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**Branden Jacobs-Jenkins named next Roger S. Berlind Playwright at the Lewis Center for the Arts, Princeton University**

***Award-winning playwright commissioned to adapt Euripides’* The Bakkhai *for opening celebration of new Lewis Center for the Arts buildings***



Photo caption: Award-winning playwright and Princeton alum Branden Jacobs-Jenkins

Photo credit: Courtesy of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins

(Princeton, NJ) Obie Award-winning playwright, MacArthur “Genius Grant” Fellow, and Princeton alum Branden Jacobs-Jenkins has been commissioned by the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University to write and develop a new adaptation of Euripides’ *The Bakkhai*. The commission is being supported through the Roger S. Berlind ’52 Playwright-in-Residence Fund. The new play will premiere at the opening of the new Lewis Center for the Arts complex in October 2017.

Jacobs-Jenkins’ plays include *Neighbors*; *Appropriate*, which received an OBIE Award for Best New American Play in 2014 and was an Outer Critics Circle nominee; *An Octoroon*, also recognized with an OBIE Award for Best New American Play in 2014; *War*; and*Gloria*, a finalist for the 2016 Pulitzer Prize. His plays have been performed at such venues as Lincoln Center Theatre/LCT3, Soho Rep, the New York Public Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, Actors Theater of Louisville, Center Theatre Group, Victory Gardens Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theater, The Matrix Theater, CompanyOne, Theater Bielefeld in Germany and the HighTide Festival in the U.K.

Jacobs-Jenkins is currently a Residency Five playwright at Signature Theatre and master-artist-in-residence in the Playwriting M.F.A. program of Hunter College, City University of New York. Other honors include a 2016 MacArthur Fellowship, the Paula Vogel Award, a Fulbright Arts Grant, a Helen Merrill Award, the Dorothy Strelsin playwriting fellowship, the Steinberg Playwrights Award, the inaugural Tennessee Williams Award, the 2016 PEN/Laura Pels Award, the Windham-Campbell Literature Prize, and most recently a MacDowell Colony Fellowship. He is a graduate of Princeton, Class of 2006, where he concentrated in anthropology and received a certificate in the Program in Theater. He also holds an M.A. in Performance Studies from New York University, and is a graduate of the Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program at Juilliard.

Michael Cadden, chair of the Lewis Center, comments, “We are thoroughly delighted to welcome back our former student and colleague, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins. He did brilliant work in our classrooms and on our stages and, a decade later, he is now officially recognized as the genius we always knew him to be. His often hilariously satirical investigations into how race and class play out in America today have made his work ‘must-sees’ for people who care deeply about a theater where ideas and entertainment dance together. So it’s only appropriate that Branden will be adapting one of the classics of ancient Greek drama, Euripides’ *The Bakkhai*, for this commission. The Greeks knew how to make ideas dance!”

"The extraordinary thing about Branden is the breadth and brilliance of his theatrical imagination,” adds R.N. Sandberg, Jacobs-Jenkins' playwriting professor and senior thesis adviser. “This was evident in playwriting class, and it's proved true through his already significant career. Every play seems to find its own unique form as it grapples with our troubled humanity and challenges us to think harder and feel more fully about ourselves, others, and our world. His brain and his heart are just far larger than most artists we encounter."

The premiere production will be directed by fellow Princeton alum Lileana Blain-Cruz, also Princeton Class of 2006. Blain-Cruz directed the premiere of Jacobs-Jenkins’ *War* at both the Yale Repertory Theater and Lincoln Center.

The Princeton premiere will be part of a weekend-long celebration next fall marking the opening of a new multi-building arts complex that will house the Lewis Center for the Arts’ Programs in Dance, Music Theater and Theater, the Princeton Atelier, and expanded rehearsal space for Princeton’s Department of Music and Program in Musical Performance. In addition to studios and classrooms, the new venue will include a block box theater, a dance performance theater, music rehearsal spaces and recording studios, an art gallery, and a forum -- a gathering space that connects the three buildings.

The Berlind Playwright-in-Residence Fund recognizes exciting, established playwrights whose work has had significant impact on the field. The program was established in 2014 through the support of Roger S. Berlind, Princeton Class of 1952, best known as the Tony Award-winning producer of over 100 New York shows, including *The Book of Mormon*, *Amadeus*, *Annie*, *City of Angels*, *Hamlet* (with Ralph Fiennes), *Sophisticated Ladies*, and *A View from the Bridge*. In 2009, Berlind was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame; in 2011, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the playwright-development workshop New Dramatists. He provided the lead funding for construction of the Roger S. Berlind Theatre at McCarter Theatre Center, a venue shared by McCarter and Princeton University.

The inaugural Berlind Playwright-in-Residence was Christopher Durang, who co-taught a course on his own work in fall 2015 with Cadden, a member of the Program in Theater faculty. As part of his appointment, Durang is currently developing a new play in collaboration with McCarter Theatre, where he premiered *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, which went on to win the 2013 Tony Award for Best Play.

To learn more about the Lewis Center for the Arts visit [arts](http://www.princeton.edu/arts).princeton.edu.

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