoom?

**Dominic Taylor:** Right. So I don't know if I can pull this off. This is the great thing about this experiment. The reason why I was attracted to Zoom, I have these two characters who are looking at sea urchins. So I was like, "Can we look at these two characters and put them in a petri dish or a centrifuge or some kind of biological experiment where I'm watching these characters dance around or move around and then see what happens when it all shakes out?" The Zoom version of this is my digital centrifuge; my digital petri dish.

I think it's interesting to think about them as these two bodies in this digital space, and then how we examine them.

I want to find a way to put these two characters into an experiment; let these people be in the petri dish. And in the second section of the play, let them do this dance around this experiment and see what comes of it. What is the result of this dance between these two beings? Most people go into experiments with a hypothesis of how it's going to end up. Part of the Zoom experiment is to see if inside this dance in the middle section will result in something else at the end? Historically, it doesn't result in something else but I wonder if internally I could find a different place for the ending. So the Zoom experiment is a digital petri dish or centrifuge is probably more accurate.

**Hayley Finn:** It's fascinating—such a brilliant idea and concept. It does feel like, as we're all spending so much time on Zoom, we're looking at people under a microscope. You're seeing a close-up, right? And then, as you're saying, it's a reexamining of historical characters and you're own reimagining of it which is exciting to think about in that way of what is that lens you are actually looking at them under a microscope, and evaluating and reconfiguring and such. I think it's brilliant.

**Dominic Taylor:** The microscope thing is actually the third section of the play. That's where we look at them under the slide. We've had our experiment and then in the third section, we as an audience are looking at this slide and trying to figure out what it is and where it came from? What were the migration patterns, or whatever it was?

I think that the slide thing—I've always had this image thinking through this lab experiment, that at the third section something is placed under a real sheet of glass for us to view. We're not going to be able to do that in Zoom; an additional sheet of glass. But there is a thing where I'm like, "Oh yeah, now we've watched all this stuff happen. So now we, as an audience, are in a different position. What did we just see and what is it?" And then after we're done with it, we file our slide away in our memory and we go forward. I'm hopeful it'll be a really cool experiment in time.

**Hayley Finn:** So you've talked about the middle being the petri dish or the centrifuge and part three as being under the microscope. How do you see part one of the piece?

**Dominic Taylor:** So part one is when we're saying, "These are the two objects that we have. These are the two mixtures that we have. This is what oil is and this is what vinegar is. Or this is what peanut butter is and this is what chocolate is." or whatever; two different things. The thing I want to do in the first part is to have the audience say, "Okay, I have an understanding of who he is, so to speak. I have an understanding of who she is." And then in the second portion, that's where they're experimenting. So the first section is really pulling out the elements and looking at what the elements are and making each of those people objects before we go into the center section dance. So we'll see if it works.

**Hayley Finn:** Throughout the piece, there's a meta theatricality at play too. We're getting a sense of the actors who are playing the roles. And there's that tension that's existing, particularly around the woman who's playing Roger. Can you talk about that and how you imagined that existing?

**Dominic Taylor:** Yeah, that's me messing with theater; having fun with theater in some way. So we're in the artifice business. We have these characters, but then there's this consciousness that these actors are performing roles. These actors are doing these

things. But as we enter the world of the play, the context of these characters is different, so I wanted the actors to be aware of the context of the characters.

To clarify what I mean by the context, chances are most audience members don't know who Ernest Just is, however, they made a stamp of Ernest Just. To know Roger Arliner Young, you have to be somebody who really knows something. So what I am trying to do with the metatheatrical thing is to let the audience be aware that no, these two characters are not on an equal playing field. They might be on an equal playing field in the space that we're in or in the Zoom that we're in, but once you get into the world wide web they don't have an equal playing space.

Roger Arliner Young has no website dedicated to her. You have to go into black women in science and then you have to Google her and find her. Ernest Just—there are Ernest Just societies. People know who he is. So on the world wide web, cause we're staying in the Zoom thing, they have a deeper foothold. So I'm winking at what we do in theatre anyway. And I do think it's important to acknowledge. And I think it's fun for the actor who's playing the character to say, "Wait a second, what's going on? Why is this the image of this woman and this the image—images—of this man? And how do they play out in my world? What do I know?"

And so I guess it's me messing with theater. It's also me messing with the world wide web cause I know I say explicitly that there is a limited amount of information about her, and there's a lot of information about him. And not to say that the web is sexist, but that's just the fact of when you go and google these people. Yeah, it's a metatheatrical tool that I think lets the audience be aware that we're in a performance. You get lost in the characters but we're in a performance. And then we jump back to the performance, and we're in a performance, and we jump back to the performance.

And then, for me, there's this other function, this other piece of information about what is the value of the performance? Why are we performing this thing? Is it for history? Is it for empathy? Is it a combination of both? And the digital landscape adds to it. It's a great tool that can only happen in Zoom. You have to be in a space like this where a character holds up the actual person's picture that can take over the frame. It can cover the



**Dominic Taylor** (playwright) is a writer-director and scholar of African-American theater whose work has been seen around the world. The Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theatre, and New York Theatre Workshop have all commissioned him. His play *I Wish You Love* premiered at Penumbra Theatre and was produced at both the Kennedy Center and Hartford Stage. His published plays include *Hype Hero*, *Wedding Dance*, *Personal History*, and *Upcity Service(s)*. His essay “Don’t Call African American Theatre Black Theatre: It’s Like Calling a Dog a Cat” was published by the Massachusetts Review. Taylor is an alumnus member of New Dramatists. He received his bachelor’s and master of fine arts degree from Brown University and is a member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Dramatists Guild. He is the Interim Chair of Theater at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television.



**Shá Cage** (director) is a film and theater producer, director, writer and actress. Named a Changemaker, Artist of the Year, a leading artist of her generation, and a Mover and Maker, her work and activism has garnered distinguished awards and has taken her across the U.S, to Japan, England, France, Mali, the Netherlands, Croatia, and more. Recent theatrical directing projects include: Brandon Jacob-Jenkin’s *Everybody* (Nov 2020), *Buttafly Precinct* (Sept 2020), *The Day You Begin* (May 2020), *Bob Marley’s Three Little Birds* (Jan 2020), *The Viking and the Gazelle* (Nov 2019), Jocelyn Bioh’s *African School Girls* (June 2019), and seven film projects between 2019 and 2020. More info here: <https://freestylefilms.tv> or <http://filmstream.com>.



**ShaVunda Brown** (Dr. Roger Arliner Young) is an internationally award-winning spoken word artist, an actress, organizer, and rap lyricist. She writes to empower and shed light on raw truths, with a sharp social consciousness. Using her knowledge of African diasporic spirituality, history, mythos, and the southern folklore of her upbringing, she weaves stories and new visions of liberation. She has been seen in *Art is Black Light*, a MN Original Series featured on PBS TPT. She has originated a few roles in the world premiere of stage plays produced by The History Theater (MN), Children’s Theater (MN), and The Arena Stage

Theater (DC). ShaVunda is the recipient of a 2020 Artist Grant from the Walker Arts Center, 2020/2019 Performance Arts Award from Washington County. She is a 2017–18 inaugural cohort member of the Bush Foundation’s Change Network, and a 2016–17 Many Voices Mentorship at the Playwrights’ Center.



**Ashe Jaafaru** (apprentice stage manager) is an actor, performer, writer, and creative idea-maker. She is involved in theater, film, and voiceover work in the Twin Cities and beyond. She creates art for liberation and continues to write imaginative stories.



**Ben Lohrberg** (design assistant) is a Minneapolis-based director, actor, and singer. His directing work includes *MOTH* at Bryant-Lake Bowl Theater, *Cinderella: A World Premiere Musical* at Hope Summer Repertory, work with the Chicago Ave Project, and his one-person clown play *A Winter’s Hope*. His performance work has been seen at the Guthrie Theater, Ten Thousand Things, Park Square, Titan Theatre Company, Hope Summer Repertory, Interlochen Shakespeare Festival, and Feinstein’s/54 Below with his solo cabaret *Dream With Me*. Ben is a National YoungArts Winner and received his education from Interlochen Arts Academy and the UMN / Guthrie Theater BFA Actor Training Program. [Benlohrberg.com](http://Benlohrberg.com)



**Godfrey L. Simmons, Jr.\*** (Dr. Ernest Everett Just) is the new Artistic Director of HartBeat Ensemble, Hartford’s Public Theatre. He is also co-founder of Civic Ensemble, a community-based theatre company in Ithaca, NY. For Civic, he directed Eugene O’Neill’s *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* and *The Next Storm*, and appeared in *My Children! My Africa!*, *Fast Blood*, and his adaptation of Mike Daisey’s *The Trump Card*. Godfrey was Producing Artist in charge of New Artist Development for Off-Broadway’s Epic Theatre Ensemble, appearing in *A More Perfect Union*, *Widowers’ Houses* (which Godfrey co-adapted with Ron Russell), and *Measure for Measure*, among other plays. At Epic, he also co-wrote and starred in a documentary play about the election of President Barack Obama, *Dispatches From (A)mended America*. Additional

New York theater credits include *The Old Settler* (Primary Stages), *Betty’s Summer Vacation* (Playwrights Horizons), *Free Market* (Working Theater), *Leader of the People* (New Georges), and *microcrisis* (Ensemble Studio Theater). Godfrey is a 2012 TCG/Fox Fellow, a participant in the TCG SPARK Leadership Program, and a lifetime member of Ensemble Studio Theatre.



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**Actors’ Equity Association** (“Equity”), founded in 1913, is the U.S. labor union that represents more than 51,000 professional Actors and Stage Managers. Equity fosters the art of live theatre as an essential component of society and advances the careers of its members by negotiating wages, improving working conditions and providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. Actors’ Equity is a member of the AFL-CIO and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. #EquityWorks

Equity is governed by its own members through an elected Council, representing principal actors, chorus actors and stage managers living in three regions: Eastern, Central and Western. Members at large participate in Equity’s governance through a system of regional Boards and Committees. Equity has 28 designated area liaison cities with over 100 members each.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH DOMINIC TAYLOR (*continued*)

complete frame of who they were. You couldn't do that on stage. You couldn't have that happen. So I'm like, "That's kind of really cool." Cause I'm trying to play into the Zoom tool as much as I can to use the form to see what the form gleans us.

If you're a composer or if you're a songwriter and somebody says you're writing a jingle, you're writing a particular type of song. And then if you're writing a show tune, you're also writing a particular type of song. And so what I wanted to do—and this is the other thing with the metatheatrical thing—I'm in Zoom so I wanted to lean into the Zoom in some way and be like, "This is something that can only happen in Zoom. This little microtool can only happen in Zoom." Also, hopefully, it'll keep grounding the play in historical accuracy or the conversation with the historical accuracy, because it's not historically accurate. I take flights of fancy in terms of my storytelling, but the images keep grounding it back.

**Hayley Finn:** Yeah, so I feel like you're dancing around this next question that I have because you've touched on it a bit both here and before. Is there a sense that the end is what the end is, in terms of history? It's over for both of these characters. And in this play, you're interested in investigating if it's not over. In some way, it feels like there's a continuation of the story that you're having. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

**Dominic Taylor:** Yeah. The biggest continuation in the story has to do with black men, black women, power relationships, the STEM world. There's a thing that happens which I think—and I don't want to reduce the play to this—but I think that one of the things which is an engine in the play and part of the reason why I'm really glad Shá's working on the play with me is black men are... we exist in the American society in a complex position and there are moments of oppression which are part of our lives. And then what do we do with those moments of oppression or how do we manifest those on the people that are our inner circle or on our friends? A lot of times the pain gets pushed onto black women in some way. It's an interesting thing when I'm thinking about privilege or authority.

Like in the unfortunate story, Just tells Roger that solo-authored works have power in the academy, which is true. As a black man who works in the academy half the time, I know that if you are a co-author of a work, they're like, "Oh you're a black scholar,

but you're not really a scholar. You're a black scholar with an asterisk." But the thing is, to take the authority away from this black woman, it's horrible. It's the notion that black men do have privilege. We have male privilege. Particularly, cis-gendered men have this male privilege space that is a space of privilege inside the black community. It's problematic when you go outside the black community—you know, Ernest Just in the Dartmouth world, so to speak. But I do think that the conversation is intraracial as opposed to interracial if I even want to use those kinds of phrases. And it's a weird kind of thing.

Then the other piece, which I can't forget, is graduate students and authority, or junior faculty members and senior faculty members. There's this whole dynamic academic architecture of power and status where people acknowledge their privilege. I'm a full professor at a university. I gotta be aware that if a graduate student gives me a paper, I can publish the paper and tell her—since we'll stay with gender—and tell her that I'm just gonna take authorship. I'll look out for her on the next one. And there's nothing that the student can do really. There are some steps that they can take, but by and large, I still have power, which is not fair. And so I think that the continued story is can this power be seen as the result of oppression—it's weird. One of the unusual things is, so what do you do with that pain and why do you inflict it on someone else? There's something that I don't put in the play that I probably should, now that I'm thinking about it. When the book got published in 1936, Roger Arliner Young was removed from her position at Howard. She was voted out by the faculty and she was removed. And the reason for her removal was that they claimed that she was a hysteric, which in the 1936 vocabulary was just like a reason to get rid of a woman. You know what I'm saying?

**Hayley Finn:** I do know. That was my thesis. It was on women in the 19th-century diagnosed with hysteria, so I'm quite familiar with the term, yeah. [laughs]

**Dominic Taylor:** Right. Just was part of the faculty group that had her removed. And then after that, she went on to get her Ph.D. at U Penn and have a teaching career. But that thing happening is so horrible and ridiculous. The fact that black men perpetrated it. The faculty at Howard at the time—the science faculty—included these great men. Charles Drew created plasma. Percy Julian helped build steroids; these great, great

men of science, right? And then they go and remove this woman because she's inconvenient or in the way. And it's such a... it's like if white guys did it, people would be like, "Oh, you know, that's white male privilege." Black guys do it, they try to find excuses for it. So I guess what I'm trying to do, to answer the question—the continuing story—is I'm trying to remove those excuses. I'm trying to have us examine that black community question about how we deal inside these worlds.

And I do think institutions help build those structures that we buy into which are detrimental. Like I was talking about—like single authorship or the notion that there's a limited number of positions available inside the academy. So if I have a position and a black woman has a position, we're taking up too much space. There's a pointlessly competitive space. And I do know—although *Biology and the Cell Surface* historically has placed Just in this pantheon of science—that book alone actually moved him into extraspecial territory. I don't think it would have been a problem if it was co-authored with another person. I don't think it would have. Hindsight is 20/20.

Just wanted to go back to Dartmouth and teach. And he actually applied for a job at Brown. He didn't get it which is weird. But it's so strange that they were like... you're an African American professor. Do you think Brown's gonna hire you in 1936? It's not gonna happen, you know. And it didn't happen for a long time. But that's neither here nor there. Brown was more liberal than Dartmouth and other places. My point being, his publishing the book didn't get him into those places. He stayed at Howard until he died. He stayed at Howard. It was fine. So if he put Roger's name on it, he was still working at Howard. It's not as if he places Roger's name on it, oh yeah, Brown's gonna not take him. Brown wasn't taking him anyway. Brown wasn't gonna hire him. You know, it's one of those things like, I don't know why you're trying to step on people because it's not gonna change your position. It's really not. And I do think trying to find black intraracial understanding is a tough space. And here I'm talking about gender. Gendered misunderstandings, that's the primary one.

**Hayley Finn:** Is there anything that you are particularly looking at in this workshop or any particular element that you have an eye on as you're working on the piece?

**Dominic Taylor:** For this workshop, one of the things I'm trying

to figure out is are there other tools in Zoom that I'm not thinking about using? I'll give you an example, although I don't think I can do it. So when we go on Zoom calls every day—every day [laughs] all day—the two things that happen which aren't in the play, but I'm trying to figure out how to float into the play, are the participants' window and the chat. Those are part of our Zoom lives, right?

**Hayley Finn:** Necessary, yeah.

**Dominic Taylor:** And so I've been trying to figure out how do I float those things in? And it is about leaning into the technology in some way to try to find what are the particular things that make it what it is. And I do think that this is really—for me—this experiment is different than just trying to turn a play into a Zoom play. I probably should let you know *The Biology of the Surface* is a much longer play that I wrote for Ensemble Studio Theatre.

This play is half of it; less than half of it actually. What I'm trying to do is change the story and morphing it into being inside finding a frame for the tale. I'm trying to find a way to which this technology gives the experience form.

I'm not trying to bring this into a land of television or trying to bring this into a film in any way. It's really about trying to find a way to make this a unique Zoom play. Now I know after the pandemic is over, nobody is going to be doing Zoom plays. But for this experiment, this is what I'm trying to pull off. And so, I don't know, it's like chat, participants, sharing screens, I'm just trying to figure out that stuff; the tools in Zoom that I could use to try to tell this story. That's it. That's the biggest piece.

**Hayley Finn:** That's great. Is there anything that we didn't touch on that you wanted to say?

**Dominic Taylor:** I've had people talk to me about this play and the Me Too movement and the Black Lives Matter movement and how those two things inform the play. Neither one of those movements, in particular, inform the making of this play. I mean, they're both part of our lives and so I think that they are in the play in some way. But they're not points that I was pointing towards. But I've had people read it and ask me about the mixture of Black Lives Matter and Me Too, and I guess Black Lives Matter and Me Too have been a part of my life from the

## INTERVIEW *(continued)*

beginning because sexism and racism are together. Because I'm like, "Oh yeah, I get it." The Me Too piece is just—the Black Lives Matter piece might be obvious—the Me Too piece is—how I was raised with a sister 15 months older and she and I've always been close.

My sister was the first girl to play little league baseball in Orange, New Jersey. She wasn't a pioneer but she was this girl at the time that was always the first girl to do these boyish things. And then I would take dance classes with her and we would do whatever the other person was doing cause that's how my mother raised us. But it was always, I always loved this... just a quick story about Me Too. So my sister and I played on this church basketball team together, a co-ed basketball team. This is a long time ago. And she was the only girl on the team and guys wouldn't guard her. Guys wouldn't guard her. And she was killing 'em! She was getting 20 points a game. Somebody said to me, "You know your sister's scoring more than you." I'm like, "Nobody's guarding her. This is great!" She's open in the corner. I'm giving her the ball. It was fantastic! And so I think I have always been like, "You're not gonna guard her, what are you crazy?" But it is a thing about, I don't know, equality is always essential to everything, in so many ways. I mean, it's just part of my life. That was all. That was the only thing I was going to say.

**Hayley Finn:** I'm really excited about this piece. It's just been a pleasure having this conversation.

**Dominic Taylor:** Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. I think this will be fun. I'm hoping—you know when you build plays and you're like, "Do they have a life afterward?" It would be fun to have a Zoom life afterwards. I know that people are probably gonna be sick of Zoom when we get done with the pandemic. But I just think this would just be fun. [laughs] I'm looking forward to this a lot.

**Hayley Finn:** One of the great things about Zoom that we've learned is that it's easier to access material through Zoom. It gives people access to a lot of narratives that they wouldn't have had otherwise. And so I could see that still happening post-pandemic, for sure.

**Dominic Taylor:** I talk about this a lot. After this pandemic, what are we taking with us when we go forward? Cause I think a lot of times people are like, "I just want to get on from this and ignore 2020." And I'm like, "There's stuff we can bring with us." And if you can bring a play with you it's good, you know, learning about a bunch of things. Like I say I'm really optimistic about this, so we'll see what happens. And thanks for doing this, I'm glad the Playwrights' Center is doing this. This will be fun.

**Hayley Finn:** Thank you.

## ARTISTS IN CONVERSATION

Building on our sold-out Public Discussion series from past seasons, *Artists in Conversation* offers a uniquely intimate look at playwrights and their process. Unlike the Center's many scripted events throughout the year, these conversations offer audiences a chance to connect directly with writers, hearing artists' thoughts on craft, the field, and the world through their own unfiltered words. Past conversations have featured acclaimed theater artists, including Migdalia Cruz, Lisa D'Amour, Daniel Alexander Jones, José Rivera, and Paula Vogel, among others.

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by Ken Urban

Dec 18, 2020

**CELL SURFACE**

by Dominic Taylor

Jan 22, 2021

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Meiyin Wang, Producing Director at The Ronald O. Perelman Performing Arts Center joins Philip Bither, McGuire Director and Senior Curator, Performing Arts at Walker Art Center for a sold-out Public Discussion. Photo by Josh Olson

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Meghan Kreidler as Volina in Betty Shamieh's *Malvolio*, during the February 2020 Ruth Easton New Play Series. Photo by Paula Keller

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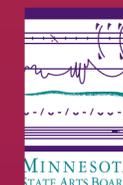
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Social justice is at the heart of the Playwrights' Center's work. We strive for it by actively supporting equitable theater-making practices that shift the paradigm, uplifting unheard stories and sharing them with the world. With your support, the Center can provide the greatest diversity of artists with the time, tools, and space to tell their truths and reshape audiences' perspectives.

**Make a gift and amplify vital storytellers today! [pwcenter.org/donate](https://pwcenter.org/donate)**

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# THEATER BEGINS HERE

"Stories give us chances to see ourselves and what we could hope to be."

—2020–21 Jerome Fellow, Candrice Jones

**We start with the storytellers.  
The playwrights.  
The artists.**

As we continue to meet the challenges of these times, the Playwrights' Center seeks to reimagine what is possible in theater; both in this moment and beyond. Throughout our 2020–21 Season we are intensifying our efforts, investing even more deeply in creative process, arts education, and access to opportunity. We are working to amplify unheard voices and promote equitable spaces, allowing for the greatest diversity of artists to make plays around the world. Through additional fellowships and increased public programming, we are creating new channels of support for thousands of writers—from paid opportunities that will sustain playwrights and theatermakers, to expanded educational resources that will enhance online learning tools and connect university students from around the world. We are inspiring a whole new generation of theater artists. It begins here.

**Join us!**

## OUR MISSION

Playwrights' Center sustains, develops, and advocates for playwrights and their work to realize their full artistic potential.

## OUR VISION

Through the practice of inclusive theater-making, Playwrights' Center fosters engagement towards an equitable, empathetic, and boundlessly imaginative world.

## OUR VALUES

### **Centering Artists**

We believe in the crucial role that playwrights and theatermakers play in witnessing the past, illuminating the present, and dreaming us forward. Our work is grounded in the needs, desires, and sustainability of the artists we support, prioritizing long-term artistic relationships.

### **Adaptability**

We recognize that playwriting processes are as diverse as the human beings pursuing them. We evolve our perspectives, practices, resources, and partnerships in order to stay relevant and responsive to artists' needs.

### **Equity**

We continually interrogate our relationship to the word Equity. We support artists across all spectrums, with an emphasis on underrepresented and under-supported voices. We aim to uproot systemic inequities that inhibit creativity and focus on building new systems that center meaningful financial compensation. We understand this work to be intersectional and long-term, grounded in relationships and evolving anti-racist practices.

### **Inclusivity + Accessibility**

We proactively engage and welcome people of all abilities, ages, cultures, ethnicities, genders, incomes, races, religions, and sexual orientations. We intentionally engage artists locally, nationally, and internationally, working across a multitude of processes and aesthetics.

### **Advocacy**

We fight for a theater field in which playwrights and theatermakers not only survive but thrive. We are committed to modeling how institutions can authentically support the art of storytelling, and connect artists' work to audiences around the globe.