UC SANTA BARBARA

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UC Santa Barbara Announces Winner of $10,000 Competition for New Plays About Science and Technology

Playwright Elyse Singer has been awarded first prize in an international competition for plays about science and technology launched by the Professional Artists Lab and the California NanoSystems Institute (CNSI) at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Singer will receive $10,000 for her winning play, "Frequency Hopping," at an awards ceremony next year that will coincide with the premiere of the play at the prestigious 3-Legged Dog Art and Technology Center, a cutting-edge theater and media group in New York City. The prize money for the competition was donated.

Nearly 175 plays from a dozen countries were entered in UCSB's second Scientists, Technologists, and Artists Generating Exploration (STAGE) competition. The unique competition evolved from a shared desire to make science more accessible to the public and the theater more reflective of what is happening in the world, said Nancy Kawalek, director of the Professional Artists Lab.

The winning play tells the story of the remarkable real-life collaboration in 1940 between film icon Hedy Lamarr and avant-garde composer George Antheil on a military communications device now recognized as the model for wireless communication. The darkly comic multidisciplinary play celebrates the process of

scientific invention—and the electrified nature of the collaborative process itself—while exploring the relationships between beauty and intelligence, science and art, and celebrity and identity.

Singer's works have been produced by dozens of prestigious theaters, including Playwright's Horizons, Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, the Women's Project, the Culture Project, P.S. 122, Dixon Place, Location One, Soho Rep, and New Georges. Singer is the founding artistic director of New York City's Hourglass Group, whose mission encompasses the development of adventurous new plays and championing writers who experiment with dramatic language and innovative theatrical forms, including the use of multimedia.

Two other playwrights singled out in the competition as finalists were award-winning Chicago playwright Gloria Bond Clunie, for "Quark," and Australian writer/director/actor Alex Ben Mayor, for "C

(299 492 458)."

In "Quark," a terminally ill astrophysics professor struggles to make a final grand gesture to change the lives of her family and the world.

"C

(299 492 458)," a simultaneously absurdist comedy and poignant tale, focuses on a female theoretical physicist's search for a unification of four disparate forces of nature. The title refers to the speed of light in a vacuum, taken as a starting point to investigate how we view the world around us.

"In addition to being enormously grateful to our esteemed panel of judges, I'm rather taken by surprise—and, of course, thrilled—by the overwhelming success of the competition," said Nancy Kawalek. "It shows that people are still hungry for theater, for new kinds of theater, and for theater that is about the lives they're living—lives influenced at nearly every turn by science and technology.

"Just as collaboration between art and science is at the very heart of the STAGE competition, collaboration is at the very heart of

‘Frequency Hopping,' both in content and in form," Kawalek continued. "This excites me as much as the play itself."

This year's scripts were judged by a panel made up of two of UCSB's Nobel laureates, David Gross (2004, physics) and Alan Heeger (2000, chemistry); Obie award-winning playwright Lonnie Carter; award-winning playwright Constance Congdon; award-winning playwright and screenwriter Jeffrey Hatcher; Morgan Jenness, dramaturge and literary agent at Abrams Artists Agency; Tony and Olivier award-winning playwright, screenwriter, and director Mark Medoff; and Kawalek.

"The play ‘Frequency Hopping' is all the more fascinating because it is a true, and perhaps little-known story," said Evelyn Hu, director of the California NanoSystems Institute at UCSB. "It demonstrates how easy it is to box ourselves into limited roles, even if those are excellent and much-recognized roles. Those are the kinds of stereotypes we as scientists are trying to change."

The Professional Artists Lab is a dynamic artistic laboratory in Film and Media Studies and Media Arts and Technology at UCSB, in which professional actors, directors, writers, and producers create and develop new works in film, theatre, television, radio, and multi-media performance. Distinguished visiting artists also discuss their craft in classes and present workshops.

The California NanoSystems Institute (CNSI), one of the prestigious California Institutes for Science and Innovation, focuses on dramatic breakthroughs in materials, devices and resulting technologies, made possible by controlling form and function at the nanoscale. These breakthroughs are being accomplished through the integration of many science and engineering disciplines, and will have broad applications for innovation in communication, biomedical, energy, and environmental technologies. CNSI is a research partnership between UCSB and UCLA.

Based on the extraordinarily positive response to the competition, it has expanded into the STAGE Project. Under this larger umbrella and Kawalek's direction, the Professional Artists Lab and the California NanoSystems Institute will collaborate internationally with professional artists to create and develop multimedia theater pieces in which science and technology play prominent roles in content and/or form.

The next round of the STAGE International Script Competition will get underway soon.

Related Links

The Winning Plays

STAGE International Script Competition

Professional Artists Lab

California NanoSystems Institute

About UC Santa Barbara

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