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UCSB Summer Theatre Lab Brings Distinguished Artists to Campus for Creative Collaboration with Students, Faculty, Each Other

An innovative two-week play development lab made its debut at UC Santa Barbara Monday, July 19 and will unite celebrated performers, writers and directors with UCSB students and faculty in creative collaboration.

While some UCSB Summer Theatre Lab sessions will be limited to lab participants, many will be both free and open to the public.

"This year's lab features a solo performance piece, a dance theater piece, two ensemble-generated theater pieces, a new play, and an adaptation of a classic play," said lab creator Naomi Iizuka, an assistant professor of dramatic art and dance and director of UCSB's Playwriting Program. "It's rare to have so many different kinds of theater artists together in one place at the same time, watching each other's work in open rehearsals, and sharing their work in both formal panel discussions and informal conversations.

"It's exciting."

Public events begin at 8 p.m. Friday, July 23 with an award-winning solo performance piece by Alec Mapa with direction by Chay Yew.

Mapa is a much-honored actor, writer, activist, and performance artist whose Broadway credits include "M. Butterfly" (both original and national touring companies), "A Little Hotel on the Side," and "Timon of Athens."

He has also appeared in the New York Shakespeare Festival/Public Theatre productions of "A Language of Their Own" and "Dogeaters," for which he was nominated for the best supporting actor award. His one-man performance "I Remember Mapa" – from which he will perform and excerpt Friday night – played throughout the United States and Canada and was selected for the 1997 Best Solo Performance Award by L.A. Weekly.

Yew has previously directed Mapa in "A Language of Their Own," which he wrote, and "I Remember Mapa." His adaptation of Lorca's "The House of Bernarda Alba," has received much acclaim, as has his direction of "The Laramie Project" and "The Strangers." He also directed comedienne Margaret Cho's "Mondo Cho." The performance will be in the Performing Arts Theatre in the Humanities and Social Sciences Building.

The lab will offer two public performances on Sunday, July 25.

From 2 to 4 p.m. in the Performing Arts Theatre, UCSB graduate student Marc Shaw and the ensemble theater group SitePacific will perform an original, movement-based piece.

And at 7 p.m. in the MultiCultural Center Theatre, teens from the Enlace program at the Isla Vista Teen Center will join with their UCSB student mentors to present autobiographical solo pieces under the direction of UCSB graduate student Judy Bauerlein.

At 8 p.m. Tuesday, July 27, award-winning poet Jimmy Santiago Baca will read from his large body of work in the Performing Arts Theatre. Baca, who learned to read, write, and compose poetry while serving time in prison on drug convictions, has won numerous awards for his writing and has held the Wallace Stevens Chair at Yale University and served as a regents scholar at UC Berkeley. His memoir "A Place to Stand" tells of his troubled youth and of the five-year jail sentence that changed his life.

At 8 p.m. Wednesday, July 28 the San Francisco-based multi-cultural theater ensemble Campo Santo will present a work in progress in the Performing Arts Theatre.

Called "the best theater company to come out of the Bay Area in the last decade" by the San Francisco Chronicle, Campo Santo has produced 21 shows and won many awards since its founding in 1996.

A discussion will follow the performance.

Participants will include Baca; actress, director and playwright Diane Rodriguez, director of the Mark Taper Forum's Latino Theatre Initiative; and UCSB dramatic arts professors Carlos Morton and Leo Cabranes-Grant.

The final public event, from 2 to 4 p.m. Friday, July 30 in the Dance Rehearsal Room of the Humanities and Social Sciences Building, is a favorite of Iizuka's. It features a dance piece by Catherine Cole, a professor of drama at UCSB and choreographer Valerie Huston.

The piece explores asymmetry in the human body and among its discussants will be UCSB physics professor Harry Nelson, who studies asymmetry in science.

"I am really excited about this one," Iizuka said. "One of the most unique features of the lab is that it pairs theater artists and scholars in collaborative relationships across disciplines."

Other events will be closed to the public to ensure that students have the performers' undivided attention.

"The lab is a remarkable opportunity for UCSB students and faculty to work closely with some of the leading and most innovative theater artists in the country," Iizuka said. "And for the theater artists, the lab provides a process-oriented, interdisciplinary environment where they can delve deeply into their works in progress with scholars and students in unprecedented ways."

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About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.