Victory Gardens Theater launches The Directors Inclusion Initiative

Chicago, IL—Victory Gardens Theater launches The Directors Inclusion Initiative to encourage and develop talented and emerging Chicago stage directors identifying as people of color, disabled, women, transgender, and gender non-conforming, with the aim to cultivate a new generation of diverse stage directors who create dynamic theatre work from their unique points of view.

“We are thrilled to have five emerging Chicago directors with us this season. They are exciting and talented artists from different backgrounds and training. Not only will they observe and work with a professional director on a production at Victory Gardens. They will be a part of our artistic life throughout the season. They will be mentored by our staff on the theatre’s daily operations, have access to all visiting artists and directors, and will be given every opportunity to further nurture their artistic and career growth. We hope that their time with us will give them the necessary tools toward the next step as professional directors,” comments Associate Artistic Producer Joanie Schultz.

“Inclusion and diversity are deeply engrained in everything we do here at Victory Gardens,” said Managing Director Chris Mannelli, “this program is an exciting amplification of the work we have been committed to since our company’s founding.”

The assistant directors for this season include Toma Tavares Langston (Sucker Punch), Lavina Jadhwani (Never The Sinner), Lexi Saunders (Cocked), Kevin Matthew Reyes (Hillary & Clinton), Chika Ike (The House That Will Not Stand).

About the Directors
Toma Tavares Langston (Sucker Punch) is the Artistic Director of The Enthusiasts Theatre Company. He’s also the Co-Founder of Another Production Company and a proud participant of Directors Lab Chicago. His directorial credits include Sarah Ruhl's Dead Man's Cell Phone, Michael Cristopher’s The Shadow Box, Jason Robert Brown’s The Last Five Years, Ntozake Shange’s For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow Is Enuf. Toma has also worked with Rebekah Theatre Project, Prologue Theatre Co. and Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre. He is also a certified Personal Development Coach and a proud native of Flint, Michigan.

Lavina Jadhwani (Never The Sinner) Lavina Jadhwani is a Chicago-based stage director. She has received the inaugural National Directors Fellowship, Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Phil Killian Directing Fellowship, the Drama League's Classical Directing Fellowship, an SDCF Observership, an Illinois Board of Higher Education Fellowship, and an LMDA Residency Award. She was named Time Out Chicago’s “Best Next Generation Stage Director” in 2013. Lavina’s work has been seen at Apple Tree Theatre, Bailiwick Repertory Theatre, Chicago Dramatists, Oak Park Festival Theatre, Rasaka Theatre Company, Raven Theatre, Remy Bumppo Theatre Company, the side project, Silk Road Rising, Stage Left Theatre, Timeline Theatre, Teatro Vista, and Victory Gardens Theater. She is a graduate of The Theatre School at DePaul University (MFA, Directing), Carnegie Mellon University (BFA, Scenic Design; Masters, Arts Management) and the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. www.lavinajadhwani.com

Lexi Saunders (Cocked) is an actor, director and teacher. Her Chicago directing credits include LezFest II and Jack & the Box Store (staged reading) with Pride Films and Plays, And I Don't Feel Any Different
with Dandelion Theatre, *I Have It* by Bekah Brunstetter at Skokie Theatre, *Wonderpeople* with 906 Theatre Company, The 5th Annual One Minute Play Festival at the Den Theatre, *The Penelopiad* (AD) at Fringe Fest, Rhino Fest, and the Poetry Foundation, and *Everybody Needs a Good Night Out* (AD) with The Home for Wayward Artists. Lexi has also trained and worked in Chicago with Walkabout Theater Company, The Women's Theatre Alliance, Theatre Y, and The Lost Geneva Project. Other directing credits include *Hello Goodbye* with Company 157, *But a Walking Shadow* devised for the Underground New Play Festival, *Spooky* (AD) at Steppenwolf West Summer Arts, and *Little Children Dream of God* (AD) at La Jolla Playhouse. This fall, Lexi will be directing a staged reading of *Missed Connections* for Pride Films and Plays’ LezPlay Weekend, assistant directing *Charlotte’s Web* with E.D.G.E. Theatre’s Constellation Project for young people with special needs, and workshopping *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* with Georges Bigot of Theatre du Soleil.

**Kevin Matthew Reyes (Hillary & Clinton)** is a graduate of UC San Diego and The School at Steppenwolf. Directing credits include *The Pillowman* with Company 157 and short films for Condensed Milk, Triton TV, and hitRECord.org, where he is a project collaborator. He has assisted as a director and teaching artist for Kim Rubinstein and Jonathan Berry. Kevin’s acting credits include *Balm in Gilead* with Griffin Theatre, *All Our Tragic* with The Hypocrites, *Solstice* with A Red Orchid Theatre, *Lord of the Flies* with Steppenwolf Theatre Company, *Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them* with First Floor Theatre, *Mahal* with Bailiwick Chicago, and *The World of Extreme Happiness* with Goodman Theatre.

**Chika Ike (The House That Will Not Stand)** Since graduating from Indiana University with a degree in Theatre & Drama and History, she has had the opportunity to work with many Chicago theatre companies, including Eclipse Theatre, American Blues Theatre Company, and Prologue Theatre Company. Most recently, she has worked as the assistant director for the world premiere of *The Royal Society of Antarctica* at The Gift Theatre.

**About Victory Gardens Theater**
Under the leadership of Artistic Director Chay Yew, Victory Gardens is dedicated to artistic excellence while creating a vital, contemporary American Theater that is accessible and relevant to all people through quality productions of challenging new plays and musicals.

Victory Gardens Theater is a leader in developing and producing new theatre work and cultivating an inclusive Chicago theater community. Victory Gardens' core strengths are nurturing and producing dynamic and inspiring new plays, reflecting the diversity of our city's and nation's culture through engaging diverse communities, and in partnership with Chicago Public Schools, bringing art and culture to our city's active student population.

Since its founding in 1974, the company has produced more world premieres than any other Chicago theater, a commitment recognized nationally when Victory Gardens received the 2001 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre. Located in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, Victory Gardens Biograph Theater includes the Zacek-McVay Theater, a state-of-the-art 259-seat mainstage and the 109-seat studio theater on the second floor, named the Richard Christiansen Theater.

Victory Gardens Ensemble Playwrights include Luis Alfaro, Philip Dawkins, Marcus Gardley, Ike Holter, Samuel D. Hunter, Naomi Iizuka, Tanya Saracho and Laura Schellhardt. Each playwright has a seven-year residency at Victory Gardens.

The Playwrights Ensemble Alumni includes Claudia Allen, Lonnie Carter, Steve Carter, Gloria Bond Clunie, Dean Corrin, Nilo Cruz, Joel Drake Johnson, John Logan, Nicholas Patricca, Douglas Post, James Sherman, Charles Smith, Jeffrey Sweet and Kristine Thatcher.

For more information about Victory Gardens, [www.victorygardens.org](http://www.victorygardens.org). Follow up on Facebook at [Facebook.com/victorygardens](http://Facebook.com/victorygardens) and Twitter @VictoryGardens.


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