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Ford's Theatre Presents  
*The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions: A First Look*



Readings on January 10-11, 2025:

*Elysian Fields*

Book and Lyrics by David Emerson Toney; Music and Lyrics by Christopher Youstra;  
Directed by Craig Wallace

*The Soldier From the Antilles*

by Nilo Cruz; Directed by José Carrasquillo

*Elizabeth Keckly & Mary Lincoln: The Last Morning*

by Gloria Reuben; Directed by Sheldon Epps

[RSVP to Attend Readings](#); Tickets are Free and Open to the Public

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Ford's Theatre presents *The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions: A First Look* on **January 10-11, 2025**. The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions is designed to serve as an artistic incubator for stories about unsung heroes responsible for changing the course of civil rights and equality in American life. In its third year, this festival will include the following readings: *Elysian Fields*, book and lyrics by **David Emerson Toney**, music and lyrics by **Christopher Youstra** and directed by **Craig Wallace** (*Fences*, *Necessary Sacrifices*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Guard*, *Driving Miss Daisy*), a Ford's Theatre Associate Artist; *The Soldier From the Antilles* by **Nilo Cruz** and directed by **José Carrasquillo**, **director of artistic programming at Ford's Theatre**; and *Elizabeth Keckly & Mary Lincoln: The Last Morning* by **Gloria Reuben** and directed by **Sheldon Epps** (*SHOUT SISTER SHOUT*; *My Lord, What a Night*; *Twelve Angry Men*).

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“The Ford’s Theatre Legacy Commissions aims to create space for new perspectives that challenge, inspire and deepen our understanding of the human experience,” said Ford’s Theatre Director **Paul R. Tetreault**. “The writers of the works presented in A First Look bring us stories of survival and perseverance in the face of extraordinary circumstances, the complexity of familial bonds and the hope found in friendship after profound loss. These stories are vital to shaping the future of our cultural narrative and we are proud to share these works for the first time with the public on our historic stage.”

*The Ford’s Theatre Legacy Commissions: A First Look* is a free, two-day festival, providing a preview of new plays in development, with opportunities for expanded conversations around the work. *A First Look* provides unique access to works in their early stages—seeing the process and hearing the voices that created and shape these stories.

**Tickets for the readings are free and available to reserve now.** Each reading will include a post-show dialogue with the creative team. More information is available at [www.fords.org/performance/the-fords-theatre-legacy-commissions-a-first-look-2025](http://www.fords.org/performance/the-fords-theatre-legacy-commissions-a-first-look-2025).

Senior Artistic Advisor **Sheldon Epps**, Director of Artistic Programming **José Carrasquillo** and The Ford’s Theatre Legacy Commissions Advisor **Sydné Mahone** lead the initiative. Epps has shared his fascination with what he calls unsung heroes: “Those men and women who are not well-known, but who should be celebrated and placed in the spotlight for their contributions to the growth and evolution of our country, either in big ways or small.”

The Ford’s Theatre 2024-2025 season is sponsored by **Chevron** and **Lockheed Martin Corporation**. The Ford’s Theatre Legacy Commissions are made possible by Lead Sponsor: **Boeing**.

“Boeing applauds Ford’s Theatre Legacy Commissions work to elevate diverse voices, ultimately enriching and strengthening our culture,” said **Ziad Ojakli**, executive vice president of government operations at **Boeing**. “We’re excited for our D.C. community to experience these talented artists’ work and spark conversation about such extraordinary people and the events they shaped.”

**The line-up for the 2025 festival includes the following:**

## ***Elysian Fields***

Book and Lyrics by **David Emerson Toney**

Music and Lyrics by **Christopher Youstra**

Directed by **Craig Wallace**

**Public Reading:** Friday, January 10, 2025 at 7:30 p.m.

A dialogue with the audience will take place after the reading

Inspired by Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, *Elysian Fields* takes place in Reconstruction-era Alabama where Bishop, a former slave is intent on dividing a mysteriously acquired plantation among his three daughters. This new musical tells the story of Bishop and his daughters as they navigate away from a painful secret and how that secret propels the family through loss, faith, forgiveness and redemption in this epic parable about the strength of ancestral love.

### **About the Playwrights**

**David Emerson Toney’s** (Book and Lyrics) playwriting credits include *Frankenstein: Dawn of a Monster*, *Kingdom*, *The Soul Collector*, *The Snowy Day*, *Coming Home* and *The Last of Midnight*. His play *Kingdom* was a finalist for the 2004 Theodore Ward Prize, was part of the 2005-2006 season at the ETA Creative Foundation Theatre in Chicago and was nominated for the Helen Hayes/Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play or Musical. Toney was the August Wilson Playwright in Residence at the African Continuum Theatre in 2006. A member of the WGA for twenty years, his film and television writing credits include staff writer for Fox’s *In Living Color*, screenwriter for New Line Cinema’s *House Party III*, head writer and story editor for ESPN, Sony Wonder and Jumbo Pictures. His animation development and writing credits include head writer and story editor for Hoyt and Andy’s *Sportsbender*, *Dragon Flyz*, *VanPires*, *The Resonator* for Abrams Gentile Entertainment, and the French company

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Gaumont Entertainment. In 1995, David was the co-winner of the “Script to Screen” screenplay competition, sponsored by the Independent Feature Project and Writers Guild of America for the screenplay *Sticks and Stones*. Currently, he is an associate professor of performance and playwriting at VCUarts in the Department of Theatre at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA.

**Christopher Youstra** (Music and Lyrics) is the associate artistic director, musical theater at Olney Theatre Center. Youstra has music-directed and conducted over 50 musicals at the Olney Theatre, including *Beautiful, Frozen, Cabaret, AD16, Once, In the Heights, Carmen: An Afro-Cuban Musical, Evita, Sweeney Todd, Carousel, Spring Awakening, Avenue Q* and *How to Succeed*. He has also music-directed/performed over 200 shows in most performing arts venues in the region including Ford's Theatre *Ragtime, Little Shop of Horrors* and *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*; Studio Theatre's 2nd Stage: *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson, Jerry Springer: The Opera, Pop!, Passing Strange*; Studio Theatre: *Adding Machine*; Round House Theater: *Once on this Island, A Murder A Mystery A Marriage, The Summer of '42, Next to Normal*; Kennedy Center Broadway Series: *Guys and Dolls*. Other theaters include: Toby's Dinner Theater, Imagination Stage, Kennedy Center Theatre for Young Audiences, Arena Stage, Burn Brae Dinner Theatre, Montgomery College, American University, Musical Theatre Center, Signature Theatre, and Columbia Center for the Theatrical Arts. Youstra has been nominated for 13 Helen Hayes Awards for Outstanding Music Direction and received the award for *Titanic*.

## ***The Soldier From the Antilles***

By **Nilo Cruz**

Directed by **José Carrasquillo**

**Public Reading:** Saturday, January 11, 2025 at 2 p.m.

A dialogue with the audience will take place after the reading

The play is set in a hospital in Alexandria, Virginia during the American Civil War, 1864. A nurse who has lost her husband in the war becomes a caretaker to the wounded. She tends to the patients, writes letters for them and reads to them from the classics. While reading *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley to a Union soldier afflicted by amnesia, Lottie seizes the circumstances to make a new man—a being that can survive in an America who sees monsters in strangers and foreigners. Raising questions about love, guilt and forgiveness, *The Soldier From the Antilles* is a stark reminder that there can be no reconciliation without a true and honest reckoning of the past.

### **About the Playwright**

**Nilo Cruz** is a visionary playwright celebrated for his evocative storytelling and exploration of cultural themes. In 2003, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his masterpiece *Anna in the Tropics*, for which he also received a Steinberg Award and Tony Award nomination. Cruz's work marked a pivotal moment in American theater, showcasing the richness and depth of Latino voices and narratives. His plays include *A Park in Our House; Two Sisters and a Piano; A Bicycle Country; Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams; Lorca in a Green Dress; Hurricane; Sotto Voce; Bathing in Moonlight; Hotel Desiderium; Kisses through the Glass; and Thirst on Water Street*. His work has been seen at numerous theaters around the country and around the world. As a lyricist, he has written the libretti for *The Conquest* requiem and *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*. Cruz also adapted Ann Patchett's 2001 novel *Bel Canto*, and he penned the oratorio *Dreamers*. In the DC area, his work has been produced by The Studio Theatre, Arena Stage and Gala Theatre.

## ***Elizabeth Keckly & Mary Lincoln: The Last Morning***

By **Gloria Reuben**

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Directed by **Sheldon Epps**

**Public Reading:** Saturday, January 11, 2025 at 7:30 p.m.

A dialogue with the audience will take place after the reading

Six weeks after President Lincoln is assassinated, Mary Lincoln, suffering from a crippling grief has ensconced herself in the Executive Residence. Elizabeth Keckly, a former slave who bought her own freedom and became a highly regarded modiste and dressmaker to Mary Lincoln during her years in the White House, temporarily closes her shop to spend as much time with Mary as possible. Elizabeth agrees to escort Mary back to Illinois when Mary vacates the White House. *Elizabeth Keckly & Mary Lincoln: The Last Morning* intimately explores how these two strong women reconciled loss and tragedy while finding solace in what became a constant in their lives: their friendship.

### **About the Playwright**

**Gloria Reuben** is an award-winning actress, singer and author whose credits span film, television, theater and music. Reuben's film credits include portraying Elizabeth Keckley in Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* (with Daniel Day-Lewis), *Admission* (with Tina Fey), *Reasonable Doubt* (with Samuel L. Jackson), and the remake of Stephen King's *Firestarter*. Gloria will be seen opposite Ed Harris in the upcoming film *My Dead Friend Zoe*. Television credits include Jeanie Boulet on the hit television series *ER* (two Emmy nominations and a Golden Globe nomination), *Falling Skies*, *Mr. Robot*, *The First Lady*, *Elsbeth* and many others. Reuben just completed filming the upcoming Amazon Prime series *The Better Sister*. Stage credits include her portrayal of Condoleezza Rice in David Hare's play *Stuff Happens*, for which she won a Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Play. Reuben was a backup singer for Tina Turner in Turner's "24/7" tour and has recorded three albums: *Just For You*, *Perchance To Dream* and *For All We Know*. Reuben authored a non-fiction book: *My Brothers' Keeper: Two Brothers. Loved. And Lost.* (an intimate tribute to her two brothers who passed away).

## **Festival Events**

### ***From Quill to Curtain: Crafting Plays Inspired by History* *Three-Part Workshop Series***

**January 11, January 18 and February 1, 2025 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.**

As a part of our *A First Look* programming, we invite you to join us for a three-part community playwriting workshop series where writers of all levels are invited to explore the art of building a narrative centered on a historical figure or event. Topics will include conducting historical research and using primary sources, balancing creative license with historical accuracy, developing storylines and characters and connecting the past with the present.

Each three-hour session will build on the last and culminate in an in-class sharing of an excerpt from each participant's work. **A commitment to all three sessions is strongly encouraged.** [Register here.](#)

## About The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions

Ford's Theatre presents a new artistic initiative for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) playwrights that will broaden the American theatre canon. Established in 2021, with first workshops in 2023, the Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions serves as an artistic incubator for stories about unsung heroes responsible for changing the course of civil rights and equality in American life. The Commissions process provides extensive development for artists, including first readings, developmental workshops and world premiere productions in the next decade. These commissions seek to broaden the American theatre canon by fostering and developing playwrights, incubating stories about social justice and racial history, and exploring the varied experiences of underrepresented characters and lesser-known historical figures and their contributions to American life.

## Ford's Theatre Society

One of the most visited sites in the nation's capital, Ford's Theatre reopened its doors in 1968, more than a hundred years after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Operated through a partnership between Ford's Theatre Society and the National Park Service, Ford's Theatre is the premier destination in the nation's capital to explore and celebrate Abraham Lincoln's life and legacy.

Ford's Theatre Society was founded under the guidance of executive producer **Frankie Hewitt**, who during her 35-year tenure, established Ford's as a living, working theatre producing performances that highlighted the diversity of the American experience. Since the arrival of **Paul R. Tetreault** as Director, critics and the theatre going public have recognized Ford's for the superior quality of its artistic programming. With works from the Tony-nominated *Come From Away* and the nationally acclaimed *Big River*, to the world premieres of *Meet John Doe*, *The Heavens Are Hung in Black*, *Liberty Smith*, *Necessary Sacrifices*, *The Widow Lincoln* and *The Guard*, Ford's Theatre is making its mark on the American theatre landscape. In the past decade, the mission of Ford's Theatre Society expanded to include education as a central pillar. This expansion led to the creation and construction of the Center for Education and Leadership, which opened in February 2012. Under the current leadership of Board of Trustees Chairman **Phebe N. Novakovic** and through the lens of Lincoln's leadership and legacy, Ford's today endeavors to advance Lincoln's "unfinished work" with programs and performances that cultivate empathy, encourage dialogue and bridge divides in American life.

For more information on Ford's Theatre and the Ford's Theatre Society, please visit [www.fords.org](http://www.fords.org).

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### #FordsLegacyCommissions

Ford's Theatre on Instagram: [@fordstheatre](https://www.instagram.com/fordstheatre)

Ford's Theatre on Facebook: [@fordstheatre](https://www.facebook.com/fordstheatre)

Ford's Theatre on TikTok: [@fordstheatredc](https://www.tiktok.com/@fordstheatredc)

Ford's Education on X: [@fordsedu](https://twitter.com/fordsedu)

Website: [www.fords.org](http://www.fords.org)

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**FACT SHEET: *The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions: A First Look***

**New Works by Gloria Reuben, David Emerson Toney, Christopher Youstra and Nilo Cruz**

Experience the power of The Ford's Theatre Legacy Commissions with a first look at readings of *Elysian Fields* by **David Emerson Toney** and **Christopher Youstra**, *The Soldier From the Antilles* by **Nilo Cruz** and *Elizabeth Keckly & Mary Lincoln: The Last Morning* by **Gloria Reuben**.

**DATES:** January 10-11, 2025

**LOCATION:** Ford's Theatre is located at 511 10th Street NW, between E and F Streets NW.

**PUBLIC READINGS:**

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By **Nilo Cruz**

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**Public Reading:** Saturday, January 11, 2025 at 2 p.m.

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***Elizabeth Keckly & Mary Lincoln: The Last Morning***

By **Gloria Reuben**

Directed by **Sheldon Epps**

**Public Reading:** Saturday, January 11, 2025 at 7:30 p.m.

A dialogue with the audience will take place after the reading

**ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMING:** *From Quill to Curtain: Crafting Plays Inspired by History*, a three-part playwriting workshop on January 11, January 18 and February 1 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. [Register here.](#)

**TICKETS:** Free and available to the public now. [Reserve tickets here.](#)

**PARKING:** Paid parking is available at several independent neighborhood garages: the 24-hour Quick-Park at the Grand Hyatt (entrance on 10th Street between G and H Streets NW), the Central Parking Garage (entrance on 11th Street between E and F Streets NW), and the One Parking garage below Ford's Theatre (at 511 10th Street, NW).

**METRO:** The Metro Center station (Red, Blue, Orange and Silver Lines) is two- and one-half blocks north of the theatre from the Eleventh Street exit. The Gallery Place-Chinatown station (Red, Yellow and Green Lines) is two- and one-half blocks north of the theatre from the G Street exit. For further information, call Metro at (202) 637-7000.

**Get Free Tickets at [www.fords.org](http://www.fords.org) – #FordsLegacyCommissions**  
**Information: (202) 347-4833 – Toll Free: (888) 616-0270 – Groups: (202) 638-2367**  
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