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THE MORNING LINE

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The New York Times


ArtsBeat The Culture at Large

May 16, 2016

Manhattan Theater Club to Bring August Wilson's 'Jitney' to Broadway

By Michael Paulson



August Wilson discussing a work at the Yale Repertory Theater in 1985. Credit: Bob Child/Associated Press

[August Wilson](#) wrote 10 plays for his famed American Century Cycle, and nine of them have been staged on Broadway.

Now the [Manhattan Theater Club](#) says it plans to make it 10 out of 10: the nonprofit said it would bring "[Jitney](#)" to Broadway this winter.

The play, which Mr. Wilson wrote in 1979, is about a group of men who drive unlicensed cabs in Pittsburgh. It has had [multiple](#) productions, including Off Broadway [at Second Stage](#) and the [Union Square Theater](#), as well as [in London](#).

The Manhattan Theater Club said its Broadway production would begin previews on Dec. 28 and open on Jan. 19 at the company's Samuel J. Friedman Theater. The production will be directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson, a frequent Wilson interpreter who won a Tony Award for his performance in Wilson's "Seven Guitars." Casting has not yet been announced.

MTC also said Monday that it would present a play called "Cost of Living," written by [Martyna Majok](#) ("Ironbound") and directed by Jo Bonney, at City Center next spring. That play is having its premiere this summer at Williamstown Theater Festival, which will co-present the Off Broadway production as well.



The New York Times

May 17, 2016

Review: ‘This Time,’ a Woman Boldly Follows Her Heart in Search of Herself

By Neil Genzlinger

“[This Time](#)” is a skillfully constructed, beautifully acted play about one woman’s quest for liberation at a time and in a place where that struggle could not have been easy. But there is nothing triumphant about the tale. Sometimes, escaping from one prison only lands you in another.

The play, written by Sevan K. Greene and being given a fine production at the [Sheen Center](#) by the Rising Circle Theater Collective, presents an alluring Egyptian woman named Amal who in the 1960s was swept off her feet by a dashing Canadian, Nick (Seth Moore). Mr. Greene conjures scenes of the young Amal (Rendah Heywood) as she meets Nick and decides to leave her husband and three children for a life with him in Canada and the United States. These are smartly intercut with scenes of late-in-life Amal (Delphi Harrington), living temporarily with her daughter, Janine (Salma Shaw), and periodically hallucinating moments from her past.

Handled poorly, this time-jumping technique can lead to muddy storytelling, but Mr. Greene proves adept at the balancing act, showing a subtle touch that lets the audience fill in the details of Amal’s long, eventful life. The director, [Kareem Fahmy](#), makes the transitions seamless, and Ms. Harrington manages the difficult trick of showing remnants of the fiery Amal incarnated by Ms. Heywood while also being convincingly frail.

The play is inspired by a memoir by Amal Meguid, Mr. Fahmy’s grandmother, and the story touches on Egyptian political upheavals, cross-cultural friction and Muslim views of a woman’s role. But this is really the story of any woman who gives up something in hopes of finding herself.

That kind of choice is rarely clear-cut, and it isn’t for Amal. Not only did her decision fracture her relationship with her children, but it also, we gradually come to learn, did not exactly result in a blissful new romance of equals. For the older Amal, Nick is long gone, her attraction for him having turned into a suffocating existence just as unrewarding as what she would have faced in Egypt. Yet she still clings to that brief moment when she was brave enough to upend her life for love. In her old age, she’s still not fully liberated, imprisoned by her own memories.

“This Time” runs through Saturday at the Sheen Center, 18 Bleecker Street, Manhattan; sheencenter.org.
Running time: 1 hour 50 minutes.



The New York Times

May 17, 2016

Review: 'Evening — 1910,' a Slice of Life on the Bowery With Movies on the Horizon

By Laura Collins-Hughes

Before a recent performance of "Evening — 1910" was through, I knew I would want to hear its music again: those strings, those harmonies. In its score, the creators of this sung-through show, Randy Sharp and Paul Carbonara, have made something beautiful and delicate.

They're billing this piece as a musical, though, and I wouldn't call it that. Directed by Ms. Sharp for Axis Company at the Axis Theater, "Evening — 1910" looks good, with period dress (by Karl Ruckdeschel) and extra-dim lighting (by David Zeffren) that's atmospherically apropos. But the story — ostensibly concerning a theater on the Bowery in 1910, as motion pictures begin to threaten live performance — is a murk of confusion that only grows.

Amid its plentiful dance (choreographed by Lynn Mancinelli) and swift traversal of dozens of songs, it may take a while to notice that you're still not sure who all of the characters are. Or what the location is meant to be at any given moment. Or what's supposed to be happening there. The staging, on a mostly bare set (by Chad Yarborough), offers few narrative markers, and the lyrics on their own aren't enough.

Ms. Sharp and Mr. Carbonara, a guitarist who was a member of Blondie in its posthalcyon years and is one of the four musicians here, previously collaborated on ["Solitary Light,"](#) a show about the 1911 Triangle shirtwaist factory fire. With music and lyrics by Ms. Sharp and Mr. Carbonara, "Evening — 1910" grew out of that project.

It begins promisingly, like a sepia-tone memory, with immigrants making their way to New York. Among them is the scruffy, camera-toting Henry (Michael Sheehy), who smells opportunity when he meets the dapper, cocky George Spencer Jr. (James Scheider). A wealthy landlord on the Bowery, George wants to replace the theater and its showgirls with kinetoscopes — little motion-picture machines for individual viewing — and Henry wants to make the pictures.

That strand of the story isn't developed any more fully than the one about the showgirls, or the bits about factory life, or the glimmers of romance — though a gorgeous, tiny song called "Hi, Hello," sung by Henry and a showgirl named Louise (Shira Averbuch, in beguiling voice), manages to capture, with astonishing economy, all the charged awkwardness of meeting cute.

The band is excellent, the sound is full and the show is fast and fluid. But "Evening — 1910" is more a song cycle than a piece of theater.

“Evening — 1910” runs through May 28 at the Axis Theater, 1 Sheridan Square, Manhattan; 212-807-9300; axiscompany.org. Running time: 1 hour 15 minutes.



The New York Times

May 17, 2016

Review: ‘Material Witness’ Explores Violence Against Indigenous Women

By Anita Gates

A white-haired woman who says her knees hurt performs the first scene of “Material Witness” at La MaMa. Ominous music plays, followed by sounds of loud exhalation. Or is that the wind? The woman (Gloria Miguel) has just been talking about “each place I leave my voice in the air.”

“Material Witness” — a Spiderwoman Theater, Aanmitaagzi and Loose Change production — can be poetic that way. At other times, it’s rowdy and playful, displaying an enormous sense of energy, strength and good will. Yet its subject is dead serious: the physical abuse of indigenous women in the United States and Canada.

The script, written by the cast (which also includes Cherish Violet Blood, Penny Couchie, Donna Couteau, Ange Loft and Tanis Parenteau) and the director (Muriel Miguel, who is Gloria Miguel’s sister), relies on repetitions that feel like political-demonstration chants. “If he hits you once, he’ll hit you again.” “In a revolution, a woman is equal.” “What did you do to him?” (Meaning: You must have done something to provoke him if he hit you.) The music ranges from “Til It Happens to You,” Lady Gaga’s anthem about sexual assault, to “The Rainbow Connection,” Kermit the Frog’s wistful ballad from “The Muppet Movie.”

Soni Moreno’s set design consists of a dozen or so quilts, draped together. Her costumes defy categorization, with elements like a sparkly red bra worn over a print dress; aviation headgear, with goggles suitable for a World War I flying ace; and an overskirt that looks like ostrich plumage. It makes a statement that’s half “we’re wild and crazy gals” and half “we’re everyone.”

The stories in “Material Witness” are disturbing, as the audience may expect, and the impression given is that men’s violence against women feels exactly the same, whether it’s perpetrated in a Westchester County suburb or on a Blackfoot or Rappahannock reservation. Maybe that’s the point.



The New York Times

May 17, 2016

Madeleine Lebeau, 'Casablanca' Actress, Dies at 92

By William Grimes

Madeleine Lebeau, a French actress who attained movie immortality with one scene, when the camera zoomed in on her tear-stained face as she sang "La Marseillaise" in "Casablanca," died on May 1 in Estepona, Spain. She was 92.

The Associated Press reported that the cause was complications of a broken leg, citing Carlo Alberto Pinelli, the son of her second husband, the Italian screenwriter Tullio Pinelli.

Ms. Lebeau was 19 when she was cast in "Casablanca" as Yvonne, the spurned girlfriend of Rick Blaine, the owner of Rick's Café Américain, played by Humphrey Bogart.

In one of the film's pivotal scenes, Nazi officers in the cafe begin singing the patriotic song "Watch on the Rhine," whereupon the Czech resistance leader Victor Laszlo, played by Paul Henreid, orders the house band to strike up the French national anthem.

One by one, the bar's patrons rise and join in, drowning out the Germans. As the song nears its stirring finale, the camera closes in on Yvonne, her face lit with patriotic fervor, tears streaming from her eyes as she sings. At the song's conclusion, the camera swings toward her again as she shouts a defiant "Vive la France! Vive la démocratie!"

"She was a free woman who lived by her own rules, totally inhabiting the roles entrusted to her by leading directors," the French culture minister Audrey Azoulay said of Ms. Lebeau in a statement on Monday. "She will forever be the face of French resistance."

Marie Madeleine Berthe Lebeau was born on June 10, 1923, in Antony, a suburb of Paris. She had an uncredited role as a student in the G. W. Pabst film "Young Girls in Trouble" (1939) before fleeing France ahead of the German advance with her husband, Marcel Dalio. Mr. Dalio, who was Jewish, was known throughout France for his performances in "The Rules of the Game," "Grand Illusion" and "Pépé le Moko."

After Ms. Lebeau appeared in a minor role in "Hold Back the Dawn" (1941), with Olivia de Havilland and Charles Boyer, she signed a contract with Warner Bros., which spelled her last name LeBeau in credits.

She played Anna Held, the wife of Florenz Ziegfeld, in "Gentleman Jim," with Errol Flynn as the boxer James J. Corbett, before filming "Casablanca," in which her husband played Emil, the croupier. The couple divorced shortly after the film was made.

She made two more films in the United States, the Resistance drama "Paris After Dark" (1943) and the musical comedy "Music for Millions" (1944). She also appeared on Broadway in the comedy "The French Touch," directed by René Clair, before returning to France, where she worked steadily through the 1950s.

She appeared as a nightclub singer in the Ealing Studios film “Cage of Gold” (1950) and a scheming prostitute in the comedy-drama “Sins of Paris” (1951). She was the pharmacist Adrienne Terreau in “The Country I Come From” (1956), directed by Marcel Carné, and the mistress of the man being pursued by Brigitte Bardot in “La Parisienne” (1957). In Federico Fellini’s “8½” (1963), she played a French actress named Madeleine, one of the former loves of Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni).

Her last turn before the cameras came in the French television series “Hello, Police” in 1969 and 1970.

In the mid-1960s Ms. Lebeau left Paris for Rome, where she married Mr. Pinelli. He died in 2009. She is survived by a daughter, Maria Duhour Gil. Complete information on survivors was not immediately available.

For a long time, she regarded her luminous performance in “Casablanca” with mixed feelings. It was too small.

“It wasn’t that I was cut out, it was because they kept changing the script, and each time they changed it, I had less of a part,” she told Charlotte Chandler, the author of “Ingrid,” a biography about the “Casablanca” co-star Ingrid Bergman, in the 1990s. “It was not personal, but I was so disappointed.” She added, “Now I’m thrilled to have been part of ‘Casablanca.’”

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VARIETY

May 17, 2016

August Wilson's 'Jitney' to Play Broadway for First Time

By Gordon Cox



MAY 16, 2016 | 12:39PM PT

AP PHOTO/TED S. WARREN

“Jitney,” the [August Wilson](#) play about unlicensed cab drivers in the 1970s, will make its Broadway debut this season in a new production from [Manhattan Theater Club](#), which has added the title to its 2016-17 season slate. “Jitney” is the only work in Wilson’s 10-play Pittsburgh Cycle that hasn’t yet played Broadway. It premiered in Pittsburgh in 1982, and arrived in New York (in a revised version) at Signature Theater in 2000.

The new staging will be directed by [Ruben Santiago-Hudson](#), who’s previously helmed Wilson plays including “The Piano Lesson” and “Seven Guitars.” His latest outing as a director, “Skeleton Crew,” recently made an Off Broadway return after a well-received run earlier this year.

For its [2016-17 season](#), MTC has also added an Off Broadway staging of Martyna Majok’s “Cost of Living.” Directed by Jo Bonney, the show, about four very different people whose lives become intertwined, will play MTC in the spring following a world premiere this summer at the Williamstown Theater Festival. (WTF’s artistic director, Mandy Greenfield, is the former artistic producer at MTC.)

No casting for either production has yet been set. "Jitney" begins previews Dec. 28 ahead of a Jan. 19 opening at the Samuel J. Friedman Theater, while "Cost of Living" starts up April 25 prior to a May 16 opening at City Center Stage I.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

May 17, 2016

Backstage Buzz

August Wilson Play For Next Season

The Manhattan Theatre Club announced an addition to its 2016-17 Broadway season: "August Wilson's Jitney," the one part of the playwright's American Century Cycle that hasn't yet been staged on Broadway. Previews start Dec. 28 at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre; Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs.

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Entertainment WEEKLY

May 16, 2016

Jane the Virgin star Jaime Camil cast in Broadway's *Chicago*

By Christopher Rosen



(Rachel Murray/Getty Images)

Rogelio De La Vega will finally get to see his name in lights.

Jane the Virgin star Jaime Camil has been cast as Billy Flynn in *Chicago* on Broadway, it was announced Monday.

Camil, who plays the aforementioned Rogelio on the CW series, will take over the role of Flynn from current star Ryan Silverman. His limited engagement run will last for five weeks starting May 31.

In addition to Silverman and soon Camil, *Chicago* currently stars Bianca Marroquín (playing Roxie Hart), Amra-Faye Wright (Velma Kelly), Raymond Bokhour (Amos Hart), NaTasha Yvette Williams (Matron “Mama” Morton), and R. Lowe (Mary Sunshine).

Camil is the latest celeb to star in the production as Flynn, joining past performers such as Eddie George, Michael C. Hall, Usher Raymond, Taye Diggs, and more.

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THE
Hollywood
REPORTER

May 16, 2016

'Jane the Virgin' Actor Jaime Camil to Star in 'Chicago' on Broadway
He will play the role of Billy Flynn for five weeks.

By Ashlee Lee



Jaime Camil in 'Jane the Virgin' (Michael Desmond/The CW)

Rogelio de la Vega is headed to Broadway.

Jaime Camil of *Jane the Virgin* will rotate into *Chicago* at the Ambassador Theatre. His five-week run begins May 31 and ends July 3.

Camil will settle into the role of Billy Flynn in the 1920s-set musical about murder and media. The Walter Bobbie-directed revival, which opened in 1996, won six Tony Awards in 1997, including best musical revival, as well as the Grammy Award for best musical theater album.

Camil previously appeared on the U.S. stage in a musical adaptation of *The Mambo Kings* in San Francisco and made his Broadway debut in *Latinologues*, both in 2005. The Latin star is one of the most well-known actors in the Spanish-speaking world of film, TV and music, and has led musicals in Mexico City including *West Side Story*, *Hook* and *Aladdin*.

The musical's producers announced the casting news ahead of the season-two finale of The CW's *Jane the Virgin* on Monday night.

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AP



May 16, 2016

'Jane the Virgin' star going into 'Chicago' on Broadway



In this Jan. 17, 2016 file photo, Jaime Camil arrives at the 21st annual Critics' Choice Awards in Santa Monica, Calif. Camil star will play Billy Flynn on Broadway in the record-breaking "Chicago" starting May 31. (Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP)

NEW YORK (AP) — Jaime Camil will be channeling his sleazy lawyer side on Broadway. The "Jane the Virgin" star will play Billy Flynn in the record-breaking "Chicago" starting May 31.

Set in the 1920s, "Chicago" is a scathing satire of how show business and the media make celebrities out of criminals. It has Bob Fosse-inspired choreography, skimpy outfits and killer songs such as "All That Jazz," "Cell Block Tango" and "Mr. Cellophane."

Flynn has been played by the likes of Patrick Swayze, Jerry Springer, Wayne Brady, Tom Wopat, Tony Yazbeck, Harry Hamlin and Billy Ray Cyrus.

Camil has appeared in the films "Pulling Strings" and "200 Cartas." He has been on Broadway in "Latinologues" in 2005 directed by Cheech Marin.

An Interview with Quiara Alegría Hudes

May 17, 2016

Written by Victoria Myers

Photography by Emma Pratte



Quiara Alegría Hudes got rid of all of her high school journals. Notes and correspondence she kept, but her own writing in her journals she got rid of, because she fears someone might find them and that the writing they house isn't very good. And she wants the writing she puts out into the world to be good. That type of precision is currently on display in her newest play, *Daphne's Dive* at the Signature Theatre, where she is playwright-in-residence. *Daphne's*

Dive is the story of a group of friends over five non-consecutive days in the course of their lives, and marks a conscious choice by Quiara to write about the complex relationships between women. Her other plays include *Water by the Spoonful*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama; *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, which was a Pulitzer finalist; and the book for *In the Heights*, which was also a Pulitzer finalist. Suffice to say, she probably doesn't have to be that worried about the quality of her early writing. We met Quiara at her home in Washington Heights to talk with her about *Daphne's Dive*, her writing process, new play development, and more.

(I.) STRUCTURE

I wanted to start by asking you about the structure of *Daphne's Dive*. What was the genesis of the scene structure and time jumps? Why did you think that was the best way to tell the story?

It's funny, because with any story there are infinite ways to tell it, infinite character arcs to follow, when you drop the needle into the story, and when you pick the needle up. So for this one, I was interested in longer scenes and really seeing the ebbs and flows of a group of friends over time, and this group of friends in particular is almost like each other's family. What the jumps in time allowed me to do was create a distance from the story, a reflectiveness in the audience's experience of the story where they can ask a lot of questions like, "What happened in the intervening time?" I don't think we always experience time chronologically in our lives. We swim in many times at once—past and present. It's an experiment in time a bit.

Did you look at different permutations of the scenes?

Yes, especially the ending. The return to the original time at the end was a recent discovery in this rehearsal process. It used to just go chronologically with the jumps, but when I discovered that we go back at the end, something about that felt right, [like], "Oh, this is why I was doing the jumps." Because it's also about the returning to. I think in some ways this is a memory play, so having that memory dramatized in the last scene felt very right.

(II.) HISTORY

The play starts in the mid '90s. The idea of recent history is really interesting—it seems like something we don't talk a lot about—how the recent past affects the future and how all of that adds up over the course of a person's life. I was wondering how you made your choices of what cultural and social markers to put in the play?

I was locked in a bit by Occupy [Wall Street]. There was something that felt very right about that. That maybe this woman, Jennifer Song [a character in *Daphne's Dive*], missed her chance, she missed a moment in our cultural history where her outsider-ness, her rebellious nature, her commitment to what seemed like a fringe ideology, might have been embraced. I can even imagine that during Occupy she could have been somewhat of an effective leader. I feel like Occupy might be a small footnote when all is said and done, but it was important to me. One of the things that I think the movement struggled with was finding those leaders that could have stuck with it for the long haul, and I feel like this character, Jennifer Song, could have done that. So in some ways that was the anchor point for me, and I had to work backwards from there. There was something that felt kind of right about four- to five-year gaps between the scenes in terms of the character of Ruby coming of age. Starting as a girl and then becoming a woman, and not dealing with questions of age, just that transition between girl to woman. So what happened was, we start in '94 with Contract with America [the 1994 Republican platform], and I was watching the show last night and thinking, "Wow, because of the primaries, Contract with America does feel kind of immediate." The audience might not know that this is actually happening in the past because of splits within the conservative movement and the Evangelical Christian base. But I think that was a special feature of yesterday being a primary day.

It's also interesting to think how much has actually stayed the same and how much has changed in that time period of twenty years.

Absolutely. We're still asking questions about what the two-party system really means and how it affects our ability to build a nation. We're still asking questions about what is the space for protest, and I think especially now with Black Lives Matter—the play doesn't come up till now, it ends in 2011. The culture wars of 1994 also reverberate with me today a little when I watch the play. I was interested in the study of accumulation and when you realize all the stuff that accumulates through one's life—the headlines, the stories—they do tend to overlap and ring true of the present moment.

(iii.) CHARACTER

How did you conceive of the characters of the play?

My experience of Philadelphia was a very eclectic and mixed experience. I have since learned, and I don't know how this is determined, that statistically it is the second most segregated city in the United States, which was shocking to me because my experience was not that. That might be a product of my bi-cultural family, but I was always in rooms where there were people of many backgrounds, and really dancing in those spaces between each other. I was interested in creating a group that was a motley crew of ethnicities, class, political interests, but that liked each other. That were just friends, and they were friends because they have a common interest in storytelling and a common sense of humor. As I developed the characters, I thought, "Where are the differences and where are the similarities?" We ended up with Jennifer Song, who is very counter-culture and in any group of friends is always going to be the one pushing, and a character like Inez, who is just a vibrant and vivacious storyteller and a very enigmatic woman. She loves material wealth, she loves fine clothing, but in some ways she is the most committed activist among them because she runs a women's health services hotline. We have the character of Acosta who makes it, he's the local guy who becomes the politician and is successful and helps the community. And then we have Daphne, who is a character who has committed herself to a more modest lifestyle as a real choice because of some of the trauma she's lived through in the past.

When you were putting the play together, how do you balance making sure the characters are doing what you want them to do, but also making sure that they don't become signifiers?

I pretty much live in the details of them, and they teach me while I'm writing. I don't come to it thinking, "I want this character to serve this function in the play." I have a very inside out approach as opposed to outside in. My friend Amy Herzog, who's a playwright I deeply admire, she taught me something: you can't determine too much about a character before you start writing, because then you deny them their own open destiny. That struck a chord with me. I live with these characters and they teach me about where they're going. That's a big part of my process.

(iv.) INSPIRATION

When you first have an idea for a play, where does that idea come from?



I rarely have just one idea. I often have a few things knocking around, and it's kind of like molecules, and they start bumping into each other and I start to learn a lot from how those bumps happen. Some of those initial molecules, for me, in this play was someone I knew growing up named Cathy Change—I knew her as Cathy Chang, she changed her name later—who was a kind of activist and performance artist and I admired her. Many people didn't like her and thought she was a nuisance. There was something about her that fascinated me—how

did she do what she did? She went out to these Philadelphia street corners and danced and waved these flags with her ideals, and I thought that was fascinating. So she had been knocking around for a while. Another point of origin was a family story. My cousin, in the adjacent row home to her, there was a raid and they cleared out the house, and the next day my cousin could hear a child crying. She went into the house and found that one of the children had hidden in a closet and was scared, and ended up adopting her for quite a few years before the girl's family was ready to take her back. That act of abandonment coupled with the act of unexpected generosity by my cousin was living in me, and something that I wanted to explore. So those were two little molecules that were bumping around.

I want to go back to what you were just saying about Cathy Change and being fascinated by her. In the play, Ruby's fixation on Jennifer Song seemed very true to life but something not often dramatized.

Well, after writing a trilogy of plays that really centered around a young man's coming of age, I was ready to really more consciously start working on female relationships and really exploring them. So, *Daphne's Dive* is one of a handful of projects I've been working on where I had to consciously say: write female characters, a number of them, and get them together, and make it as complicated as possible. So there's *Daphne's Dive*, and I'm writing a new musical for La Jolla Playhouse called *Miss You Like Hell* that is about the complexity of mother-daughter relationships. I just wrote a play called *The Good Peaches*, which is also about mother-daughter relationships and female academics. That's a conscious choice. I realized that I probably squeaked by on the Bechdel Test for my Elliot trilogy, but I wanted to get a higher score on that. One of the things that I find rewarding about *Daphne's Dive* is there are these moments where these very enigmatic, atypical female characters get to relate to

one another on their own terms. Ruby doesn't get very much face time with Jen, but I do find their moments of interaction—and Jen and Daphne's moment of interaction, and the sister's moments of interaction—to be particularly rewarding. For me, they were ones I wanted to dig into.

The relationship between Ruby and Jen you see mirrored in the way girls can be about celebrities, or even people who have just passed through their lives and they're like, "Oh, that's really interesting to me."

I think what Ruby sees in Jen is a willingness to say things out loud that other people don't want to hear. I think that's one of the qualities that Ruby is most attracted to in Jen, and that she does it with a smile on her face and a dance on her feet. Whereas Ruby struggles with her adoptive mom, Daphne is a much more private person and does not wear her heart on her sleeves or her beliefs on her sleeves. But Ruby wants to go out into the world. She's hungry for big, meaty conversations, and I think Jen provides that. And I think Jen provides a model of beauty to Ruby that is exciting, that's kind of on her own terms. And also a different approach to sexuality. Ruby is a character who comes from trauma and has a troubled past, so for Jennifer Song to model a kind of sexuality that isn't overt but isn't apologetic and that is very present in the body without humiliating herself, I think is something Ruby is really excited by.

When you were saying before that you have the molecules knocking about, do you have a moment where you're like, "Okay, time to sit down and write"?

Yes. So that molecules knocking about thing, that's a long time. In some ways those molecules have been knocking about since I was a teenager, since they're in me. But when I sat down to actually start writing this thing, I knew I wanted it to be about a group of people who tell stories. That was an early conceit. And they're going to tell stories that gloss over some of the things they'd rather forget, but the stories are also their way of coping with the things they'd rather forget. So I just wrote that [from] scene one. I just sat down and thought, "Let's see what stories these people are telling." And it turned out that they all wanted something from Acosta. Acosta is a gateway to many resources in the community. So the stories they're telling all relate to what they want from Acosta. So Pablo, who is the local artist, he tells the story of how he is obsessed with garbage, collects garbage, arranges that garbage on his living room floor, sketches that composition onto a canvas, then paints the garbage on the canvas, and he needs some money for paint. And this curious thing happened where I had this long meaty scene of naturalism and this phrase "I am eleven" just popped up and I didn't know why so I just left it there. It turns out, why was because we were going to watch this girl grow in a way no actor realistically can, and I wanted it to be one actor, so there was a utility in her saying, "I am 11," "I am 15," "I am 20," but there's also this fun little Brechtian touch in framing what is essentially a naturalistic play. And I liked that duality a lot.

(v.) MUSIC

I read in a lot of other interviews that you have a very musical background. How does music affect your writing process?

I hear things. I hear rhythms and I hear the world and I hear the voices and I hear how loud and soft the voices are. I saw in your interview with Lynn Nottage that she has a soundtrack that she listens to, and I do something very similar. For this play, it was the piano music of Michel Camilo, who is a Dominican, Latin jazz piano virtuosic. He's just explosively joyous when he plays. I've been a fan of

his since I was a teenager. There's something about the explosive celebration of his music that I was like, "I want that spark of life to be in my play," despite the fact that there are some very heavy and painful moments in it. But I want this to be a group of people who are still celebrating even though it's hard. So I listened to his music and he inspired me, and then I approached him and he composed the score to the production.

When you hear music do you put a narrative to it?

It's three steps, I think. I hear music and I feel an emotion, and the emotion tends to have three parts. The emotion the music is portraying and the emotion outside of the music. So for Michel Camilo, for instance, the emotion of the music was joy and celebration, but what I heard outside of it is that life is painful and we're all going to die, and yet there's still celebration. And then the third step is saying, "How do I capture that energy?" So it's more about an energy for me. This isn't always the case, but for *Daphne's Dive* I discovered the narrative out of character work and character exploration.

Can you talk more about that?

As I mentioned before, it's like the different characters—why do they all want to be in this room? Why do they all want to come here together? And in some ways they're all a little bit of outsiders. Despite their very divergent portfolios of who they are, they're all outsiders. Even Acosta. He is the man of his people, but he becomes a politician and that makes him a little bit of an outsider. Inez is an outsider because she loves this community and works in this community, but she's like, "Get me to the suburbs, I don't want to breath in this air pollution." She doesn't want to live on those blocks. Jen is very obviously an outsider. They all have outsider qualities. And then there's this character of Rey who is this biker dude who hangs in the bar. He's not from Philadelphia, he's not Latino, it's a mystery why he's there, but he just likes them and that's why he's there. In some ways it's a place where these outsiders can be themselves together. So discovering what makes each of them an outsider in a different way, and how they show off to each other about who they are, and how they brag about who they are, and how they compete over who is more authentic or who has a funnier story—that was a lot of the character work.

Going back to music. Classical music has a structure to it even without words. Do you think a musical background helps you have a different and more varied understanding of structure, outside of the Yale School of Drama, "this is what a good play is" model?

Structure is a deeply emotional and musical thing. Repetition and variation is just a basic component of music that I think of all the time when I write a play. Scenes three and four in *Daphne's Dive* are an example. Scene three ends in such a moment of crisis and is deeply painful, and scene four is one and a half minutes of salsa dancing, and that's a moment where I'm saying the audience just needs to get their bearings and get back on their feet to move forward. And that is my musical instincts informing my dramaturgical, structural instincts a bit. The thing that's nice about music is that it essentially has no meaning. It is free of meaning and there is real freedom in that. When you know something isn't quite working or not quite landing in the way you want it to, rather than saying, "What's wrong with the story," or, "what should be happening literally that's not happening?" It's like, what kind of music do we need here? Have we been hitting it legato or staccato for too long and we're tired of that and we need a change? Or do we need to double down on that and keep going forward? This how I knew in scene five that I'd landed on the correct ending with "I am 11," because musically that is correct. It is the reprise of the original theme. There is something that is very familiar about that even if it's not a quote-unquote well-made play that follows the rising action and denouement and all

of that. There is something recognizable to the audience when the original three words of the play—"I am 11"—pop up again. They know, here we go, home stretch.

(vi.) REWRITING



I wanted to ask about your rewriting process. For you, what is the most valuable part of the process for rewriting?

Rewriting is where I do spend most of my time. I have this stage of the molecules knocking about, then I have the stage of writing the first draft, which is pretty quick. It's three to four weeks, it's quick and dirty, and it yields a chaotic first draft of the play and a truncated first draft of the play. I think the first draft of *Daphne's Dive* was 40 or 60 pages, but it hits a lot of the major notes and has the architectural bones of the piece. After that, I spend a year turning that skeletal draft into the play. So in some ways rewriting is 90% of my process. The thing that I like about writing very quickly, at first, is that it doesn't give me time to let that editor kick in. It keeps me writing on a subconscious level and losing control of it. That's really valuable for me. Something very primordial tends to happen at that moment. Rewriting is when my intellect and more critical capabilities are

kicking in. I'm really studying what I've done and asking myself, "What do I want to do with this? Where do I want to dig in?"

How do you balance that initial emotional impulse that goes into the first draft with the long development process for new plays? How do you maintain, "This is what the play is about, this is why I wanted to write it," when you're changing things over the development process? Or do you let that go a bit and are more like, "That's what it was about then, and this is what it's about now"?

It's a muscle and it gets stronger, but for me, it does involve a practice of silence and introspection where I have to constantly be connecting to that initial impulse—why did this matter? Why did I write

it? And where am I now? To listen to those things with clarity is hard and something I've worked on and gotten better at. But I find, for me, that when I write that fast and furious first draft, it's pretty hard to un-write some of the guts and viscera of that first connection. It's just in there. I would have to really essentially take apart the play. One of the things I learned with *Daphne's Dive* and that initial fast writing period was that this house had five rooms—five scenes. Something about that felt completely airtight to me. Especially since what happens in scene three is such a fulcrum. In fact, what was happening in scenes one, two, and three felt pretty clear. Scene four was a little hazier. Scene five, I probably wrote twenty-five versions of scene five. Very different things came of these characters in the end. Then when I came up with this version, I felt like I had found the correct version of what I'd been working towards.

(VII.) THEMES

Do you see any themes in your work?

I see all sorts of themes. I'm very interested in female sexuality in various guises. In some ways I just love that topic and I think it's underexplored. Spirituality is a theme that I can't say I hit very much on the head, but it feels ever-present as I write. I see in my plays time and again an interest in community and family and the enigmatic, eclectic nature of our culture. This is not the first play of mine where I'm putting people of all walks of life together on stage, and there's something about that experiment that I find true and exciting.

(VIII.) NEW WORK

What's something you think can be done to improve how new work is developed?

I think there are a lot of things that can be done. Having had a handful of years at this racket now, I'm very skeptical of development programs at producing theatres. I don't totally understand it. To me, it's like having a publisher go through an editing process with a writer when they don't intend to publish the book. I have done programs like the O'Neill and Sundance—those were great for me because you're not at a producing theatre. You're just developing the work. But at a theatre, I wish they'd just be developing stuff that they're going to be producing. I just think it's a cleaner model. I think one of the huge pitfalls of readings and workshops is that it's actually not when the best rewriting happens, at least in my experience. For me, the best rewriting happens when it's in three dimensions. When the actors are rehearsing it and it's in that production mood. It's like hearing a string quartet on a midi file vs. hearing a string quartet on the actual instruments. I don't think the greatest rewriting is going to happen off of that midi file.

I also imagine it's difficult to be doing something with a constantly changing director and cast.

It can be hard. I've certainly made my mistakes, which I rue, with having actors I love be in different readings of plays of mine and then not get cast in the production, and that in itself has been a learning curve for me. I just thought, "I don't need to be doing readings all the time and casting." It gets a little confused. Musicals are a different beast, and I think workshops of musicals are extremely important, but you want to do those workshops with the commercial producers or the producing

theatre. That's when the producers' buy-in is the biggest and their notes are because they want the production to go well; the stakes are so much higher than when they're causally responding.

How do you balance the instinctual side of writing with the more academic side? I'd say at the same time we have an academy around playwriting, we also have theatre as an institution in a weird relationship with other academic pursuits. What do you think about that? How do you balance that?

As to the question of instinct vs. intellect, the instinct has to be given primacy. It has to. If not, anyone could write my plays. There's a reason why I'm writing this particular play and it's because of those instincts. And my intellect and my critical eye can look at something and say, "That's not quite doing what I want it to do," but my intellect doesn't always have the solution, and oftentimes when it does, it's my intellect putting its finger on something and waiting for my instincts to say, "I know, I know." If we don't have playwrights' distinct voices and instincts, then theatre is just boring. I think of a playwright like Annie Baker, whose instincts are so sharp and keen despite the fact that she is a fierce intellectual, her instincts are raw and almost have naïve energy to them. There's no academic component that makes her play better—it comes from a deep sense of instinct married with her fierce intellect. As far as teaching goes, I do teach undergraduates and I teach at a liberal arts school and I love that, since for me, the challenge is how to teach playwriting not as a craft or professional endeavor, but as something that is valuable to all thinkers. In fact, a big part of my teaching is finding the relationship between the intellect and the instinct and finding a practice where one is engaging both of those, and I think that can go anywhere with you. That's not just a playwriting thing.

(ix.) REPRESENTATION

I wanted to go back to something you said awhile ago about just scooting by on the Bechdel Test. Do you feel like there's extra pressure on you to write women and write strong women?

I would like to put that pressure out to other people, to be honest. You asked what my thoughts were on theatre development today, and I think we need to actively, committedly be trying to produce the most diverse pool of plays possible. I'm not just talking about ethnicities, race, and gender. I'm talking about aesthetics and everything that goes into theatre. I don't see that happening without a very committed pressure put on ourselves as artists and theatres. If I feel that pressure from anything, it's from myself. It's not from the outside world, but it's me going, challenge your assumptions, [and asking], who is not being spoken about that needs to be spoken about. It's very important to my practice.

Do you feel like sometimes theatres will only let something be one out of the three of gender, ethnicity, and aesthetics?

I think there's a danger whenever there's a slot for the "outsider play," whether it's aesthetically or the way we categorize human beings. It's just dangerous, and it leads to boring theatre and boring audiences. It's not healthy for anyone. The aesthetic diversity, to me, is just as important as the other sorts of diversity. This is one of the reasons why it's exciting right now to be writing because I do think the aesthetic diversity that's coming from a wide breadth of playwrights is thrilling. I don't see one model that we're writing after. I see a lot of playwrights all pushing at the boundaries of what a play can be in very different ways. I mentioned Amy Herzog, Annie Baker, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, and if



I may be so bold to put myself as one of their contemporaries, that we're pushing at the confines in very, very different ways. I love that and I think that's important.

Do you find your work is talked about differently than if you were a male writer?

Oh, yes. Absolutely. I mean, my whole life is spoken about

differently. I get asked a lot of questions that I'd be willing to wager a lot of money that Edward Albee never gets asked. He never gets asked, "What does being a white male playwright mean?" He never gets asked that kind of stuff. But actually I think he'd have a lot to say about it that would be interesting. I don't find it a bad question, I just wish it were a question that was asked to those quote-unquote outside the mainstream, but we need to have critical eyes on ourselves inside the mainstream too. So definitely, the work gets engaged in a very different way. I have Albee envy because when he sits down and talks to interviewers, they get right to the meat of the play, which is something I don't often get to do in interviews. Usually the interview is about my identity, and then the interview is over and it doesn't even get to the work. That gets really boring really quickly.

I think we're at an interesting time in terms of identity politics becoming a trend and it doing the opposite of what people maybe think they're trying to do.

Right. So when we get really bogged down in that as theatre of professionals, I think that can have its pitfalls too. Like saying, "We need a play this season by a playwright of color, who's that going to be?" That sort of thing. Because in fact the work should be richer and it shouldn't always be clear. The stories should be more diverse. All of those things. This is a diverse country and I think we've outgrown some of the boxes—they're not irrelevant, but I think we've outgrown them and out-sophisticated them. One of the things that I have to deal with a lot, in terms of press, is because my identity encompasses multiple identities, it takes them awhile to get a handle on that. It's like "Well, are you a woman writer?" "Are you a Latina playwright?" "Are you a Jewish playwright?" And then the interview is up.

What's something you think can be done to improve gender equality in theatre?

I think be extremely conscious at all times of the existence of gender inequality, and to be actively pushing one's thoughts and your colleagues' thinking. It doesn't happen through silence. It has to be a curated and active discussion. And I'm not talking about panel discussions. I'm not talking about that sort of thing. I'm talking about doing and producing the work. I'm talking about the plays we write and the plays we produce.