**America's Leading Native American Theatre Company Presents** 

# 29<sup>TH</sup> FESTIVAL OF NEW PLAYS

JUNE 10&11

AUTRY MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN WEST JUNE | 18

LA JOLLA **PLAY HOUSE** 



# NATIVE VOICES

For as long as there have been humans, there have been stories. Stories are embedded in our souls and etched on our bones. They make us who we are. In a good story, you can lose yourself. A good story allows us to escape and experience another way of living.

However, only a great story can help you find yourself. A great story unlocks our blood memory and reminds us of who we are and who we are meant to be.

For this year's 29th Festival of New Plays, the two plays selected explore finding our place in our communities, the world, and, in *Comanche Girl on the Moon*, even the galaxy! Both delve into the complexity of losing a loved one and the complicated family dynamics that it brings to light. Most importantly, both remind us that we are our ancestors' dreams come true.

I fell in love with Maddox Pennington's work when I read their first play in *The Muldrow Trilogy*. That is a bold statement on my behalf since I am from Muldrow, and I have never uttered the name of that town with the word *love* before in my life! But Maddox gave me a fresh lens into rural Oklahoma and my own biases. In *Central Standard Time*, Maddox tackles generational, cultural, and political issues with grace, grit, and a healthy dose of *"Bless your heart."* Their heart, humor, and headstrong characters remind us that making a place a home takes work.

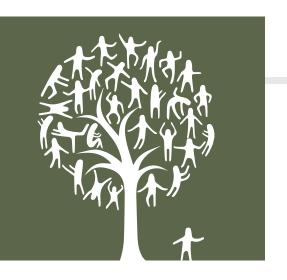
Dustin Tahmahkera is no stranger to the Autry. We first encountered Dustin through his work with the Autry's own Josh Garrett-Davis on the upcoming *Imagined Wests* exhibition. However Dustin's short play *9-1-1 Comanchería* won the 11th Annual Short Play Festival and the hearts of our audiences. When we received a Mellon grant with Children's Theatre Company to commission new plays for intergenerational audiences, Dustin wowed us with his proposal and received our inaugural commission for Generation Now. We are pleased to share with you the very *first* workshop of *Comanche Girl on the Moon.* Dustin weaves a beautiful tale about bullying, identity, and the loss of a grandparent. What begins as a journey to escape these trials becomes a quest for greater connection and a sense of worth.

As always, we would not be able to share these stories without your support. Whether you go to Oklahoma or the moon, we hope you find yourself in these stories and the people who inhabit them. May they remind you of who you are and who you are meant to be.

We are grateful you are a part of the Native Voices family and our community. Because of you, we will continue to have more stories to tell.

De Sanna Studi

### **FEATURING**



### Central Standard Time



by **Maddox Pennington** (Cherokee)

**The Autry:** Saturday, June 10, 2:30 p.m. **La Jolla Playhouse:** Sunday, June 18, 1:00 p.m.

After moving back to their family hometown in rural Oklahoma, Jay confronts chasms of generational and cultural differences in their hopes of contributing to their Nation and family. Jay's reconnection is tested by resistance from relatives, scrutiny at work, but most of all by an uncertain and shifting notion of home

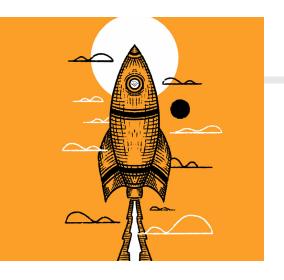
Director: Rainy Fields (Muscogee Nation/Cherokee)

Dramaturg: Carolyn Dunn (Cherokee, Mvskoke Creek, French Creole,

and Tunica/Choctaw Biloxi descent)
Stage Manager: **Kholan Studi** (Cherokee)

JAY	Maia Vik Villa (Rarámuri, Nahua, Maya)
IRENEJehne	an Washington (Yuchi, Seminole, Shoshone)
GREAT-AUNT AGGIE	Sheri Foster (Cherokee)
AUNT MARGIE	. Arigon Starr (Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma)
UNCLE LUKETom Allard	(Loyal Shawnee Band of Cherokee Nation)
RHIANNONOkee Dunn-And	erson (Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians)

### **FEATURING**



### Comanche Girl on the Moon



by **Dustin Tahmahkera** (Comanche)

The Autry: Sunday, June 11, 2:30 p.m.

La Jolla Playhouse: Sunday, June 18, 4:00 p.m.

Tired of being bullied at school, Petu discovers her late grandmother's secret rocket ship on her family's allotment in Oklahoma. Together with her humorous animal relatives and some eccentric interplanetary creatures, Petu plans to fly to the moon in search of a new start, but at what cultural cost to herself and her tribal community in Oklahoma?

Director: **Princess Daazhraii Johnson** (Neest'aii Gwich'in)

Dramaturg: Olivia Espinosa (Azteca)

Stage Manager: **Jennifer Bobiwash** (Mississauga First Nation)

PETUSovereign Bill (Tlingit and enrolled Muckleshoot tribal member)
TABU
KINA
PASI / KWASI Enrico Nassi (Otoe-Missouria Tribe, Cherokee)
OHA / TASI / KUEWOO
KAHU / PABI Benny Wayne Sully (Sicangu Lakhota)
NUMUMUA Jennifer Bobiwash (Mississauga First Nation)

### "If I'm here to reconnect, I should connect with the family that's here. And they should connect with me? That's the only way this...counts."

- Jay, from Central Standard Time

### "And tomorrow can't come too soon, for I'll be a Comanche girl on the moon."

- Petu, from Comanche Girl on the Moon

Maddox Pennington (Cherokee) (they/he) is a nonbinary writer, professor, and stand-up comic originally from the Cherokee Nation; they received an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Columbia University, and their debut bibliomemoir, *A Girl Walks Into a Book: What the Brontes Taught Me About Life, Love, and Women's Work* was published by Hachette Books in 2017. Currently they teach college writing courses on topics of empathy and monsters, Disability Studies, and Native Studies at the University of Southern California. Their play *LOVE CHICKEN* premiered at the 2022 Hollywood Fringe Festival, where it was a Best Comedy nominee and won the Theater Theatre Podcast Playwright Award. *Embers Borne West*, their first play in a trilogy about Native migration and intergenerational belonging, was featured in the 2022 Moving Arts MADLab reading series. They are directing *Annex*, a dark comedy they wrote about mental illness, queer family and magical realism, for its HFF23 premiere at the Zephyr Theatre in LA.

Dustin Tahmahkera (Comanche) (he/him) is a parent of four beautiful children, playwright of Comanche-centric theatre, and professor of Native media and sound studies at the University of Oklahoma. Tahmahkera's recent short play 9-1-1 Comanchería, received both the best play and audience favorite awards at Native Voices Short Play Festival in Los Angeles. 9-1-1 Comanchería is part of a series of original short plays in Tahmahkera's book project Comanche vs. the World. His previous books include Tribal Television: Viewing Native Peoples in Sitcoms (University of North Carolina Press) and Cinematic Comanches: The Lone Ranger in the Media Borderlands (University of Nebraska Press).



Rainy Fields (enrolled citizen of the Muscogee Nation/Cherokee descent) (she/her) graduated from the University of New Mexico with a BA in Theatre. She co-created and co-hosted the *Hollywood Ndnz Podcast* with over 40 episodes produced. Most recently she voiced the character of Piper in Rick Riordon's audiobook *The Lost Hero*.



Princess Daazhraii Johnson's (Neest'aii Gwich'in)
(she/her) directing work includes both film and
theatre, most recently her short film We Will Walk
the Trail of our Ancestors is available through the
Reciprocity Project/REI Studios. She has helped direct
staged readings for Native Voices, Play Penn, and
Perseverance Theatre and full productions for Cyrano's
Playhouse. Johnson is also a Peabody Award-winning
and Emmy nominated film/tv producer, writer, and voice
actor known for her work on PBS Kids Molly of Denali,
Indy-docs Walking Two Worlds, Apayuaq, Disney's

SuperKitties, and The Great North. She lives on lower Tanana Dene lands with her family in Alaska.

"We're senior citizens. We know how to look up the homework. And Rhiannon there is what you'd call a digital native, isn't that right Ree."

- Edna, from Central Standard Time

"A story transforms when different people tell them. A lot of people have different stories. But putting them together, when you come together, that's when the magic happens."

- Kaku, from Comanche Girl on the Moon



Creole, and Tunica/Choctaw Biloxi descent) (she/her) is a storyteller who encompasses both poetry and playwriting with works about family, grief, resilience, and the landscape in all genres in-between. In addition to the award-winning Outfoxing Coyote, her books include Through the Eye of the Deer, Coyote Speaks, Echolocation: Poems, Stories and Songs from Indian Country: L.A., The Stains of Burden and Dumb Luck, and more. Her plays The Frybread Queen, Ghost Dance, and Soledad have been developed and staged at Native Voices and her current

work in progress is the pow wow comedy *Chasing Tailfeathers*. Stage acting credits include *Desert Stories for Lost Girls, The Bingo Palace, Neechie-itas, Sliver of a Full Moon,* and the musicals *Distant Thunder* and *Missing Peace*. She lives in Los Angeles and Oklahoma with her family.



Olivia Espinosa (Azteca) (she/her) has taken on roles as an actor, director, and playwright. She is honored to work as a dramaturg since much of her experience centers on Theater for Young Audiences, including performing in two La Jolla Playhouse POP Tours, and traveling with Armed Forces Entertainment, performing for military families. Espinosa currently teaches the fundamentals of improv for effective communication and engaging storytelling to lawyers with Haus of Improv, a company co-founded by her and her husband.



Jennifer Bobiwash (Mississauga First Nation) (she/her) is an Anishinaabekwe from Misswezhaging. She is a First Nations actor, playwright, and director raised in Robinson Huron Treaty territory. She was a Season 21 Volt lab writer with Boston's Company One Theatre, a past Artist in Residence at Thurgood Marshall College at UC San Diego, and is currently writing two new plays, one for the Vagrancy's Blossoming staged reading series and the other for Moving Arts MadLab series.



kholan Studi (Cherokee Nation) (he/him) was born and raised in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Ever since he was a child, he has loved entertaining folks and making them laugh and feel. In 2012, Studi moved to Los Angeles to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts where he completed his studies in 2015. Since then, he has worked in many productions with Native Voices, including *They Don't Talk Back* by Frank Henry Kaash Katasse and *Bingo Hall* by Dillon Chitto. Studi was also honored to play Elias Boudinot in a production of *Sovereignty* by Mary Kathryn Nagle at Marin Theatre

Company in 2019. During the pandemic, he took part in Perseverance Theatre's production of *Spirit of the Valley* by Frank Henry Kaash Katasse, as well as lent his voice to Native Voices' *The Adventures of Super Indian* by Arigon Starr. In 2022, he was an understudy for *Between 2 Knees* by the 1491's where he lived every actor's nightmare by taking the stage for part of the run. Studi would like to send his love and support to all those affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"Why am I supposed to tiptoe around sixty-yearold grudges and make secret alliances to exist, when nobody's even trying to understand me."

"Ah, yes. The opposite of gravitate is levitate, which means to hover above ground by magical powers."

- Pasi, from Comanche Girl on the Moon



Tom Allard (Loyal Shawnee Band of Cherokee Nation) (he/him) taught stagecraft and video filmmaking before becoming the resident storyteller for Pasadena Polytechnic School. This September will mark his 52nd year of singing for his supper, in one form or another. He is deeply grateful for this continued adventure with Native Voices.



Sovereign Bill (Tlingit and enrolled Muckleshoot tribal member) (she/her) is the voice of Molly in *Molly of Denali* on PBS, the first nationally broadcasted Alaskan Native cartoon with an Indigenous lead. She is lives in Washington and is attending college to pursue her love of arts and advocate for her community.



Samantha Bowling (Cherokee) (she/they) is a standup, sketch, improv, and character comedian from Cincinnati, Ohio. She lives, works, plays with her dog, paints, writes music, drives a stick shift, and performs in Los Angeles. Her solo show *This Was Never Supposed to Be a One-Woman Show: A One-Woman Show* is premiering at this year's Hollywood Fringe. Theatre credits include *Desert Stories for Lost Girls, Spirit of the Valley* (Perseverance Theatre), *The Lowell Offering* (Merrimack Repertory Theatre), *Under a Big Sky* (Native Voices), and *Informed Consent* (Lantern Theater).

TV/Film credits include *Tomb Invaders* (SyFy), *Back to Awesome* (Amazon), and *Blood Brother* (Lifetime). @2ndGuessCorrect

"I'm not...I'm not out to the family, so please don't say anything."



Okee Dunn-Anderson (Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians) (they/them) is a Two-Spirit person from San Pedro, California. They have played roles such as Willy Wonka in *Charley and the Chocolate Factory*, the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, and Sandra King in *Round Dance*.



Rainbow Dickerson (Thai/Rappahannock) (she/her) recently finished the world premiere run of Cashed Out by Claude Jackson, Jr. at San Francisco Playhouse and can be seen on stage next in Manahatta by Mary Kathryn Nagle at The Public Theatre in NYC. On screen, she has received accolades for her work in the feature Beans, including a TIFF Rising Star and Best Supporting Actress Award; and portrays a beloved character in the coming Netflix adaptation of Avatar: The Last Airbender. Currently, Dickerson is passionately producing and performing in a film adaptation of Cashed Out. Other selected credits

include the ABC Disney Discovers Program, Broadway, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, American Repertory Theatre, Yale Repertory, and others. She is represented by Liberman Zerman Management and Griffin Talent.



Sheri Foster (Cherokee) (she/her) is originally from Texas but has long been active in Los Angeles' entertainment community. Her theater experiences include the world premiere of Bill Yellow Robe's *The Independence of Eddie Rose, Death of a Miner, God of Vengeance, Meacham in Uniform,* and touring with the Native American Theater Group's Mystic Voices. Most recently she lent her voice to Arigon Starr's *The New Adventures of Super Indian* and performed in Larissa FastHorse's *Urban Rez* with Cornerstone Theater Company. Her film work includes Oliver Stone's *U-Turn* (for which she was

honored with a Best Supporting Actress Award from First Americans in the Arts), *Naturally Native, Secondhand Heart, Shouting Secrets,* and *MOHAWK.* Her television performances include *House,* TNT's *Crazy Horse,* PBS's *Coyote* 

Wait's, and NBC's comedy, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt for which she was the first American Indian actress to be considered for an Emmy for her role as Fern on the Netflix series. She provided narration for the Emmy-nominated Great Performances PBS special featuring the American Indian Dance Theater. She served on the board directors of the American Indian Registry founded by Will Sampson and was a founding Trustee of The First American in the Arts. Foster's directing debut was The Dawes Commission, a play by the late Bob Hicks. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Academy-nominated make-up artist, John Blake.



Jason Grasl (Blackfeet) (he/him) is an actor, playwright, and director. Film/TV credits include Rutherford Falls, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, 9-1-1, White Collar, Hot in Cleveland, Cassidy Red, and The Seminarian. Theatre credits include The New Adventures of Super Indian and Fairly Traceable (Native Voices); Laughter on the 23rd Floor (Garry Marshall Theatre); Cherokee (Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company); The Blame of Love and Sliver of a Full Moon (touring); Urban Rez (assistant director); and Tony n' Tina's Wedding. Playwright credits include The Normal Force, Lying with Badgers, Emergency Management, and The Blame of Love.

Grasl is currently an adjunct faculty member in the Theatre Department at CSULA and is an MFA student in the Dramatic Writing program at USC.



Enrico Nassi (Otoe-Missouria Tribe, Cherokee) (he/him) appeared most recently as John Ridge in *Sovereignty* (Theatre for a New Audience). Regional credits include *Asher, Lying with Badgers* (Native Voices at the Autry); *Ensemble, Diana* (La Jolla Playhouse); *Billy, The Real Thing* (Studio Theatre); *Ned, Exorcism,* (Arena Stage); *1938: Inventing the Enemy* (Theater J); and *Man, Machinalia* (JACK.BROOKLYN). He earned his MFA at UCSD.



Arigon Starr (Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma) (she/her) is an award-winning musician, actor, and playwright, as well as a renowned comic book writer and artist. Her work with Native Voices includes her comedy musical *The Red Road* and the radio comedy *Super Indian*. A former Tulsa Artist Fellow, she created the romantic comedy *Round Dance* for the Oklahoma Indian Theater Company in 2018 during her fellowship. She is a member of SAG-AFTRA and Actors' Equity and is based in Los Angeles.



Benny Wayne Sully (Sicangu Lakhota) (he/him) is an actor based out of LA. He is an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, home of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate. He was recently seen in the Off-Broadway premiere of *peerless* by Jiehae Park at 59e69 in association with Primary Stages.

"According to this legitimate, official-looking stack of fancy legal paperwork signed in a court of law, this entire allotment, all 160 acres, will belong to me in seven days."

- Uncle, from Comanche Girl on the Moon



Maia Vik Villa (Rarámuri, Nahua, Maya) (they/them) is an actor, writer, and drag king (Vik Floyd). They are uplifted when among 2SLGBTQI+ Nahua community circles, and they are a novice Nahuatl speaker. Na notocah Maia huan Vik! Stage Credits: Bennington College (VT), CASA 0101 (Boyle Heights), The Playground (Chicago), Second City Hollywood, United Citizen's Brigade Hollywood, Highways Performance (Santa Monica), Eastside Queer Stories Festival (East LA), and the Hollywood Fringe Festival. Actor: @maia.vik.villa; Drag: @mx.vikfloyd



Jehnean Washington (Yuchi, Seminole, Shoshone) (she/her) is a multitalented and multicultural artist. A graduate of the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City, she has worked for more than 30 years not only as a singer/song writer and musician but also in the entertainment industry in film, television, radio, and voiceovers. Washington is a recognized and archived singer, songwriter, musician, actor, and storyteller with the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., and an ensemble member of Native Voices at the Autry. She is also the owner of the Los

Angeles-based film company Lighthorsewoman Productions and co-wrote the award-winning screenplay for the movie *Rave*.



All actors are appearing through a special agreement between Native Voices and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

"So, you see how we've got kids' toys, Bible jewelry, embroidered pillows, and some questionable Native souvenirs all together in this section?"

- Jay, from Central Standard Time



#### ABOUT THE **ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

**DeLanna Studi** (Cherokee) (she/her) has more than 25 years of experience as a performer, storyteller, educator, facilitator, advocate, and activist. Her theatre credits include the first national Broadway tour of the Tony Award– and Pulitzer Prize–winning play *August: Osage County;* off-Broadway's *Gloria: A Life* (Daryl Roth Theatre); *Informed Consent* (the Duke on 42nd Street); and regional theatres (Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Portland Center Stage, Cornerstone, and Indiana

Repertory Theatre). Studi originated roles in more than 18 world premieres, including 14 Native productions. A pivotal moment in her career was writing and performing *And So We Walked: An Artist's Journey Along the Trail of Tears*, based on retracing her family's footsteps along the Trail of Tears with her father. *And So We Walked* has been produced throughout the country and was the first American play chosen for the Journées Théâtrales de Carthage in Tunisia, Africa. Recently, it made its Off-Broadway debut at Minetta Lane where it was recorded for Audible. In film and television, Studi stars in the Peabody Award-winning *Edge of America; Hallmark's Dreamkeeper; Goliath; Shameless;* and *General Hospital*. She is a 2022 USA Fellow, a recipient of the Butcher Scholar Award, a MAP Fund Grant, Cherokee Preservation Grant, and the Doris Duke Performing Artist Fund. Since 2007 she has served as chair of the SAG-AFTRA National Native Americans Committee.



#### ABOUT THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

**Elisa Blandford** (she/her) has been producing for Native Voices at the Autry since 2014, from world premieres and touring productions to Short Play Festivals, Playwrights Retreats, and Festivals of New Plays. She co-founded Vanguard Repertory Company and the Windmill Arts Center, a black box theatre and dance studio dedicated to fostering performance and visual arts. She has a BA in Theatre from Florida State University and MBA from the University of Redlands.



#### ABOUT THE LITERARY MANAGER

**Katie Rich** (Chickasaw, Cherokee) (she/her) is an actor, writer, and director, as well as the Native Voices Literary Manager. Selected acting credits include: Carrie in *Desert Stories for Lost Girls* (Native Voices), Nora in *Assistance* (American Repertory Theater), Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* (A.R.T./Bedlam). She's an alumna of the Walt Disney Talent Showcase and holds her MFA in Acting from Harvard University and the Moscow Art Theatre. www.katieanvilrich.com

#### NATIVE VOICES

#### **ABOUT NATIVE VOICES AT THE AUTRY**

Native Voices at the Autry places Native narratives at the center of the American story in order to facilitate a more inclusive dialogue on what it means to be American. Founded in 1994 by Randy Reinholz

(Choctaw) and Jean Bruce Scott, Native Voices is dedicated to the development and production of new works for the stage written by American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and First Nations playwrights. The organization remains committed to emerging and established Native playwrights and theatre artists, to telling Native stories by and about Native people, and to providing the public access to these plays and playwrights—all with the goals of fostering greater understanding and respect of showcasing artistic voices that might otherwise not be heard.



### ABOUT THE AUTRY MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN WEST

The Autry is a museum dedicated to exploring and sharing the stories, experiences, and perceptions of the diverse peoples of

the American West, connecting the past to the present to inspire our shared future. The museum presents a wide range of exhibitions and public programs—including lectures, film, theatre, festivals, family events, and music—and performs scholarship, research, and educational outreach. The Autry's collection of more than 500,000 pieces of art and artifacts includes the Southwest Museum of the American Indian Collection, one of the largest and most significant collections of Native American materials in the United States.



#### ABOUT LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE

La Jolla Playhouse is where artists and audiences come together to create what's new and next in American Theatre. From Tony Award-winning plays and musicals, to imaginative programs for young audiences, to interactive experiences outside our theatre walls, the Playhouse brings people together to inspire discussion and open pathways to new ways of thinking. A visit to the Playhouse

is an invitation to harness the transformative power of theatre to explore the here and now—and together, expand our world's compassion, understanding and hope.

#### SPECIAL THANKS

Graphic Design by: **Tima Lotah Link** (Šmuwič Chumash)

#### **SAVE THE DATE!**

**SEPTEMBER 29 - OCTOBER 15** | L.A. Premiere Production

### Where the Summit Meets the Stars by Frank Henry Kaash Katasse (Tlingit)

When a near-death experience derails her flight through Southeast Alaska, Rose awakens to find herself in the care of the kind man who pulled her to safety. But who is this mysterious stranger? And how is it possible that she survived? As they journey by boat through the darkness and fog, Rose untangles the mysteries of her past, questions the world around her, and comes to an inescapable crossroads. Where the Summit Meets

the Stars is an ethereal Alaska Native story driven by music, dance, and the culture of

the Tlingit people.

#### **IN GRATITUDE**

Your support is vital to the success of **Native Voices at the Autry,** allowing us to create, develop, and produce Native theatre for a national audience. We would like to acknowledge our generous supporters:

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