

PGA CREATE

BOOSTS MID-CAREER PRODUCERS

INAUGURAL PROGRAM BOLSTERS UNDERREPRESENTED VOICES AND SHOWCASES THE FUTURE OF STORYTELLING.

WRITTEN BY DINO-RAY RAMOS

As the landscape of representation in Hollywood continues to shift toward shining a light on people of color, the LGBTQIA+ community, women, the disabled community and other historically marginalized voices, a number of programs have emerged to help amplify inclusivity. With PGA Create, the Producers Guild of America gives these voices a platform—but with a unique twist.

While many existing programs cater toward new voices just entering Hollywood, PGA Create puts the focus

on mid-career producers and producing teams. They aren't new to the game, but they aren't necessarily getting projects greenlit as veteran producers with decades of experience might. Instead, they are in that phase where they have tools, talent and experience, but need someone to give them a megaphone so they can be heard.

PGA Create, sponsored by Google, was held October 25–28 and showcased creative producers and producing teams who are actively developing, financing and packaging both scripted features and scripted series. The program gave

participants opportunities to hone their project pitches as well as attend master classes with experienced producers and build their network.

For its inaugural program, PGA Create selected 10 producers/producing teams (six features and four series). *Produced By* had the opportunity to speak with some of the participating producers and producing teams, including Marissa Diaz, creator of series *The Real and Magical Diaries of Luna Icaza*; Sav Rodgers and Alex Schmider with the coming-of-age comedy *I Love*





You, Margot Robbie; and Nasir Kenneth Ferebee and Quan Lateef-Hill with the feature *Give the Drummer Some*.

MARISSA DIAZ

"My experience with both PGA Create and PGA membership has been beyond my wildest expectations," says Diaz. "The programming was phenomenal, from learning about guild initiatives to master classes to creative workshops with working producers.

"There was a fun, full-circle moment

in the lab with Peter Saraf in A Master Class on Producing Television. I had the opportunity to share with Peter and my cohort that a few years ago, after a PGA West/East meeting, a mentor of mine, Lianne Halfon (PGA West) connected me to Peter Saraf (PGA East), which led to me landing my first industry job on *Girls*. In a lot of ways, I have the PGA, its members, and now PGA Create to thank for my entire career."

A cross between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *True Blood*, Diaz's *The Real and Magical Diaries of Luna Icaza* was able

to further develop during the program. The series follows Luna, a piñata-making Tejana who inherits her grandmother's magic on the night of her quinceañera. She uses her new power to tame the ancient Mexican mythological creatures that come to destroy her hometown.

SAV RODGERS AND ALEX SCHMIDER

For Rodgers and Schmider, they had the opportunity to see their teen rom-com, *I Love You, Margot Robbie*, come to



10 SELECTED TEAMS & PROJECTS

Features

1. **Ashley Flores**, Writer/Producer and **Sabrina Ehlert**, Producer, *Madrigal 10*
2. **Beverley Gordon**, Producer, *Experience*
3. **Nasir Kenneth Ferebee** and **Quan Lateef-Hill**, Producers, *Give The Drummer Some*
4. **Gia Rigoli**, Producer, *The Weight Of Land*
5. **Sav Rodgers**, Writer/Producer and **Alex Schmider**, Producer, *I Love You, Margot Robbie*
6. **Rabia Sultana**, Producer, *Mala Sangre*

Series

1. **Ken Arquelio** and **Juan Pablo Arias Muñoz**, Writer/Creators/EP, *Desert Rats*
2. **Rashad Chambers**, Writer/Creator/EP, *Outliers*
3. **Marissa Diaz**, EP/Creator, *The Real And Magical Diaries Of Luna Icaza*
4. **Elisha Miranda**, Writer/Producer and **Audrey Seda**, Producer, *The Chronicles Of Eva*

fruition. The feature follows teenage transgender boy Felix McNeil's high school experience. His ordinary life turns extraordinary when a larger-than-life, supportive imaginary friend in the

form of Margot Robbie falls into his world from a billboard.

"Our time in the program is just beginning, and it has already opened so many doors for us," says Rodgers, who wrote the feature. "They have already given us a new community, new mentorship, and new opportunities. It's not every day you get to work on your dream movie, let alone with the full support of an institution like the PGA."

Schmider, who is the *rom* to Rodgers' *com* in the story, points out that producers from underrepresented communities are often overlooked in talent pipeline programs and the industry at large because producing can be such an elusive, though foundational, part of the storytelling process.

"What has become increasingly evident is that Hollywood's evolution toward authenticity will require not only representation in writers rooms, edit bays, and on screens, but overseeing stories and sets during the full lifespan of a project," says Schmider. "What sets PGA Create apart from other initiatives in the industry is that it squarely focuses on developing producers, filling a high-demand need and eagerly sought opportunity for those from underrepresented communities to successfully pursue a producer's path."

Schmider's sentiment aligns with PGA Create's premise: supporting newer generations, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds as multi-hyphenates. They are as fluent in code switching as they are in creative expression across various mediums.

NASIR KENNETH FEREBEE AND QUAN LATEEF-HILL

Ferebee and Lateef-Hill came to the program with their feature *Give the Drummer Some*, a coming-of-age story that follows Jasmine "Jazz" Sample, an aspiring drummer at Duke Ellington School of the



Stephanie Allain (Homegrown Pictures); **Corrine Aquino** (Artists First); **Anne Carey** (Archer Gray); **Elsie Choi** (Rideback); **DMA** (Planet DMA); **Mike Farah** (Funny or Die); **Lizzie Friedman** (Priority Pictures); **Donna Gigliotti** (*Hidden Figures*); **Sarah Green** (Brace Cove Productions); **David Hinojosa** (2AM); **Mel Jones** (*Really Love*); **Courtney A. Kemp** (End of Episode); **Alyssa Lanz** (UTA); **Tonya Lewis Lee** (*She's Gotta Have It*); **Dan Lin** (Rideback); **Melvin Mar** (*The Detective Agency*); **Lori McCreary** (*Madam Secretary*); **Maurício Mota** (Wise Entertainment); **Ravi Nandan** (A24); **Benjamin Odell** (3Pas); **Tommy Oliver** (Confluent Films); **Theresa Page** (Ley Line Entertainment); **Tara Roy** (STARZ); **Robert Salerno** (Artina Films); **Peter Saraf** (*Nuclear Family*); **Shrihari Sathe** (DIALECTIC); **Gene Stein** (*Narcos*); **Mary Jane Skalski** (*American Animals*); **Shelby Stone** (ID8 Multimedia); **Gregory Trattner** (Film Finances); **Pam Veasey** (*Long Slow Exhale*); **Shana Waterman** (One Race TV); and **Philipp Wolf** (DNEG).

Arts in Washington, D.C. Set in the crack epidemic era '80s, the film depicts Jazz navigating the city at a time when D.C. was both the murder capital of America, but also a city exploding with culture.

All the while, she tries to overcome the misogyny within the city's go-go community that conflicts with her dreams.

Ferebee and Lateef-Hill were able to develop and flesh out their project under the guise of the program, which allowed exclusive access to veteran producers.

"These producers vet you and your work, highlight your strengths, and help to improve upon your weaknesses. In addition to that, we are paired with established producers for an ongoing mentorship. We've already spoken extensively with our mentor, and it's been enlightening to discover what it takes to get to the next level of our careers," they said in a joint statement.

Notable advisors, mentors and speakers from the industry that participated in the inaugural PGA Create included an impressive roster of names in the industry.

"We've definitely learned that becoming a prominent producer requires a level of tenacity, discipline and persistence that goes above and beyond the call of duty," added Ferebee and Lateef-Hill. "In speaking with the established producers, we learned that the key to building a career of longevity is to be consistently finding, creating and producing quality material, and to also have a clear vision. This business is a test of endurance, and we've learned that from the knowledge imparted upon us during this program from the speakers, mentors and our peers."

PGA Create is designed to be a touchstone over the span of one year, including an invitation for participants to reconvene during the PGA Create Forum, a new event to be held during the Guild's signature Produced By Conference in June 2022. In addition, the PGA partnered with Google for an adjacent Short Film Project, providing \$50,000 grants to two producers or producing teams. The opportunity is being offered exclusively to recent participants in PGA Create.

"What is most special about PGA Create is its earnest belief in their fellows and inherent 'can-do' producerial spirit," says Diaz. "I said I wanted to make a campy, magical realist Latine teen

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procedural set in South Texas, and instead of rolling their eyes, PGA Create said, 'Great. Here's how you do it.'

"PGA Create isn't about convincing its fellows that their ideas are too small, or too big, or not 'four quadrant' enough," Diaz continues. "It is about taking our stories and making them come to life. Instead of using the lab as an educational exercise, PGA Create's focus is to use their access and resources, not only to execute a well-rounded week of programming, but, more importantly, to produce the most successful creative producers and their

respective projects. The commitment to building the program so that its fellows can successfully transition into roles as working producers closes the gap for many underrepresented voices in Hollywood." ■

PGA Create was developed through the PGA One Guild initiative, which supports inclusive membership, employment, content, and authentic depictions. The PGA Create program is a reimagining of the long-standing Power of Diversity Master Workshop, which concluded its 18th edition in 2020.