inside:

Our Playwrights in the Spotlight
Tony nods, rave reviews, and the premieres we’re looking forward to this fall

James Baldwin is Having a Moment
Thirty years after his death, the radical prophet of a generation is the hottest writer in America

The Yaddo Summer Reading List
With a bumper crop of new releases, our authors have you covered for beach season
It has been a banner year thus far for Yaddo dramatists both on and off Broadway. Leading the pack is J.T. Rogers, whose magnificent Oslo opened at Lincoln Center’s Vivian Beaumont Theater in April to rave reviews and went on to win the 2017 Tony for Best Play. Directed by Bartlett Scher and starring Broadway vets Jennifer Ehle and Jefferson Mays, Rogers’s “colossus” of a play (so labeled by New York Times theater critic Ben Brantley) depicts the behind-the-scenes intrigue of the secret peace talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization that led to the 1993 Oslo Accords. Another late-season standout was War Paint, a triumphant collaboration between three Yaddo alums — Doug Wright (book), Scott Frankel (music) and Michael Korie (lyrics) — that garnered nominations for best leading actress in a musical (double honor to Tony-Award grand dames Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole, playing cosmetic industry rivals Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden), best costume design, and best scenic design. American theater legend Paula Vogel’s elegiac Indecent (first staged at the Yale Repertory Theater in 2015) picked up a Best Play Tony nomination as well as awards for Best Direction and Best Lighting. (Sad-But-True corner: Despite Vogel’s decades of contributions to American theater and Pulitzer Prize for Drama, Indecent marked her Broadway debut.) Vogel was also honored this spring with a Special Citation as a playwright and mentor from the New York Drama Critics Circle and Lifetime Achievement Award from the Obie Awards. Rounding out Yaddo alum Tony triumphs, writer Danny Rubin celebrated his first Tony nomination, for Best Book of a Musical, for Groundhog Day, his adaptation of the screenplay he co-wrote with Harold Ramis for the 1993 movie. Other notable #Yaddoartist openings this spring/summer included Amélie, starring Phillipa Soo, a musical version of the

Above: J.T. Rogers and the cast of his Tony-award winning Oslo

Above: Ayad Aktar, whose financial thriller Junk comes to Lincoln Center this fall. Right: War Paint’s Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole.
2001 film, with book by Craig Lucas; Can You Forgive Her, Gina Gionfriddo’s Off-Broadway comedy of manners (of sorts) at the Vineyard Theater (originally produced by the Huntington Theater Company); the one-woman performance piece/historical detective story Say Something Bunny, that Alison S.M. Kobayashi developed while at Yaddo (gushed Vogue: “The best new theater experience in town is nowhere close to Broadway”).

Looking ahead to fall and the 2017-2018 season, anticipation is high for Ayad Akhtar’s financial thriller Junk, a high-octane drama set in the hotbed of the ’80s junk bond era. Previously produced at the La Jolla Playhouse (and deemed “thrilling” by the Los Angeles Times), the play opens at Lincoln Center’s Vivian Beaumont Theater on November 2nd, starring Broadway and TV veteran Steven Pasquale. And Young Jean-Lee’s Straight White Men makes its much-anticipated move to Broadway as part of Second Stage’s inaugural season at the Helen Hayes Theater, after previous incarnations at Chicago’s Steppenwolf and The Public Theater. It’s a historic run: This makes Lee the first Asian-American female playwright to be produced on Broadway. “I’m so excited that this is happening, but it’s a little bit of a double-edged sword,” Lee said in an interview, of her belated barrier-breaking. “On the one hand, that’s great but it’s also like, ‘Oh, why hasn’t there been another Asian-American female on Broadway?” (We couldn’t agree more.)

Say Something Bunny is a multimedia performance based on an amateur audio recording unearthed at an estate sale: a reconstructed portrait of a New York family from the 1950s that was the surprise Off-Off-Broadway hit of the summer (October dates just added due to popular demand). Creator Alison S.M. Kobayashi talks about Yaddo’s outsize impact on her work.

What inspired Say Something Bunny? 
I’ve been producing work using found objects for the past decade, exploring material that has a mix of humor and heartbreak while at the same time being somewhat mundane and everyday. These 1950s audio recordings had all these elements, plus the simple act of listening to them brought me great pleasure. I immediately fell in love with the family.

What do you hope your audiences take away? 
By spending the last 6 years exploring the recordings of this one family so deeply, I feel irrevocably bound to complete strangers. I hope that in some small way the audience can feel that connectedness, too. It also comes back to the impulse to record and document oneself and the way we construct our own legacies.

Can you describe the process of turning this 70-year-old recording into an immersive performance piece? 
The longest process was creating the transcription. After deciphering characters, I started to visit archives to try to uncover their identities. My time at Yaddo was the month before the show’s first performance in Toronto: Yaddo was the place where all of the elements of Say Something Bunny! came together.

Tell us more about the impact of your time at Yaddo. 
Though the project was in the works for years, it really found its shape at Yaddo — those familiar with the living quarters and grounds might recognize them in some of the footage. I was also so fortunate to be in residence with some truly remarkable storytellers and artists; I feel forever grateful to Yaddo for curating this unforgettable and inspiring company.
We’re delighted by the success of our two biggest fundraisers this year, the annual Summer Benefit and Yaddo Variations, which together raised more than $400,000 for the artist residency program. Variations 2017, a series of private dinners and performances celebrating Yaddo’s unique contribution to the arts, unfolded in four cities across the country over several evenings in May. In New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and San Francisco, guests were treated to evenings with some of Yaddo’s most celebrated writers and artists – that demonstrated the astonishing range and depth of Yaddo’s impact on American cultural life. With the support of several hundred guests and our generous corporate sponsors, Variations produced the highest net profit in five years for what was previously known as the New York City Benefit. Special thanks to our magnanimous hosts and all our artist guests of honor.

At the sold-out Summer Benefit in Saratoga on June 22nd, over 300 people celebrated “under the pines” in a site on the grounds rarely glimpsed by the public. Guest of honor, best-selling Yaddo author Terry McMillan, entertained the crowd with tales of her residencies and a reading from her latest book, I Almost Forgot About You. We thank all our donors, the hard-working committees, and the local businesses who donated food, flowers and wine. Proceeds from these two events play a crucial role in ensuring that our residency program continues to flourish.

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Her most recent poetry collection, *The Moon Is Almost Full*, will be at Mills College and the director of its Creative Writing program. YeHUDA AmiCHAI, Chana was for many years a professor of English as her translations of the Israeli poets DahlIA RavIkoVitch and Pruizes, and an award from the Poetry Society of America) as well as KRONFELD], two prestigious Pushcart Poetry in Translation [with Chana (honors include the PEN Award for achievement in their artistic discipline who have reinforced the sense of community that is central to Yaddo’s residency program”) to the Pulitzer-Prize winning composer, frequent guest, and longtime board member David Del Tredici. Past medal recipients are Philip Roth, Laurie Anderson and Martin Puryear. We look forward to welcoming all former residents, family and friends to this celebration: Tickets are $30 (two for $50) and will be available at www.yaddo.org in September.

Yaddo’s planned giving program, the Trask Society, recognizes donors who have made provisions for Yaddo in their estate planning. Many former residents have helped secure Yaddo’s future in this fashion, including the poet Morris Golde, writers Curtis Hamack, Patricia Highsmith and Bernard Malamud, and visual artist Anne Truitt. Now they are joined by longtime members of the Yaddo community Daniel Brewbaker and Chana Bloch.

**DANIEL BREWBAKER** — composer, pianist, and poet — died May 14, 2017 at age 66 after a two-year battle with brain cancer. A much beloved Yaddo guest artist, Daniel was in residency 19 times between 1993–2015, serving as Special Assistant to the President more than 15 times in that period. Daniel was the first American composer to receive a commission from Russia’s Kirov Orchestra and Chorus; *The Poet*, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the birth of Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, premiered in St. Petersburg under conductor Valery Gergiev in 1999. Not only will Daniel’s extraordinary talent be remembered but his spirit on the Yaddo grounds will live on. As Program Director Candace Wait said, “His amiable demeanor soothed the anxieties of dozens of artists arriving at Yaddo for the first time, graciously welcoming them into the community with open arms.”

Poet, translator and scholar **CHANA BLOCH**, a major figure in American letters, died May 19, 2017. Acclaimed for her five collections of poetry (honors include the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation [with Chana Kronfeld], two prestigious Pushcart Prizes, and an award from the Poetry Society of America) as well as her translations of the Israeli poets Dahlia Ravikovitch and Yehuda Amichai, Chana was for many years a professor of English at Mills College and the director of its Creative Writing program. Her most recent poetry collection, *The Moon Is Almost Full*, will be published in September by Autumn House Press. Chana returned several times to Yaddo after her first residency in 1988; she was a steadfast supporter with a giving history extending almost 30 years.

**Mark Your Calendar: Artist Reunion!**

**THE HISTORIC GATEHOUSE AT HARLEM STAGE** will host the Yaddo Artist Reunion on Thursday, November 2 from 6:30 — 9 PM. A centerpiece of the evening will be the presentation of the 2017 Yaddo Medal (introduced in 2014 to recognize “individuals of extraordinary achievement in their artistic discipline who have reinforced the sense

Longtime Yaddo friend and supporter **Helen Frankenthaler** is suddenly everywhere: This summer the Clark Museum in Williamstown features *As in Nature: Helen Frankenthaler Paintings* as well as *No Rules: Helen Frankenthaler Woodcuts*, (both through October 9) while Gagosian Paris has *Helen Frankenthaler: After Abstract Expressionism, 1959-1962*, including works not exhibited since the early 60s (through September 16). At the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth is *Fluid Expressions: The Prints of Helen Frankenthaler* (through September 10) which heads east to the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center in Poughkeepsie from October 6-December 10.

The Museum of Modern art unveils its major **Louise Bourgeois** exhibition *An Unfolding Portrait* (September 24-January 28, 2018) which showcases the sculptor’s little-known printed oeuvre, drawing on MoMA’s prized archive of her print and illustrated books as well as seldom-viewed pieces on loan.

**Coming Attractions:**

**Mark your calendars for these exhibits, premieres and openings featuring the work of Yaddo artists past and present**

Director Noah Baumbach’s latest, *The Meyerowitz Stories*, which received a 4-minute standing ovation at its world premiere in Cannes, will be featured at the New York Film Festival (September 28-October 15) before it opens in theaters nationwide. The all-star cast includes Adam Sandler, Ben Stiller, Emma Thompson, Dustin Hoffman.

The “Yaddo Presents” series continues this fall with an evening with *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner, who joins us in Saratoga on November 11th to discuss his first novel *Heather, The Totality* (Little, Brown) which he started at Yaddo. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for more info, news, and updates!

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Photo credits:

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Pulitzer-winning Elizabeth Strout revisits characters from *My Name is Lucy Barton* in the luminous new *Anything Is Possible* (Random House), a collection of linked stories exploring love, loss, and everyday life in small-town America.

Colm Tóibín mines ancient Greek myth to stunning effect with *House of Names* (Scribner), a powerful retelling of the tragedy of Clytemnestra, who ruled ancient Mycenae in her husband King Agamemnon’s absence and plotted to kill him when he returned from Troy.

With *Bright, Precious Days* (Penguin Random House), Jay McInerney completes the trilogy he began with *Brightness Falls* and *The Good Life*: a portrait of a marriage — and of his adopted city, New York — set against the backdrop of the dawn of the 21st century.

Andre Aciman’s *Enigma Variations* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) follows the protagonist, Paul, through the twists and turns of a lifetime of conflicted passions as he learns that “heartache, like love, like low-grade fevers, like the longing to reach out and touch a hand across the table, is easy enough to live down.”

Did you know Oscar winners more frequently thank Steven Spielberg than God in their acceptance speeches? Get a sense of the full range of the influential director’s work — and the many ways it reflects his life and times — in legendary film critic Molly Haskell’s incisive portrait, *Stephen Spielberg: A Life in Films* (Yale University Press).

Gish Jen’s provocative *The Girl at the Baggage Claim: Exploring the East-West Culture Gap* (Knopf) compares the individualistic West and the collectivist East’s notions of self-definition and community, and how this plays out in art, education, geopolitics and business.

Lynn Freed is having quite a season. Her latest, *The Last Laugh* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) is a rollicking look at what happens when three self-proclaimed “old bags” run off together to a Greek island to escape their children and grandchildren (with limited success). Then, coming in October, is *The Romance of Elsewhere* (Counterpoint), a collection of essays exploring the connections between travel, writing, and identity.

David Sedaris opens up his personal diaries for public view in *Theft by Finding: Diaries (1977-2002)* (Little, Brown and Company) — to hilarious effect. Overheard comments, salacious gossip, soap-opera plot twists, secrets confided by total strangers — everything is copy for one of our great modern observers. Best of all: There will be a Volume 2.

After the death of her best friend, the loss of her life savings, and the collapse of her marriage, 60-year old Meredith Maran leaves her San Francisco freelance writer’s life and moves to Los Angeles, determined to rebuild, a process she humorously and poignantly chronicles in *The New Old Me: My Late-Life Reinvention* (Blue Rider Press).

Coming in October, Jennifer Egan’s highly anticipated *Manhattan Beach* (Scribner) is a World War II story intertwining the narratives of Anna Kerrigan, the Brooklyn Navy Yard’s only female driver; her father Eddie Kerrigan, a union man with ties to the Mob; and Eddie’s boss, nightclub owner Deter Styles. This is Egan’s first book since her 2010 Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel, *A Visit From the Goon Squad*.

The haunting tale of a desolate cottage and the hair-thin junction between this life and the next, Gail Godwin’s *Grief Cottage* (Bloomsbury USA) is a new type of ghost story: a wistful reflection on loss, loneliness, coming of age, and how the living learn to lay their ghosts to rest.
EVERYONE KNOWS HIS NAME
James Baldwin is having a moment

The hottest writer in America today has been dead for 30 years. James Baldwin — who memorably spent time at Yaddo in 1955, overlapping with poet Jane Mayhall, writer Dawn Powell, painter Clifford Wright, and fellow African-American writer Alston Anderson, and inscribing a copy of Go Tell it On the Mountain to Elizabeth Ames as a parting gift — is having a triumphant posthumous revival. As the subject of Raoul Peck's Oscar-nominated documentary I Am Not Your Negro; as the inspiration for Ta-Nehisi Coates's National-Book-Award-winning Between the World and Me (based on The Fire Next Time), and — with his prescient insights into race relations in the United States — as one of the spiritual fathers of the Black Lives Matter movement, Baldwin has captured the public imagination on an even grander scale than he did in life. Books such as Fire, written to his nephew on the 100th anniversary of black emancipation, and Giovanni's Room — a once-overlooked novel about an American expatriate coming to terms with his homosexuality — now sit firmly at the center of the cultural conversation. As Henry Louis Gates has said, “Baldwin is back. Bigger and badder than ever.”


SINGER-SONGWRITER STEW (co-creator of the Tony-winning musical Passing Strange) and his band The Negro Problem bring his song cycle Notes of a Native Song to music festivals from Toronto’s Luminato to London’s Underbelly to New York’s Summerstage.

A SPATE OF BALDWIN BOOKS new and old, including this spring’s James Baldwin: The FBI File, edited and with an introduction by literary historian William J. Maxwell — which brought over 100 once-secret documents from Baldwin’s extraordinary 1,884-page FBI file to light — and the Library of America’s reissue of Baldwin’s complete works.

A NEW TASCHEN COLLECTOR’S EDITION of Fire pairing the seminal text with photographs by Steve Schapiro, who traveled the American South in 1963 with Baldwin on assignment for LIFE magazine — including previously unpublished images of Baldwin and civil rights giants like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks (John Lewis wrote the introduction).

THE SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE’s acquisition in April of Baldwin’s archive — some 70 boxes of manuscripts, drafts, and notes. Interest in the career-spanning material — particularly certain personal correspondence that will remain sealed for 20 more years — has been intense. “With the current resurgence of interest in Baldwin’s works and words … the timing couldn’t be better for Baldwin to join us at the Schomburg,” said Kevin Young, the Center’s Director.

EVEN THIS YEAR’S OSCAR-WINNING BEST PICTURE, writer/director Barry Jenkins’s Moonlight, owes a debt to Baldwin. “I describe Moonlight as the child of Giovanni’s Room and The Fire Next Time,” said Jenkins. “James Baldwin is a man of and ahead of his time; his interrogations of the American consciousness have remained relevant to this day.”

AS BALDWIN-MANIA SHOWS NO SIGNS OF ABATING (the @jamesbaldwin Facebook page has 262,000 followers), Jenkins recently announced his next film: an adaptation of Baldwin’s late novel If Beale Street Could Talk, to begin production in October. Jenkins wrote the screenplay for this story of young Harlem lovers Tish and Fonny in 2013 at the same time he was developing Moonlight. The work — depicting a black family’s struggle with a very unjust criminal justice system — is prophetic. “An artist is a sort of emotional or spiritual historian,” Baldwin told LIFE in 1963. “His role is to make you realize the doom and glory of knowing who you are.” Baldwin ably illuminated and transformed the narrative of his own time and — luckily for us — he’s lighting up our days, too.

“Artists are here to disturb the peace.” – James Baldwin

Here’s a sampling of recent work influenced either overtly or subtly by Baldwin:

James Baldwin Photograph © Van Vechten Trust; Compilation/Publication © Eakins Press Foundation
Yaddo is a retreat for artists located on a 400-acre estate in Saratoga Springs, New York. Its mission is to nurture the creative process by providing an opportunity for artists to work without interruption in a supportive environment. Yaddo offers residencies to artists from all nations and backgrounds working in the following disciplines: choreography, film, literature, musical composition, the visual arts, performance, and video. They are selected by panels of other professional artists without regard to financial means. Residencies last from two weeks to two months and include room, board, and a studio. Yaddo’s extensive grounds and buildings were designated a National Historic Landmark in 2013.