



BROWN

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Brown University Writing for Performance Program Showcase Hits New York

PROVIDENCE, RI — The Brown University Writing for Performance program introduced the class of 2017 to the New York performance scene last week as part of a new week-long playwriting residency developed in partnership with The Flea Theater, New York (Artistic Director, Niegel Smith).

In their third year at Brown, Writing for Performance students take up the third phase of their annual practicum. *Action* follows *Articulation* (first year, where writers engage with notation) and *Atelier* (second year, where the focus is on initial moves from text into live time and space through a rehearsal process). In *Action*, students build community, looking to develop conversations with a wider circle of collaborators over a longer period of time and by a range of means including readings, consultations, and an intensive workshop period. As a culmination of their three years in the program, the writers are asked to take their biggest textual risks, pressing at and beyond the most hopeful limit of what they know and believe their words can do.

This year for the first time, the Brown University Department of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies has developed a fully reciprocal relationship with The Flea Theater in New York. The partnership allows the graduate student writers to share a dynamic, creative, experimental, and professional space with a theater at the vanguard of writing for performance. The Flea Theater makes available its space as well as resident actors and directors, giving the Brown students a unique opportunity to engage collaboratively with emerging voices in the world of theater, performance, and activism. The purpose of the residency is to shape creative environments in which writers generate work with the aim of igniting life-long artistic relationships.

This year's final year students in the program are Diane Exavier '17 MFA and Carlos Sirah '17 MFA. Both Exavier and Sirah presented excerpts of new work on Monday as the culmination of their week-long residency at The Flea Theatre.

Diane Exavier '17 MFA writes, makes, thinks a lot, and laughs even more. As a theater artist and educator, she creates performance events, public programs, and games that challenge the traditional role of the audience, inviting viewers to participate in the active realization of a theater that rejects passive reception. Her work has been presented at California State University: Northridge, New Urban Arts (Providence), West Chicago City Museum, and in New York: Bowery Poetry Club, Dixon Place, Independent Curators International, Brick Theater, Medialia Gallery, The Invisible Dog, and more. Her fiction, poems, prose, and dreams appear in *The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind*, *The Atlas Review*, *CUNJUH Magazine*, and *Daughter*. Her nonfiction chapbook *Teaches of Peaches* will be published by TAR in Summer 2017. Exavier is a three-time recipient of the Roland Wood Fellowship for Theater Studies from Amherst College.

Good Blood by Diane Exavier '17 MFA was directed by Lilleth Glimcher. *Good Blood* follows the story of a Haitian family living in Brooklyn and their sudden return to Haiti. From the journey of immigrants to the spread of a global epidemic, *Good Blood* crosses language, time, and an ocean as it questions the contracts we make, the conditions we live under, and what it means to reach for a love that might outlive you.

Carlos Sirah '17 MFA is a performer, writer, and veteran. His work encounters exile, rupture, displacement in relation to institutions, local and beyond. His most recent theater pieces include: *The Light Body* and *Planets Measured by Parallax*. His work has been performed and/or shown at Poet's House, Nuyorican Café, KGB, The Wild Project, Brown University, and the National Black Theatre Festival. Sirah has also performed on the main stage at the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival. He has developed work at Vermont Studio Center, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Warrior Writers in collaboration with William Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences, The Hambidge Center, The Virginia Center for Creative Arts, and The Blue Mountain Center. He is a facilitator and serves on the steering committee of *Warrior Writers*, a community of veterans who make art. Sirah also facilitates a weekly workshop at the Rhode Island State correctional facility. He previously worked as an organizer for Iraq Veterans Against the War. Sirah is a Lambda Literary Writer's Retreat Fellow for 2017.

The Utterances by Carlos Sirah '17 MFA was directed by Marina McClure. After a large-scale ecological disaster, coupled with The War that Settled Dust, were-citizens of The City, now fugitive from home and land, seek out alternative territories in order to (re)build, (re)member, and (re)name.

Brown University's graduate Writing for Performance program culminates in an MFA Playwriting degree. The program is a central site in New England for the formation of new playwrights. The program grants its students broad inventive license while offering close mentorship and profound resources in the department, the university, and the greater local and international communities. The program is run by Erik Ehn, a Professor in the Department of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies and a successful playwright in his own right. Ehn aim to cultivate writers dedicated to the development of their craft, the deep interrogation of the forms and purposes of their art (and of the place of art in the larger world), and a leaning into authentic transformation of society through theatrical action. Alumni of the program include Pulitzer Prize winner, Quiara Alegría Hudes '04 MFA (*In the Heights*, *Water by the Spoonful*); MacArthur Genius Grantee, Nilo Cruz '94 MFA (*Anna in the Tropics*); and Pulitzer Prize nominee, Sarah Ruhl '01 MFA (*The Clean House*, *In the Next Room*). The festival (formerly the *New Plays Festival*) is made possible through support from an endowed fund for the Adele Kellenberg Seaver '49 Professorship in Literary Arts.

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The Flea Theater, one of New York's leading Off-Off-Broadway companies, is delighted to be joining forces with the Brown University MFA Writing For Performance Program. Under Artistic Director Niegel Smith and Producing Director Carol Ostrow, The Flea is known as a home for cutting edge productions and a haven for emerging artists. The Flea has presented close to 200 world premiere theater, music and dance productions since its inception in 1996 and is the winner of several Obie Awards, a Special Drama Desk Award for outstanding achievement and an Otto Award for political theater. Past productions include premieres by Steven Banks, Thomas Bradshaw, Erin Courtney, Bathsheba Doran, Will Eno, Karen Finley, Amy Freed, Sarah Gancher, Sean Graney, A.R. Gurney, Jennifer Haley, Hamish Linklater, Enrique Gutiérrez Ortiz Monasterio, Itamar Moses, Anne Nelson, Qui Nguyen, Adam Rapp, Jonathan Reynolds, Kate Robbins, Roger Rosenblatt, Elizabeth Swados, and Mac Wellman. Successes include *The Guys* as well as Drama Desk nominated *She Kills Monsters*, *These Seven Sicknesses*, *Restoration Comedy*, *The Mysteries* and ten World Premiere productions by A.R. Gurney. The Flea has just completed a \$23M capital campaign and is poised to move into a new three theater performing arts complex in Tribeca this fall.

theflea.org

The Brown University Department of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies is the intellectual and artistic center at Brown for faculty and students interested in the aesthetic, historical, literary, practical, and theoretical explorations of performance in global perspective-theatre, dance, speech, performance art, and performative "roles" in everyday life.

In addition to the Undergraduate Program, the department offers a Doctoral Program in Theatre and Performance Studies, an MFA program in Playwriting, and the Brown/Trinity MFA programs in Acting and Directing. The department is a member of Brown University's Engaged Scholarship Program and the newly-founded Brown Arts Initiative. Dedicated to diversity and inclusion and cutting edge theory and practice, the department produces innovative scholarship and creative work by faculty and students alike.

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