

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE *Current*

February 12, 2024

[Shelly Leachman](#)

Maternal love unleashed: 'Everybody's Favorite Mothers' premieres at UCSB

What is the true power of a mother's love? Can it change the world? What happens when mothers come together in support of their children?

Those questions are at the heart of award-winning playwright James Still's latest piece, "Everybody's Favorite Mothers," a true story that takes place in the past, casts a spotlight into the present, and offers advice for the future. A [preview production](#), courtesy of UC Santa Barbara's LAUNCH PAD performance program, and directed by Risa Brainin, chair and professor of theater and dance, opens Thursday, Feb. 22 at Hatlen Theater on campus.

"Everybody's Favorite Mothers" is a theatrical celebration of unconditional love and unlikely activism that started in the summer of 1972 when one mother marched in a parade with her gay son. She carried a home-made sign boldly declaring her support — and a new kind of movement was born. On that day she was an unknown hero to dozens of shocked gays and lesbians, but that was only the beginning. Jeanne Manford and her husband Jules went on to co-found a support group for parents — an organization that would eventually become known around the world as PFLAG (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2023.

The play is also about young queer men and women coming out, standing up to power and accelerating the fight for gay rights, set in a time when homosexuality was illegal in 49 states, when the American Psychiatry Association still diagnosed homosexuality as a mental illness, and when police raids on any kind of same-sex gatherings were common and life-threatening. With violence against the transgender community and LGBTQ+ youth now at an all-time high, “‘Everybody’s Favorite Mothers’ isn’t nostalgic,” noted Brainin — it’s a warning that there’s still work to do and that history can inspire us to find ways forward.

“James Still is a deeply passionate writer,” said Brainin, artistic director of LAUNCH PAD, who has been collaborating with Still since 1988. “His plays grapple with the most challenging issues of our time. He is a unique storyteller using everything from naturalism to magical realism which bring the plays alive in the most surprising ways.

“Working on a Still play is a joyous adventure from start to finish,” she added.

The work’s artistic team is composed of New York based costume designer Nicole Smith, who is new to UCSB, and veteran LAUNCH PAD designers Michael Keck, Michael Klaers and Anne Sheffield. The cast features professional actors Julie Fishell and Paul Canter alongside four UCSB BFA acting students: Jacob Marshall, Netta Nakash, Indigo Runge and Travers Tobis.

Performances will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 22, 23, 24, 27 and 29, as well as March 1-2; a matinee will be offered at 2 p.m. on March 2. Seating is limited.

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