

SUBJECT 1: *Shadow/land* is a healing.

SUBJECT 2: Is reflection.

SUBJECT 3: Rooted in ancestry and history.

JILL M. VALLERY: Is a conversation about the alchemy between memory, legacy, and general responsibility for one's agency, for oneself, but also the ways in which the outside kind of encroaches on our sense of what those things are. It is in legacy, I think, with the work of Ntozake Shange and Toni Morrison and little bits and pieces of Lorraine Hansberry. But it's altogether something all its own with language that is incredibly rich and very specific. I think specifically, those folks from New Orleans will definitely get a taste of home and-- yeah, a lifting of all of that legacy.

GARLIA CORNELIA JONES: On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, making landfall with storm winds reaching as high as 125 miles per hour. I was in the first semester of my graduate school at Indiana University. We watched and listened, attended forums, and did what graduate students do-- discuss, debate, and wait, like the rest of the country, knowing the aftermath would affect generations of people.

Black families were particularly affected, as highlighted in the documentary film *When the Levees Broke* directed by Spike Lee. And if you haven't seen it, you should. It shows a searing and honest depiction of real families struggling to make a way through. It's an example of how art can communicate grief while also inspiring action.

Nearly 20 years following that devastation of Katrina, playwright Erika Dickerson-Despenza has written a play that focuses on this same story through the lens of family, a mother/daughter tale. Hey, everybody. It's Garlia here at The Public. The Public Theater is--

CHILD: Your work.

GARLIA CORNELIA JONES: [LAUGHS] OK

Hello. My name is Garlia Cornelia Jones, your host for *Public Square 2.0*. And for the next few weeks, we're going to spend some time talking about the new play, *shadow/land*, written by Erika Dickerson-Despenza and directed by Candis C. Jones. If you follow the work of The Public Theater in New York City, you may remember the audio play from the spring of 2021. Two years later, with COVID restrictions shifting, Erika's fully realized production is ready to take the stage.

However, instead of focusing on the writer and director, we worked with both Erika and Candis to highlight the production elements bringing this story to life, making this episode different from the audio play. As you can imagine, any play focused on New Orleans is bound to have an amazing score. And while music was a big part of the audio play, lighting and movement were new to this process.

So today, we take a moment to talk with lighting designer Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew, movement director Jill M. Vallery, and composer Delfeayo Marsalis. We drop into the conversation with Jill at the top, highlighting her role as a mother and caregiver, and how those parts of her life connect to her art.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Jill.

**JILL M.
VALLERY:** Garlia.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** I'm really excited that you're here. I say that about everybody. It is very true. And I'm thrilled to just get to know more about you and your work in this context outside of being a mom and a parent, which, as a Black mom and as a mom period, just sort of sometimes takes over all of who we are and people forget. So when I see you in like the rehearsal room and saw you in the rehearsal room, it was like, oh, wait, this is not the mother to a child.

[LAUGHTER]

This is also a full human.

**JILL M.
VALLERY:** Artist, creative being, separate from.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Yes.

**JILL M.
VALLERY:** Still connected, yeah. Thank you for this. This is such an honor, to be on this platform speaking with you. So I greatly appreciate the invitation.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:** Yes. I would love to just kind of start there because I talk about parenthood and being a Black mother and Black parent often. And so I'm really curious, what is that balance for you with your work and your art making? Is there even a balance?

My students and I actually were talking about not using that word, "balance," just based on a conversation I had with Narda E. Alcorn, who was like, I don't subscribe to that word "balance." Sometimes things are in the front seat. Sometimes they're in the back seat. So I'm just really curious, what is that for you?

**JILL M.
VALLERY:** Absolutely. That is a great question. And I agree. Sometimes, when you think about the word "balance," you think about this idea of, oh, things have to be perfectly aligned, you know, and if they're out of balance, that I'm out of balance. So I feel for me, it's the idea of peace. How can I offer peace in my household amidst the times when things are out of balance? That's kind of how I approach that because it's a work in progress.

And I'm fortunate enough to have a partner who is in the arts as well. So we're constantly negotiating all right, you're going to go out to see this play, or we're going to call my mom from California to assist us in this process because I'm traveling or I'm on tour somewhere and you're working on a project that has you from 10:00 to 6:00. So it's also the outside-- outside of our immediate family that come in and really assist us on that process.

But it's a funny story. I literally just asked my son this the other day. I asked him-- I said, you know, honey, what is it that you love about mommy? Just wanted to get in their heads and know what it is. And Garlia, he said, I love the fact that you work a lot and you still spend a lot of time with me.

GARLIA Oh. That is beautiful.

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. I was like, OK.

VALLERY:

GARLIA That-- yeah. Right. So that's huge.

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. Yeah. That he understands that work balance. And I feel like when I am giving myself or fortunate enough to be in the rooms that I am, creatively and artistically, I'm able to then give him a full mom as opposed to just the mom that you see doing all the things in the household and cooking food and just trying to navigate that. So that's an excellent question.

VALLERY:

GARLIA Yeah. And so many people who do not have children who are in this industry, if they do want children, these types of conversations are in their heads about, what are the options? What are the options? What are the possibilities?

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. I get it all the time. Yeah, yeah.

VALLERY:

GARLIA Yeah. Like, is it a thing that you can--

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. Actually do?

VALLERY:

GARLIA Right.

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. Can you navigate a career and have a child? Absolutely.

VALLERY:

GARLIA And the support system that you mentioned is really important, and not only of your communities but within your artistic process, right?

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. Absolutely.

VALLERY:

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: Are there things that you as an artist parent need from your collaborators within the project or the institutions that you have asked for or that you have been afraid to ask for, to make space for yourself to be able to do both of those things?

JILL M.
VALLERY: Again, funny you ask this. I am currently-- well, I'm on a LOA, but I'm in the production of *776*, which is currently on tour. And I knew that the tour schedule was-- it was rigorous. It is really rigorous. And my son is in first grade. Like, I can give you this much, but I'm going to have to be here for him during these months.

And it was that, like, are they going to support me? Is it going to be a situation where we're like, no, you know what, thank you for your time. We're going to have to find somebody else to replace you during these months that you are requesting to be out. And I procrastinated. I was like, OK, I don't know, I don't know.

And something, Garlia, was like, I have to ask for it. Because even if they deny me, I know that I'm making the right decision because I need to be here for my son during this particular time in his school year. And lo and behold, they were like, we completely understand. And they granted it.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: That's amazing.

JILL M.
VALLERY: And here I am. Exactly, exactly. So it is that idea of putting my energy into knowing what it is that I have to prioritize and trusting that I will be supported and with whatever organization that I'm in.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: Right. So you're able to do both this and the tour and prioritize family.

JILL M.
VALLERY: Correct, correct. And I'm fortunate enough to be in the room with Erika and Candis, who I have grown extremely close to. And they know my son and husband. So they can as well. If I have to do a parent-teacher conference, I'm not going to be into rehearsal at that particular time. They're like, do what you have to do.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: Yeah. I think the value of collaborators that understand caregiver and family responsibilities is sorely underestimated. It makes our jobs easier. It gives us that ability to take a breath and not have to feel like we have to make excuses for-- I've been late to teaching because my daughter forgot her lunchbox and I needed to go take it to school or somewhere so that she had it.

JILL M.
VALLERY: That's her lunch.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES: And she called-- and she messages me as I'm on the way, so I can't-- I've got to stop and go back and because I don't want her to have a bad day. So it's, you know, you do all the things you can do to make sure they have everything when they walk out the door, but sometimes they don't.

JILL M.
VALLERY: Listen.

GARLIA And it's because they're children.

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. Exactly.

VALLERY:

GARLIA [LAUGHS]

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. There's been many a time-- you forgot your piano notebook? Ugh, OK.

VALLERY:

GARLIA Right. And it's that. It's all of that. So it's really beautiful to hear that, and to just acknowledge that, even for
CORNELIA people who might be listening in on this parenting or caregiving journey or are curious and just like, how do--

JONES:

JILL M. And if it's one more thing that I can offer is having the courage to say what it is that you want, speak what it is
VALLERY: that you need. Sometimes, I feel we get caught up-- and I'll speak specifically for myself, but I see a lot of my
friends get caught up in the idea that it is my responsibility to get the schoolwork done, to get the dinner on, to
get the laundry done, and all this stuff.

And it's like, if you don't speak that, then your partner's not going to really know, you know what I mean? That
balance is so critical for the well-being of the family. So definitely speaking what it is that you need so you give
space for your partner to rise up and help support you, because it can get really, really challenging.

GARLIA So it's so huge. It is so, it is so, so huge.

CORNELIA

JONES:

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Composer Delfeayo Marsalis has a strong connection to family as well. Dubbed the First Family of Jazz, artists
with the name "Marsalis" have been making their impact for decades. We took a moment to touch base with the
shadow/land composer as he talked about what it was like growing up in a family with such a rich musical legacy.

DELFEAYO Yeah. Well, you know, growing up in the family was great. We had-- at one time, there were four of us. And I was
MARSALIS: the youngest at that point. So we had a good time. And it's really our mother, Dolores, who had the vision. She
graduated from Grambling State University with a degree in home economics.

So our dad, he was a pianist, and that's what he wanted to do, to play piano. And mom had the vision-- she
wanted to have a large family. And so she took care of all the business. She made sure that we did all our
homework. And so then she also encouraged us to have a certain kind of relationship with our dad, which was
important because sometimes we were doing schoolwork and we would ask questions, and she would just say,
wait till your daddy gets home. So that was very important to us.

And having my brothers, it was-- we were more interested in athletics, playing football early on, than the music. And we had a good time. And we were tight. It was a small house. Man, it was something.

And then our younger brother, Mboya was born. And Mboya was diagnosed with autism. And that kind of changed the family dynamic. And then a few years after him, Jason, who was the youngest, was born.

So it wasn't so much the family thing at that point other than our dad was playing piano and we went to some of those gigs. And that was exciting. But my mother, and I guess a lot of the older folks of that generation, they stressed to us that they did not have a lot of opportunity. And it didn't matter about the level of skill or the seriousness. Opportunity just wasn't there.

So I think that was my mom's idea, was that we were going to take advantage of whatever opportunities we could and do the best that we could.

GARLIA And at one point in the conversation, we had a surprise visit from one of my children.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

DELFEAYO The challenge is to be in sync with the director and the author in terms of what is the emotion that the music has
MARSALIS: to create and how best to do that. Someone's intruding.

GARLIA Hello. I'm actually doing an interview right now, dear. She needed her--

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

DELFEAYO Mom's working. Get out, woman. Get out.

MARSALIS:

GARLIA They don't even care. The other one has on the television. I just-- it's all chaotic.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

DELFEAYO Well, I remember when my dad would do gigs, that was us. When we were going to my dad's [INAUDIBLE], we
MARSALIS: had no clue what was going on.

GARLIA You're just like, hey.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

DELFEAYO We'd just be like--

MARSALIS:

GARLIA I'm here.

**CORNELIA
JONES:**

DELFEAYO Yeah, in the middle of a song.

MARSALIS:

GARLIA You're like, what's going on?

CORNELIA

JONES:

DELFEAYO Dad, can we go home?

MARSALIS:

GARLIA Like, can we go? Are you done? Family is an important place to begin for us with this episode because it
CORNELIA highlights the core connections with this mother/daughter story. While the Marsalis family might be a little more
JONES: of an obvious connection, both Jill and Delfeayo have roots in New Orleans. With that in mind, I asked them both the value of working on a story about their hometown.

I was able to work on the audio play a bit. And so I would love for you to really take us through this journey of the work that you're doing with the Grand Marshal and the importance of that role within this, in this piece, because I know it does really play a new and very important role in the storytelling that Erika has put forth, yeah.

JILL M. Yes, that she has so brilliantly interwoven into the tapestry of this mother and daughter relationship. I was
VALLERY: fortunately able to be a part of this production-- I think it was 2018, at Fault Line Theater. It was one of the workshops just bringing it together. And I worked a lot with the two actresses, as I said before, in infusing more of an embodied place within their monologues.

So when I was called again to work on the project now that it is on its feet, Erika shared with me that there is this Grand Marshal component. And she kind of talked me through what she has envisioned for it. And Garlia, I was like, [GASPS] this is exactly what I not only envision for the space, but also, the excitement of bringing dance, and not just dance but the spiritual component of dance, into the space because New Orleans is a melting pot of cultures, a melting pot of spiritualities. And one of the strongest spirituality that is practiced there is [? Vodun, ?] aside from Catholicism, of course. But from African descendants, [? Vodun ?] is practiced.

And funny story-- I worked with two dance companies, Haitian dance companies, after I had graduated from school. And one of the companies went to New Orleans not shortly after Katrina. And mind you, I did not mention this, which is hugely important. I'm from New Orleans.

GARLIA Oh. OK, OK. I think we should start over. Yeah, start over, Jill.

CORNELIA

JONES:

[LAUGHTER]

That is very important. That's very important.

JILL M. Pardon, everyone. Yeah, I was born not so much raised, because my dad was in the military. We moved when I
VALLERY: was a year and a half. But my whole family is from New Orleans. So this piece speaks to me in such a deep way that, again, when I was asked to be a part of it with this now spiritual component, it was one of those projects that you pray for. And when you get it, you're like, OK, I have to take such good care of this because of the connection that I have with it, not only with my ancestral lineage but also with the spiritual component added.

So segueing it back to one of the Haitian dance companies that I worked with we went there after Katrina, and I remember seeing the lines, the water lines, on the home. And experiencing the city that I once knew, the energy being just depleted, and the energy that this Haitian dance company was bringing into it, I felt, was such a powerful, palpable experience for the city and for the community. It was the one time in my performance life that my family from my dad's side and my family from my mom's side all came together to see this and witness and experience this performance.

So the connection of what Erika has introduced into this space is-- it's like an activation of the energy of New Orleans. And the Grand Marshal not only is-- how do I say? They shapeshift. This character shapeshifts within the play.

You have the Grand Marshal, who is somebody who interacts with people, brings in the parade of second line and performs the New Orleans second line, which is-- I want to say it's an Indigenous dance-- to New Orleans and the energy of people of New Orleans. But they also shapeshift into a loa by the name of Baron Samedi, And this loa is the gatekeeper of the cemetery. So they are the loa who brings people who are transitioning to the other side.

Then the Grand Marshal shape shifts into the Gede, which the Gede is a Haitian family that is responsible for the life and death cycle, fertility, and the energy-- basically the energy of life. So as this play is moving on-- oh, one more thing. They also shapeshift into the memory for Magalee, memories for Ruth, and empowering energies for Ruth.

So it's a continual vacillation of activating the space within the play and activating the characters within the play as well.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

I haven't-- I have not yet seen a run through of the production. I have obviously heard and worked on the audio play. And I've been in the rehearsal space, which felt like there were altars in different areas of the space. And I'm from Detroit, so I take very seriously working on stories that have to deal with your home and where you're from. And I work in Detroit a lot, so it is very important for me to go back and be part of what the storytelling is for where I'm from so that-- so at least I can control some part of a narrative that somebody, somewhere will see

And so in hearing you talk about being from New Orleans, even having family there, going back, and then infusing this work, I'm just curious about home and if that really drew you closer to this work, and what it even means to be a part of telling this story.

**JILL M.
VALLERY:**

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. In January, I went back home, maybe for two weeks. Yes, for about two weeks. And while I was there, I again connected with my family, but in a different way than what I normally do-- knowing that I was going to go into this space of *shadow/land*. I spent really concentrated time with my father's sisters, my aunts, asking in-depth questions about lineage.

I spent quite a bit of time in the cemeteries. If you know anything about New Orleans cemeteries, they are above ground in ornate-- Louis kept the grounds-- are really kept, but there's a lot of historical connection to the cemeteries there. So I made sure-- and also understanding the importance of honoring ancestors, I made sure that I went to the plots where I knew my people were, cleaned them off, did a lot of prayer, prayer and preparation, for this position and this responsibility, and to spend a lot of time being still.

I would normally go to New Orleans, and I'd be out with my family. Where are we going? Taco Tuesdays, and we're going to go here and party. And it was wonderful, when it affords that. But I knew that this time going in--

GARLIA It was a different trip.

CORNELIA

JONES:

JILL M. Yeah. This time was a time for me to be still and to be reflective and to be in that place where I'm able to receive-
VALLERY: - receive, whether that be instruction, whether that be words of wisdom for myself moving forward, whether that be just direction-- direction-- and making sure that, again, I am moving any insecurities that I may have as my own personal self and being able to be a vessel to conduit truth, authenticity, homage, and honor to my legacy.

GARLIA And as I hear here you talk about going home, I'm really left with that feeling of being still and you really sitting in
CORNELIA the stillness and being open to hearing what you needed to hear to move forward with this work.

JONES:

How does that differ from other things that-- from the other project that you work on? I feel like we've touched on it a bit, but it does feel like the approach to *shadow/land* and working with Candis and Erika in this room is not just about working on a play, right? And so as we talk about storytelling and stories and our ancestry, and that being what Black and brown people do, is tell these epic stories that we've talked about weaving. And that also makes me feel think about water and the flow of that, and how it cleanses and destroys and hurts and heals, all at the same time. It does all of those things.

So for me, what is-- the different-- what makes this more than just first day of rehearsal, introduce yourself, I'm the movement director, right? What makes it more than that?

JILL M. Yeah. Well, you mentioned when you come into the space, you've seen altars that are set up in the space. And I
VALLERY: feel that, and I appreciate the care in which Erika and Candis take to understand the importance of the energies that we are dealing with and understand the importance of the support that our ancestors have for us and are always around us.

So that alone is setting up the space for self-accountability. It's setting up the space for healing. It's setting the space for us to be able to be in community, and know that it's not just us who's showing up in the space every day. It is us with our people that are showing up in this space. So we have our ancestor altar.

We also have, which I really appreciate as well, the altar for Baron Samedi, because that is also an energy that we are paying utmost respect and homage to. So if we are calling them into this space, then we need to make sure that we are calling them in a way that, again, is of the utmost respect to this deity. And study-- that's another thing I appreciate about Erika and Candis, is they really study what it is that these deities like, how it is that you are to greet them so that we're in a good space within the creative space.

So that's one of the things that's different about this process as opposed to other processes that I've worked on or shows that I've worked on, is that deep appreciation and knowing that we are not just our individual selves. And God bless my sister Erika. I always let her know that I appreciate that, no matter what, she's showing up in the spirit of liberation. She's showing up in the spirit of community, connectivity. Like, how do we-- not only in the midst of caring for ourselves, how do we show up and care for each other?

GARLIA No, I'm just going to say that a care is and feels very baseline in all of the interactions. That is the standard. And
CORNELIA then we just move forward and through and up and out, really, from there.

JONES:

As someone who is from New Orleans with such a strong connection to that city, what does it mean for you to be part of telling this story?

DELFEAYO
MARSALIS:

It's the kind of story that I love. I mean, it has all of the important and crucial elements. Of course, if you're an actual jazz musician, then you have a respect and an appreciation for the tradition. But at the same time, we're trying to do things that are relevant, culturally relevant, today.

So this play touches on the same thing that's been going on. And the idea that developers are coming in and, of course, they want to take up all-- they want to buy the land, and they want to do whatever they want. And of course, they're making these promises. They're empty promises.

And we kind of know that, but it's like, OK, do we need this money, or do we try to maintain something? And if we maintain it, then what does that actually mean? Which is really tough for Black folk, man. It's just, we've been like the greatest nomads in history. It's just-- it's very difficult for Black folk to stay placed and stay put in the community.

And earlier in our history, when folks was ready for us to go, they'd just burn us out. They'd just say, OK, it's time for this town to go. So we still have kind of those scars that we're trying to heal from. But we're still trying to maintain.

So I think it's very, again, a compelling story. And it's excellently told. And I'm definitely glad to be a part of it.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:

Yeah. I had the chance to speak with Jill, who's the movement director. And Jill also has family from New Orleans. And so we also just connected on what it also means for her just to go back to a space where she has familial roots and to tell a story about that place. And I often draw that connection just because I'm from Detroit, as are the production team of this podcast. And I do a lot of work back home. And it has such great meaning to be able to be involved in things in Detroit and be part of the telling of that story.

And the answer that you just gave also highlights something I also think a lot about, which is how we, the Black community, how we have always used the arts as a refuge. And I'm wondering if you can talk a bit about that connection. Like, what is the power in our ability to use music to help us heal?

DELFEAYO
MARSALIS:

Well, you know, look. They talk about the Greeks, and the Greeks knew about the importance of the arts and music and literature. It wasn't until the British came along, and they had-- they just despised music, man. The British, Lord have mercy.

But original man, original woman comes from Africa. So all things sprang from Africa. But because of this worldwide narrative, which is really against the people of African descent-- I guess we could say "the darker people," since everyone actually is from Africa in one way or another. But the reality is that we-- that was original man and woman.

And the idea of culture, the idea of music, the idea of arts, the idea of telling stories that are didactic, and all of this stems from Africa. And from the standpoint of power and money, there's kind of been what I perceive as a longstanding attempt to shift away from where it actually came from and to credit other folks. I said the thing about Britain because the advantage that we had in New Orleans is that we were colonized by the French and Spanish, who had respect for-- they were like, yeah, this is going to be a tough situation, but we respect what y'all got going on.

Whereas the British, they were more about control. So their vibe was like, man, get the drums away from them African. We don't want-- we don't know what they're doing. So it was about the control and how they can-- so it was really, really, really tough in these places-- Mississippi, Alabama, Virginia-- really tough.

New Orleans, you had a little more freeway. And the reason people love New Orleans, even today, is, one, the direct links that we have to our Africanism, and two, really what the country was supposed to be, it's the true melting pot where people can come along and they can find their way. And it's something that the people who live in New Orleans are not trying consciously to maintain these traditions. It's just what it is. It's real life.

And you find that on the continent of Africa. It's the same kind of a thing. Folks are living the way that they've been living, and they just-- things that you have that are tradition, but also they're important for what is going on today. So again, I love New Orleans. And this play is a great representation of some of the beliefs and ideals that we have as New Orleanians.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:

Earlier in the conversation, Jill mentioned the second line, a New Orleans tradition that Delfeayo also references as he shares what he hopes people take away from this production.

DELFEAYO
MARSALIS:

Well, a lot of folks love the second line. And they love the idea that New Orleans music, it has a certain type of a sound of celebration. But the great thing is that that celebration is also an expression of pain. And it is a way that the African-descended folks of color have dealt with pain. Rather than kind of be sad and depressed, they channeled that energy into something that was joyous and something that was a way to just look at it-- OK, we're just here for a small amount of time so we're going to make the best out of what this situation is.

And again, while that narrative has been changed by the dominant culture for their own benefits, we still love that idea-- that idea that, yeah, OK, this is jive, but we're going to turn it around. We're not going to sit there and wallow in the fact of how jive it is. So the idea is that you have the emotional suffrage and pain, but then you have the joy and the celebration. And the real question is, how do you reconcile those two? And I think the play does a great job of dealing with that dynamic.

GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:

It's impossible to visit New Orleans and not think about water, and not because of Katrina. Whether walking down the riverfront, catching an impromptu performance in Jackson Square, getting food on Fishermen, or finding a random party in the Bywater, New Orleans is a city that pulses with the tide. But how do you create water on stage?

Part of this task went to lighting designer Jeanette Yew. We caught up with her just a few days before launching into tech.

JEANETTE OI-
SUK YEW:

I actually got introduced to it during the pandemic. So the first time I read it, it was super emotional because of-- you know, it is dealing with a-- honestly, I still feel like that Katrina is a big giant wound in this country that we have never really reconciled. And there are many of them, obviously, in this country, but I feel like that that's-- we have a habit of not reconciling with pain, which, understandably, no one wants to. But I do actually-- personally, I think it's important.

So when I first read it, Erika actually sent me a recording of it. This is before the podcast. That was like a Zoom reading that she sent me. And it was super emotional. When I sat through it the first time, I didn't even necessarily thinking about what happened in terms of story wise but just was really moved and feeling really emotional about that, about the pain in a lot of ways. So that was my first introduction to it.

Then I listened to the podcast, the actual production of it. And starting to-- one of the things I love working with Erika, particularly her as a playwright, is that she finds a way to be political in a very authentic, in-your-face, but really shaking you to the core kind of way, that is not didactic, that is not accusatory.

And I think that that is really exciting because when I hear it again, I hear more of the politics and the complexity of social question that she's really asking. So that is my second introduction to it. And Candis is like amazing dramaturg. I know she always has dramaturg working with her.

But as a director, she and Candis is such a force because she-- I think that she brings out the human interaction, the detail that make the characters become super vivid. So yes, there's all these big social question politics that Erika is displaying it in front of us to force us to take a look at them. And then Candis brings out this human way of addressing those things, that the two of them is just such great partnership. And that's how I have always got into working with them, from color water to this, because color water has the same kind of inquiries that Erika is asking.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

Was there anything about this piece that challenged you in a different way?

**JEANETTE OI-
SUK YEW:**

Oh. I mean, I think it's challenging because, first of all, Jason Ardizzone-West did an amazing design of the space. But the play itself, basically after a very short amount of time, the performance-wise, the actors are pretty confined in a certain area because the premise of the piece is like, the space is getting flooded and kind of inaccessible.

And so technically speaking, I now have-- even though it is a big space, I am limited to the area that I'm lighting to reveal the story. And each section of the story gets more and more complex emotionally, and more and more dangerous also as the situation gets more dire. So my challenge will be, how do I use the same tools again to think about revealing them dramaturgically as each layer gets peeled off and get to this really-- I don't want to give it away. I'm not going to give away the story-- but get to an end that is really extremely heart wrenching and emotional.

So that is going to be my challenge for this because most of the time, they actually perform in a pretty small amount of space.

**GARLIA
CORNELIA
JONES:**

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And so what is it like working with water conceptually? How does that inform-- and how has that informed your does design, whether literally or metaphorically?

**JEANETTE OI-
SUK YEW:**

I have now-- I think The Public, at least for the lighting department, they already say that now I can only do shows that that has water, because I've done two shows now with actual water onstage.

[LAUGHTER]

GARLIA OK, fair enough.

CORNELIA

JONES:

JEANETTE OI-SUK YEW: Technically speaking-- Yeah, technically speaking, I think I need to provide a lot of sense of movement in space because water is organically reflecting and moving. So technically, I try to instill a level of movement. But then I think that for us specifically, it is actually how the movement and how the reflection, how the water itself tells a story.

So I think for color water, they were sort of metaphorically encompassing the entire space because there's these water bottles hanging up. So I have tools that changes the color and movement of it to make it feel like the entire space is constantly moving organically like water.

For *shadow/land*, because we really are coming from-- the water is more coming from the ground because it's like it's a flooding, there are some rain from the top, but mostly there is this idea of like seeping in, getting higher and higher. So in that case, I'm trying to get the water to go up in the air, so kind of get the reflection into the entire space through the idea of reflection.

So that's kind of like the approach for *shadow/land*. And because the LuEsther has white columns, so that it will be able to take that idea of reflection much more dynamically. So that's what I'm trying to work with. And then the unpredictability of water also-- that depends on how it moves, the reflection changes. So I'm using those, keeping in mind how water behaves, and then use it in part of the storytelling.

GARLIA Back in 2021, as The Public was releasing the audio play version of *shadow/land*, Georgetown professor, Soyica
CORNELIA Colbert, hosted a three-part conversation called *The Clearing*. This series featured Erika, Candis, and a collection
JONES: of other guests, all in conversation about *shadow/land*. We're going to shake up our regular schedule as we re-release *The Clearing* over the next few weeks. So stay tuned as we continue this conversation.

Shadow/land runs at The Public in LuEsther Hall beginning April 20. You should check it out, and not just because I say so.

SUBJECT 1: *Shadow/land* is--

SUBJECT 3: *Shadow/land* is--

SUBJECT 4: For me and for, I hope, everyone that has the good fortune to join us, *shadow/land* is, indeed, a place to come out of the shadows and into the light of who we really, really are, and the beauty that all that brings and the things that we don't need that we can now leave behind.

GARLIA We hope you're enjoying this content as much as we love producing it for you. As always, don't forget to like,
CORNELIA subscribe, and give us that five-star rating you know we deserve. For everyone here on the *Public Square* team,
JONES: I'm Garlia Cornelia Jones. And we'll see you Thursdays at the *Public Square*.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Welcome home to the *Public Square*. We're so glad to have you back.

PRESENTER: Today's episode of *Public Square 2.0* was hosted and produced by Garlia Cornelia Jones, director of innovation and new media at The Public Theater, with support from New Media associate, Emily White. Creative production includes story support by John Sloan III of Ghostlight Creative Productions, and audio production by Justin K. Sloan of Ghostlight Creative Productions.

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