

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES FINAL PRODUCTION OF 2023/24 SEASON: *REDWOOD*, WORLD-PREMIERE MUSICAL FEATURING TONY AWARD-WINNING BROADWAY ICON IDINA MENZEL

La Jolla, CA – La Jolla Playhouse announces its final production for the 2023/2024 season: the world-premiere musical *Redwood* (February/March 2024), book and direction by **Tina Landau** (Playhouse's *Beauty*), music by **Kate Diaz**, lyrics by **Kate Diaz** and **Tina Landau**, with additional contributions by the acclaimed Tony Award-winning performer **Idina Menzel** (*Wicked*, *Frozen*), who will star in the production.

Broadway icon Idina Menzel makes her La Jolla Playhouse debut in the world premiere of *Redwood*, a one-of-a-kind theatrical event about one woman's journey into the precious and precarious world of the redwoods. Idina plays Jesse, a successful businesswoman, mother and wife, who seems to have it all, but inside, her heart is broken. Finding herself at a turning point, Jesse leaves everyone and everything behind, gets in her car and drives. Thousands of miles later, she hits the ancient forests of Northern California, where a chance meeting and a leap of faith change her life forever. In the presence of the magnificent, towering redwoods, Jesse finds strange and powerful connections, an unexpected sense of community, and a chance at healing. Acclaimed writer and director Tina Landau brings this immersive and cinematic new work to life with lush visuals and a soaring score by Kate Diaz. Travel with Jesse to an intoxicating environment of dense greenery, fractured light and dizzying heights – a place where Nature can help us heal, if only we don't destroy her first. An exhilarating new musical featuring one of Broadway's greatest stars, *Redwood* will awaken your sense of adventure and lift you higher than the treetops.

"What a thrill to cap off our 2023/2024 season with this riveting new musical that overflows with invention, inspiration and empathy. The Playhouse has been developing this piece since we reopened our doors, working with the dynamo team of Tina Landau, Kate Diaz and Idina Menzel – each a visionary artist in her own right – to create an extraordinary work that reaches for the sky and touches the soul," said **Christopher Ashley**, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse.

In addition to *Redwood*, the Playhouse's 2023/2024 season will feature five other world premieres, including *Love All* by writer/actor **Anna Deavere Smith** (*Twilight Los Angeles, 1992*), directed by **Marc Bruni** (*Beautiful: The Carole King Story*); *Is It Thursday Yet?*, created, choreographed and performed by **Jenn Freeman**, created, choreographed and directed by **Sonya Tayeh** (Broadway's *Moulin Rouge*, Playhouse's *Hundred Days*), composed and performed by **Holland Andrews**; *The Untitled Unauthorized Hunter S. Thompson Musical*, music and lyrics by **Joe Iconis**; book by **Joe Iconis** and **Gregory S. Moss**, directed by Tony Award winner **Christopher Ashley** (*Come From Away*); *SUMO*, by **Lisa Sanaye Dring**, directed by **Ralph B. Peña**, in a co-production with **Ma-Yi Theater Company**; and *Babbitt*, by Tony Award winner **Joe DiPietro** (*Memphis*), adapted from the novel by **Sinclair Lewis**, directed by **Christopher Ashley**, and featuring acclaimed stage and screen star **Matthew Broderick** (*The Producers*, Playhouse-born revival of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*).

Tickets for the Playhouse's 2023/2024 season are currently available through a subscription purchase, available at LaJollaPlayhouse.org or by calling (858) 550-1010.

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Redwood Artist Biographies

Kate Diaz is an LA-based composer-songwriter-producer. Kate has scored animated series, feature documentaries and docu-series, and she also composes music for trailers and commercials. Her pop/rock songs have been placed in multiple tv shows, and she recently co-wrote and produced an end credits song for an upcoming documentary. A multi-instrumentalist, she self-produces her scores and songs.

Tina Landau is a writer and director whose Broadway credits include *The Spongebob Musical* (also conceiver; Drama Desk & Outer Critics Circle winner Best Direction and Best Musical, 12 Tony noms), Tracy Letts' *Superior Donuts*, and the revival of *Bells Are Ringing* (Tony noms). Tina has written and directed productions including the musicals *Floyd Collins* (with composer Adam Guettel, Playwrights Horizons) and *Dream True* (with composer Ricky Ian Gordon, The Vineyard), as well as *Ms. Blakk for President* (with Tarell McCraney, Steppenwolf Theatre), *Space* (Steppenwolf, The Taper, The Public), *Beauty* (La Jolla Playhouse), and *Stonewall: Night Variations* (En Garde Arts.) Her Off-Broadway productions include Bill Irwin and David Shiner's *Old Hats*, Chuck Mee's *Big Love* and *Iphigenia 2.0* (all Signature), Paula Vogel's *A Civil War Christmas* (NYTW), and many works by Tarell McCraney including *Head of Passes*, *In the Red and Brown Water* (both at the Public) and *Wig Out!* (Vineyard). Tina is an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, where her over 20 productions also include McCraney's *The Brother/Sister Plays*, *The Wheel* (with Joan Allen), *The Doppelganger* (with Rainn Wilson), and *The Time of Your Life* (also Seattle Rep, ACT). Tina's work has been recognized by the Tonys, Drama Desks, Drama League, Outer Critics, Lucille Lortel, Obies, and many more, and she's a recipient of a United States Artist Fellowship, Princess Grace Statuette, NEA/TCG Directing Fellowship, and Rockefeller and Pew grants. She's the author, with Anne Bogart, of *The Viewpoints Book*, and is currently an Artist-in-Residence at Little Island in NYC. Her next musical production will be *A Transparent Musical*, which opens at Center Theater Group in LA in the Spring of 2023.

Idina Menzel is a powerhouse multi-hyphenate: a singer, an actress in film and TV, a songwriter, a Broadway star, and a philanthropist. She rose to fame for her role as Maureen in the popular Broadway musical *Rent*, and her career took off when she won a Tony Award for her role as Elphaba in the smash musical *Wicked*. Her voice can be heard as Elsa in Disney's Oscar® winning *Frozen*, the second highest grossing animated film of all time. The film's song "Let It Go", voiced by Menzel, became an instant international phenomenon, winning the Oscar® for Best Original Song – where Menzel performed it at the ceremony – and the Grammy® Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media. She reprised her role as Elsa in Disney's *Frozen 2*, which broke records to become the highest grossing animated movie of all time. She joined Adam Sandler in the Safdie Brothers' Film Independent Spirit Award-winning A24 film *Uncut Gems*. Menzel can currently be seen in the Disney+ documentary *Idina Menzel, Which Way to the Stage?*, Disney's Enchanted sequel, *Enchanted 2: Disenchanted*, alongside Amy Adams, Patrick Dempsey, and Susan Sarandon; as well as Amazon Studios' *Cinderella*, for which she wrote and sang the song "Dream Girl." Menzel's prolific recording career includes multiple cast albums and the solo albums: *Still I Can't Be Still*, *Here, I Stand*, *idina*, and her latest album, *Christmas: A Season of Love*. Her first Christmas album, *Holiday Wishes*, debuted at #1 on Billboard's Holiday Albums chart. Menzel received the Breakthrough Artist of the Year Award at Billboard's annual Women in Music event in 2014 and performed the National Anthem at Super Bowl XLIX. Additional screen credits include Lifetime's remake of *Beaches*, Disney's *Enchanted*, Maureen in Chris Columbus' film version of *Rent*, as well as the recurring role of Shelby Corcoran on Fox's *Glee*. Menzel was previously seen on stage in *If/Then*, for which she earned her third Tony Award nomination, Broadway's *Aida* and the Encores! production of *Hair*. Menzel also premiered *Wicked* in the West End, receiving the Theatregoers Choice Award. She and her sister Cara Menzel recently released a children's picture book, "Loud Mouse," which centers on self-acceptance and being true to yourself. Menzel co-founded the A BroaderWay Foundation in 2010, dedicated to offering girls from underserved communities an outlet for self-expression and creativity through arts-centered programs.

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La Jolla Playhouse's 2023/2024 Season***Love All***

By Anna Deavere Smith
Directed by Marc Bruni
June/July 2023

Love All is the triumphant story of the rise of sports icon and social justice pioneer Billie Jean King. The trailblazer for equality faced tough competition on the court and adversity in the world, all against a backdrop of the massive social changes of the 1960s and '70s. With support from King herself, this exciting world premiere comes from the pen of award-winning playwright, professor, actor and author Anna Deavere Smith, whose artistry is evidenced by the ground-breaking work she has created for more than four decades, including the Tony-nominated *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. Under the skillful hand of director Marc Bruni (*Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*), *Love All* evokes the highs and lows of Billie Jean King's extraordinary career, and asks not just what it takes to be a champion, but what it takes to change the course of history.

Is It Thursday Yet?

Created, Choreographed and Performed by Jenn Freeman
Created, Choreographed and Directed by Sonya Tayeh
Composed and Performed by Holland Andrews
July/August 2023

Dancer and choreographer Jenn Freeman was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in 2021 at age 33, and since then she has navigated an endless sea of epiphanies. Inspired by a deep curiosity to examine her childhood memories through this new lens, Jenn found a way to illuminate her story using the language she knows best: Dance. *Is It Thursday Yet?* invites audiences into the unique complexities of Jenn's neurodivergent brain through a stunning tapestry of dance, live music and home video footage. Original live music from renowned musician Holland Andrews is woven with audio narrations from Jenn's therapist, vocals, clarinet, drums and electronic music. A vibrant, colorful and tactile scenic design by Tony Award winner Rachel Hauck is inspired by Jenn's sensory sensitivities to texture, color, light and sound. This inventive, engrossing new work is co-created and directed by Sonya Tayeh, the electrifying, Tony Award-winning choreographer of Broadway's *Moulin Rouge*. *Is It Thursday Yet?* celebrates what it means to live a life on the spectrum.

The Untitled Unauthorized Hunter S. Thompson Musical

Music and Lyrics by Joe Iconis; Book by Joe Iconis and Gregory S. Moss
Directed by Christopher Ashley
September/October 2023

Who was Hunter S. Thompson? He changed journalism. He defined counterculture. Equal parts philosopher, clown and genius, he was armed and dangerous with a typewriter as his preferred weapon. Careening from the 1940s to his death in 2005, this gonzo musical blasts into the life of one of America's most influential and destructive icons. In relentless pursuit of the meaning of the American Dream during an era of political and social upheaval, Hunter S. Thompson cultivated a new form of journalism that — for better or worse — injected his subjective view into the heart of the story. Now, in another, even more severe moment of fake news, propaganda and polarization, Hunter's story helps explore how we got here, and how to keep fighting. Set to Joe Iconis' anarchic and tuneful score, this musical is a rock 'n' roll portrait of an artist seeking greatness and coming to terms with his own legacy. It's a heartfelt trumpet call to the moral idealists, the outraged, the outlaws and the outsiders. There will be peacocks, there will be breakdowns, there will be fireworks.

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SUMO

By Lisa Sanaye Dring
Directed by Ralph B. Peña
Co-Production with Ma-Yi Theater Company
September/October 2023

Entrenched in an elite sumo training facility in Tokyo, six men practice, eat, love, play and ultimately fight. Akio arrives as an angry, ambitious 18 year old with a lot to learn. Expecting validation, dominance and fame, and desperate to move up the ranks, he slams headlong into his fellow wrestlers, especially Mitsuo, the highest-ranked fighter. With sponsorship money at stake, their bodies on the line, and their futures at risk, the wrestlers struggle to carve themselves – and one another – into the men they dream of being. Lisa Sanaye Dring has painted a vivid world with poetic precision, mixing ancient, divine ritual with the guttural ferocity of competition. *SUMO* was a hit as part of the 2021 DNA New Work Series. Directed by Ma-Yi Theater Artistic Director Ralph B. Peña and featuring live taiko drumming, this tenderly drawn and unique work will come to life for San Diego audiences.

Babbitt

By Joe DiPietro; Adapted from the novel by Sinclair Lewis
Directed by Christopher Ashley
November/December 2023

Multi-award-winning star of stage and screen Matthew Broderick and Tony Award-winning playwright Joe DiPietro join forces with our own Christopher Ashley for this comedic, unmissable theatrical event. *Babbitt* entered the zeitgeist in 1922 as a novel by white-hot satirist Sinclair Lewis, the first American Nobel Laureate. An instant literary classic, *Babbitt* has been a stalwart on “best ever” lists for over 100 years, and is now adapted for the stage. George F. Babbitt is a middle-aged real estate broker in the Midwestern city of Zenith. By day, he has a prosperous, respectable middle-class existence. By night, he’s plagued by the thought that he has amounted to nothing. Searching for more to life than his top-of-the-line toaster and hickory golf club — more *meaning* — Babbitt leaps with abandon into the most spectacular rebellion of his life — one that could end up costing him everything.

Redwood

Book by Tina Landau
Music by Kate Diaz; Lyrics by Kate Diaz and Tina Landau
With Additional Contributions by Idina Menzel
Directed by Tina Landau
February/March 2024

Broadway icon Idina Menzel makes her La Jolla Playhouse debut in the world premiere of *Redwood*, a one-of-a-kind theatrical event about one woman’s journey into the precious and precarious world of the redwoods. Idina plays Jesse, a successful businesswoman, mother and wife, at a turning point, Jesse leaves everyone and everything behind, gets in her car and drives.... Thousands of miles later, she hits the ancient forests of Northern California, where a chance meeting and a leap of faith change her life forever. In the presence of the magnificent, towering redwoods, Jesse finds strange and powerful connections, an unexpected sense of community, and a chance at healing. Acclaimed writer and director Tina Landau brings this immersive and cinematic new work to life with lush visuals and a soaring score by Kate Diaz. In an intoxicating environment of dense greenery, fractured light and dizzying heights, this musical will awaken your sense of adventure and lift you higher than the treetops.

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La Jolla Playhouse is a place where artists and audiences come together to create what's new and next in the American theatre, from Tony Award-winning productions, to imaginative programs for young audiences, to interactive experiences outside our theatre walls. Founded in 1947 by Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire and Mel Ferrer, the Playhouse is currently led by Tony Award winner Christopher Ashley, the Rich Family Artistic Director of La Jolla Playhouse, and Managing Director Debby Buchholz. The Playhouse is internationally renowned for the development of new works, including mounting 108 world premieres, commissioning 60 new works, and sending 33 productions to Broadway, garnering a total of 38 Tony Awards, as well as the 1993 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

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