

Savannah Maive Edwards
20 March 2020
Arts Scholar Fourth-Year Award Outcome Statement

Dramaturgy and Community Engagement at a Professional Theatre

Last summer, I was hired by La Jolla Playhouse to work as an Education and Outreach Administration Intern. I absolutely loved working at La Jolla Playhouse, and now know what kind of work environment I can thrive in. I learned way more than I ever thought I could in an unpaid internship, and my experience restored my faith in "progressive" theatre companies and contemporary artistic work in general.



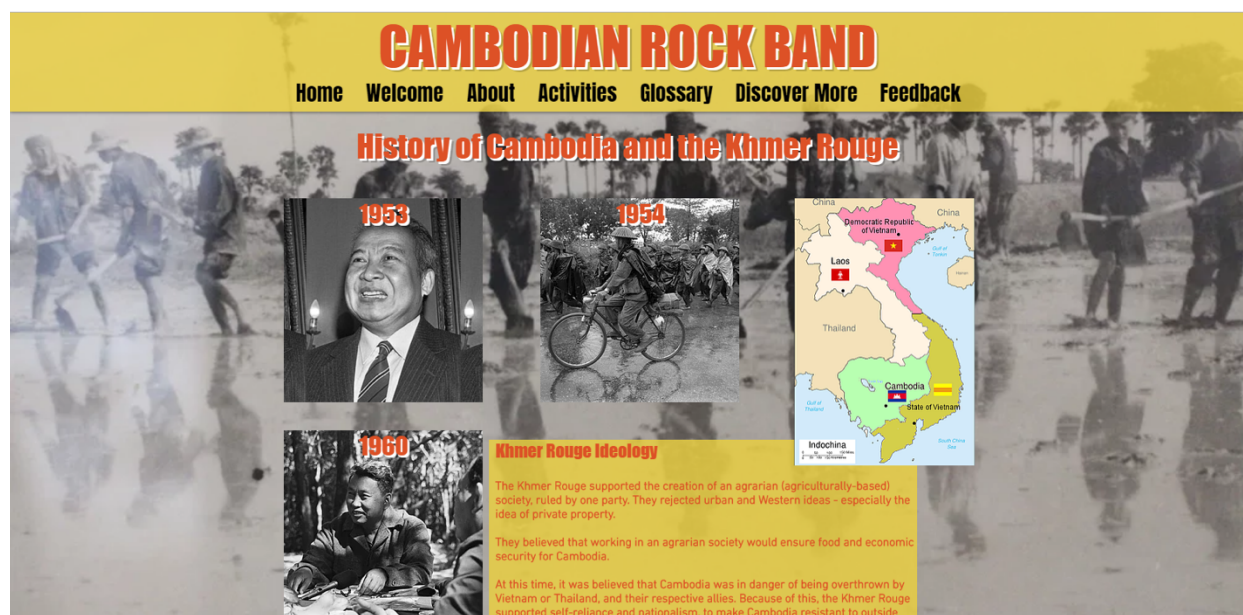
Me, at La Jolla Playhouse.

I was lucky enough to get a lot of complimentary tickets to see theatre around San Diego - nearly all of which have been new works. In total, I got to see four professional shows and a staged reading for free, and I also attended the San Diego Fringe Festival and paid too see one other play. All of these performances (except for one Shakespeare play) were completely new, and made me very curious about opportunities in new play development and dramaturgy. The shows I saw were: *Put Your House in Order* (La Jolla Playhouse), *The Luckiest* (LJP), *Radioman* (staged reading, LJP), *Space Force* (SD Fringe Festival), *things that go bump in the night* (SD Fringe Festival), *As You Like It* (The Old Globe), *The Tale of Despereaux* (The Old Globe), and *The Old Man and the Old Moon* (Coronado Playhouse).



Me and some other LJP interns before we watched The Tale of Despereaux at The Old Globe.

I got some dramaturgical experience through my internship as well. One week, a group of interns (including myself) decided that we wanted some homework to do, so we arranged a script evaluation workshop under the guidance of the Playhouse's Director of Artistic Development. Additionally, as a part of my internship I made a digital education guide for students who attended the Playhouse's production of *Cambodian Rock Band* by Lauren Yee. This was used by over 360 San Diego High School students to accompany and deepen their experience with the play and its historical context.



Here is a screenshot of the education guide that I made. The website itself is no longer accessible because the production is no longer running at LJP.

During my internship, I also got to meet with a professional dramaturg, Shirley Fishman. Shirley has been a dramaturg for several decades, working on world premiere productions such as *Come From Away* and *Indecent* (by Paula Vogel, my favorite playwright). She graciously spoke with me and another intern for three hours – I got a lot of insight on what it's like to work professionally as a dramaturg in new play development. I am currently using this experience as I provide feedback in my Advanced Playwriting class and as I give feedback to an alumni playwright who Doug Grissom has connected me with.

One of my favorite experiences in my time in San Diego was attending the staged reading, *Radioman*. LJP has multiple community and outreach programs for active military and veterans in San Diego, including a playwriting workshop program that enables vets to find a voice in theatrical storytelling. The staged reading I saw was a part of this program, and I got to sit in a theatre full of people who I mostly wouldn't expect to see in a theatre otherwise, and hear a story that addressed the reality of life post-service for a multigenerational, and multiracial/multicultural group of vets. I struck a conversation with the person sitting next to me – he was from South Carolina and was a member of our military before being discharged because of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. He expressed interest in participating in the program, and it made me wonder how programs like this could benefit vets across the country, as well as what possibilities there are for similar programs crafted for different communities in our society.

After coming back to UVA, I have been able to learn more about performance theory, theatre as social engagement, and how I function as a human being and artist in this world. I took a class called *Global Dramaturgies* in the English Department with Kelli Shermeyer, where I learned how to approach dramaturgy across genre and nation. In this class I was able to write, dramaturg, and workshop my own short one-woman show that examines sexual assault on campus. I also got more artistic experience from assistant directing *Lungs*, stage designing for Shakespeare on the Lawn's production of *As You Like It*, and producing and directing a Virginia Players Lab Series performance called *globalwarming.ppt*. This production was a part of Climate

Change Theatre Action 2019 – a worldwide series of readings and performances by selected environmentalist playwrights which coincides with the United Nations COP meetings. *Globalwarming.ppt* consisted of 13 short performances, with four plays written by UVA students, two devised pieces by UVA students, and 7 pieces written by CCTA playwrights and directed by UVA students. In total, there were 7 UVA student directors and 43 total performers (mostly consisting of UVA students). This, and the two projects mentioned before were it all centered around environmentalism in some way, and working on them definitely worked my dramaturgical gears as I connected script to history to theory, and translated it for the audiences to find the connections as well. Finally, I got to work as Production Stage Manager for Priyanka Shetty's *The Elephant in the Room* at the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage. While I am not pursuing work as PSM, this experience has helped me understand how to work professionally with a new play as I observed the director and playwright in their processes, and it was a great honor for me to work in the Kennedy Center for one day and meet with other theatre professionals. I mention these experiences because they have not only furthered my learning post-internship, but I believe that my internship at LJP was a part of a chain of events that led to each of these experiences. My time at LJP gave me the confidence and expertise to be able to tackle more than four different projects in one semester. I have also been able to use my dramaturgy experience in my own writing during Playwriting I, which I took in the Fall of 2019, and Advanced Playwriting, which I am currently taking.



Production photo from globalwarming.ppt of a play that I directed.

My role at La Jolla Playhouse was unpaid, so the funding from my Miller Arts Scholars Fourth-Year Arts Award was imperative in enabling me to have this transformative experience. I would like to thank the J. Sanford Miller Family for their support in helping me learn so much and be able to follow my dream without financial burden.

Timeline

June – July

- Interned at La Jolla Playhouse

September

- Assistant Directed UVA Drama's production of *Lungs*

October

- Virginia Playwrights produced a night of stage readings which included my play, *iSexy*

November

- Was the scenic designer for Shakespeare on the Lawn's production of *As You Like It*
- Stage Managed Priyanka Shetty's *The Elephant in the Room* at the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage

December

- Produced and directed Virginia Players' Lab Series

January

- Was dramaturg for Shakespeare on the Lawn's production of *Twelfth Night*

March

- Began working with Doug Grissom to get more dramaturgy experience by collaborating with alumni who are playwrights

Budget

Expenses	Details	Amount Spent
Housing	Two month's rent and utilities in La Jolla	\$1,080
Travel	Plane tickets from Charlottesville to California and back	\$479
Local Transportation	Occasional Ubers/Lyfts around San Diego and to/from the airport	\$325
Meals	Weekly groceries and meals with coworkers	\$900
Tickets	One ticket to a play	\$32
Other	Co-pay for a doctor's appointment	\$30
Total		\$2,846