

# 809 ALMOND

WRITTEN BY MYLAN GRAY  
DIRECTED BY STEPHEN BUESCHER

SHEILA & HUGHES  
POTIKER THEATRE

MAY 9, 14, 15, 17 @ 7:30PM  
MAY 11 @ 2:00PM



UC San Diego  
THEATRE & DANCE

WAGNER  
NEW PLAY  
FESTIVAL  
2024

# 809 Almond

Written by Mylan Grey

Directed by Stephen Buescher

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## THE CAST

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Angela	Kyá Giselle
Stephanie	Emma Lias
Andrew	Germainne Lebrón
Jonathan	Layth Haddad
Loren	Torkan Omari
Stephanie (u/s)	Sophia “Espie” Ignacio
Andrew (u/s)	John Soto
Angela (u/s)	Charity Reid
Jonathan (u/s)	Justin Valine
Loren (u/s)	Taylor Mapes

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## CREATIVE TEAM

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Scenic Designer	Eleanor Williams
Costume Designer	Alina Bokovikova
Lighting Designer	Taylor Olson
Sound Designer	Padra Crisafulli
Production Stage Manager	Juhi Sabharwal
Dramaturg	Mysia Anderson
Assistant Scenic Design	Abby Miranda
Assistant Costume Design	Faith Garcia
Assistant Lighting Design	Aunya Graham
Assistant Sound Design	Jordyn Lowe
Assistant Director	Annais Scott
Assistant Director	Charlotte Yu
Assistant Stage Manager	Yareli Garcia

Assistant Stage Manager	Ziyi Fang
Production Assistant	Jill Liang
Deck Crew	Tairan Zhang
Deck Crew	Nyla Janmohamed
Deck Crew	Jeffery Spiers
Wardrobe Crew	Quinn Lewis
Wardrobe Crew	Simone Franchino
Wardrobe Crew	Sydney Prebe
Wardrobe Crew	Ivan Quezada
Light Board Op	Alex Devyataikin
Sound Board Op	<b>Mariana Noreiga</b>

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## Note From Director

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Oakland was filled with the sounds of protests during the day and the sting of tear gas at night. Highways, bridges, and BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) trains were being shut down by protesters chained together with metal tubes that covered their arms; the only way to break through the human barricades was to saw through the metal. The city was inconvenienced and electrified with the direct actions of change.

It was against this backdrop that I found myself looking for parking in a local Berkeley food Co-op. The parking lot was full except for a cluster of empty parking spots that were being taken over by a gathering of Black Lives Matter protesters. I slowly parked my car in one of the open spaces and no sooner had I turned off the engine when the three leaders (White women) swarmed my car with their Black Lives Matter signs. They glared and glowered at me and I'm sure they would have yelled at me to get the "f" out of their parking spot if they hadn't seen that I was Black. One of them encouraged the other two to back off, though the rage in their eyes persisted.

I remember looking at all of the Black Lives Matter signs and this growing group of White Folks, and I thought to myself....I am not welcome in this parade. And isn't it for ME?

Surely this isn't happening in a food Co-op parking lot?!?!?!?

Surely this isn't happening in the Bay Area?!?!?!?

Surely this isn't happening to someone Black?!?!?!?

Welcome to 809 Almond, a provocative play by Mylan Gray about White and POC (People of Color) occupation and Black exclusion. History is being repeated and made right before our eyes. Whose side are YOU on?

**Insiders scoop:**

\*During the process of rehearsing this play we often had 'family meetings' with the entire Company on the set in the living room. It was the place we came together to deepen conversations, laugh, share a meal together, and take a well needed break from the comic-tragic content of the play.

We, at 809 Almond, invite you to laugh at this play.

We invite you to think about this play.

We invite you to talk about this play.

Enjoy!

~Stephen Buescher, Director

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## Dramaturgical Note

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809 Almond is a beautiful home steeped in secrets. If its walls could speak, they would likely recount tales of radical activism. They might boast of the Berkeley Friendship Park protest that began in its front yard, of the Grateful Dead performing in the garden, of serving a sandwich to Huey P. Newton in the kitchen, and of transforming into a hippie haven amidst rampant hypercapitalism. Or, perhaps they would whisper a slightly different tale.

From the outside, the Victorian splendor of 809 Almond stands as a beautiful contradiction. With "two living rooms, a one-acre garden, a dining room, a game room, a sun room, and a massive kitchen," this stunning 8-bedroom mansion harks back to an era before the Bay Area was synonymous with tech giants, gentrification, and an unrelenting housing crisis.

The drama unfolds with the home's occupants, members of a progressive co-op, entangled in this speculative paradox. Each member embodies the structural dilemma of their residence, when their considerable privileges clash with the socialist ideals and historic roots of their home. The burden of their substantial intergenerational wealth fuels a compulsion to absorb a Black roommate into Almond's walls.

Yet, Angela's presence isn't seamlessly integrated into this "progressive dystopia" (Savannah Shange, 2019). She arrives with her own set of desires, beliefs, and aspirations—an array of ideas not easily understood just because Stephanie took an Introduction to Black Studies course. Like the house, Angela harbors her own secrets. Her inability to conform perfectly offers the audience a chance to ponder whether discussions about Black people—without a diverse representation of Black voices—are ever truly genuine.

These competing narratives of how liberal politics manifest reach a climax as the 2020 Black Lives Matter Movement erupts just outside their door. As the city around them ignites, the non-Black residents of 809 Almond must face the limits of their outward-facing politics amid internal discrepancies. With a Black girl magic force field, might Angela be the catalyst Almond needs in this critical moment? Or, will her enigmatic arrival ultimately serve a greater purpose?

Despite their well-intentioned politics, the co-op can never fully uncover all the secrets of 809 Almond, just as they can't fully understand Angela's complexities. 809 Almond allows for the exploration of a Black woman's interiority—and the challenges that may arise in ostensibly progressive spaces when they finally make room for such complexities to make themselves at home.

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## Content Warning

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Guns, Violence, Nudity, Profane Language, Racial Slurs (e.g: N Word), Flashing Lights/Strobe

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## The Playwright

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**Mylan Gray** (they/he) is an Eagle Scout and debate champion turned Black absurdist playwright from Kansas. They are a descendant of black educators and soldiers and are preoccupied with transforming Black suffering into Black joy, laughter and peace. They have received the Lorraine Hansberry Award from the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival for their play, *Buried in Blood*. Their work has been developed by the Tank Theater, the Workshop Theater, the Kansas City Public Theater, the Whim Theater Company, the Mid-America Theater Conference, and the Writing Downtown Residency in Las Vegas. They are a graduate of Stanford University, where they received the Kennell Jackson Jr. Award, the Braden Storytelling Grant, and a Chappell Lougee Scholarship. They are co-producer of the LIT Council of the Tank Theater, and have written a fiction podcast for LWC Studios. Their work draws on his deep reverence for Brazil and a penchant for spiritual journeying. When they are not writing, reading, or watching films, they are in the forest soaking up the songs of birds and listening to the world's oldest keeper of stories: the trees.

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## The Director

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**Professor Stephen Buescher** is a director, choreographer and teaching artist. He choreographed *Covenant* by York Walker at the Roundabout Theater as well as directed a development workshop of

York's *Soul Records* at the Vineyard Theater and Manhattan Theater Club. Recently he choreographed *Babbitt* at La Jolla Playhouse which is headed to the Shakespeare Theater Company in DC in the Fall. He has choreographed *Copper Children* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); *Atomu* (Sundance Film Festival); *Hamlet, A Thousand Splendid Suns, Orphan of Zhao, Stuck Elevator, Monstress, Let There Be Love*, and *Underneath the Lintel* (American Conservatory Theater); *The Imaginary Invalid* (Old Globe Theater/ Fiasco); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Private Lives* (Long Wharf Theater); *A Christmas Carol* (Trinity Repertory Company); *Love's Labour's Lost* (Shakespeare Santa Cruz); *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (Lorraine Hansberry Theater); and *Black Maria* (Providence Black Repertory Theater). He has directed *A Flea in her Rear*, and *Man in Love* (University of California San Diego); *The Bacchae Communion Rite, The Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, Galileo, The House of Bernarda Alba* (Moscow Art Theater), *Hotel Paradiso, Black Orpheus*, and *Crazy for the Country* (American Conservatory Theater MFA program) . Professor Buescher has been a long time company member with Dell' Arte International where he has performed both nationally and internationally. International Festivals include the International Small Scene Theater Festival (Croatia), The Festival of New Adaptations (Hungary), and The Festival International de Teatro Caribe (Colombia). He has also performed with the National Theater of Greece, Oktana Dance, and Tanz Theater Heidelberg. Nationally he has performed with Dell' Arte International, American Conservatory Theater, Smith Wymore Disappearing Acts, Scott Wells and Dancers, Shotgun Players, and Deborah Slater Dance. He is a first round recipient of TCG's New Generations Grant, a member of SDC, and the Network of Ensemble Theaters. Professor Buescher is a graduate of the Dell' Arte International School of Physical Theater and California Institute of the Arts.

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## The Cast

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**Kyá Giselle (Angela)** proudly hails from Brooklyn, New York. Graduating summa cum laude from Pomona College with a dual degrees in Theatre and Clinical Neuropsychology, Kya is also an alumna of Brown University TheatreBridge Acting Conservatory. Her UC San Diego credits include: ,Thicker Than, Bunny, Bunny, Bach at Leipzig, Limp Wrist on the Lever, and In The Red and Brown Water. Regional: *Babbitt* (La Jolla Playhouse), *From Out Behind My Shame* (Garry Marshall Theater).

**Emma Lias (Stephanie)** is a fourth year undergraduate student originally from Raleigh, North Carolina. They will graduate with a double-major in Theater and Critical Gender Studies and a double-minor in Literature and Philosophy in June. She is thrilled to close her UCSD experience as a part of the *809 Almond* company! Recent performance credits include *A Flea In Her Rear* (UCSD), *Stay With Me* (Tucson Fringe Festival), *The Glorious William and Mary* (Education Premiere for The Idyllwild Arts Foundation). Recent playwriting credits include: *Should I Swallow?* (The National Women's Theater Festival), *All News Radio* (New Village Arts Final Draft Festival), *The Wolf Which Ate*

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## The Cast *cont.*

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*The Man Downstairs* (The No Sleep Podcast), *Epicene! A Queer Extravaganza* (UCSD 2021-2022 Season), *Once Daily* (UCSD LABS).

**Germainne Lebrón (Andrew)** is a proud Boricua from the Bronx. He is a UC San Diego M.F.A. Actor Cohort of '26. UCSD Credits include: *THE PROMISE* by Jose Rivera; *ROMEO & JULIET*; Theatre credits includes: *LA GRINGA* at American Stage; *NATIVE GARDENS* at The Warehouse Theatre; *THE INHERITANCE PART 1* at Trinity Rep; *IMOGEN* (A *Cymbeline* Adaptation) at Brown/Trinity Rep; *EIGHT TALES OF PEDRO* at The Secret Theatre; *O's CONFEDERADOS* and *LUCHA LIBRE* at Columbia University's Schapiro Theater; *RIVER ROUGE* at The Lenfest performing Arts center ; *ELVIRA: THE IMMIGRATION PLAY* at Collaboraction Theater Company; *KING LEAR* at The Brick Theatre. He is also an Actors Theatre of Louisville PTC 2019/20 Alum where he wrote and performed a solo show: *MADRE TIERRA* which premiered in The Actors Theatre of Louisville. He also performed in *LOUISVILLE//KENTUCKY//USA* in their new play project festival, Fifth Third Banks *DRACULA; A CHRISTMAS CAROL* and *ARE YOU THERE?* in the Humana Festival of New American Plays 20'.

**Layth Haddad (Jonathan)** is a 4th year undergraduate Theater major with an AA in Theatre Arts from Mira Costa College. He is excited to graduate with his BA this fall and is extremely grateful to wrap up his UCSD journey with this amazing team of artists. Some recent collegiate credits include: Mira Costa (*All my Sons, Antigone, Pirates of Penzance, The School for Scandal, Waiting for Lefty*), UCSD (*I Found a Zipper* WNP, X). Professional credits include: New Village Arts (*Into the Woods, The Ferryman*). Catch him in this summer's double-feature production of *Henry VI* parts 1 and 2 at The Old Globe. Layth would like to dedicate his performance to his baby sister Talyth.

**Torkan Omari (Loren)** is a law student turned poet turned actress. She is a part of the 2026 MFA Acting cohort at UC San Diego. Born in Afghanistan, she's lived in Amsterdam, Medellin and Berlin before moving to the US. Torkan holds a BA in international law and philosophy from the University of Amsterdam. Before embarking on her journey as a writer and actress she worked in tech, journalism and design. Torkan performed her writing as a spoken word artist across Europe. She wrote and performed *Choose Your Life*, a reflection on the female, refugee and Muslim experience in the west, at UCSD. Her recent theatre credits include *Shar-e-Naw* by Mina Jawad, *Orlando* by Sarah Ruhl and *Comedy of Errors*. When she is not acting or writing, you can find her training in martial arts and weapons.

**Sophia "Espie" Ignacio (Stephanie u/s)** (they/she) is a fourth-year Psychology and Theatre double major, originally from the Bay Area. UCSD Credits: *The Comedy of Errors* (Assistant Director/Vocal

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## The Cast *cont.*

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Director), *Into the Woods* (Vocal Director, Muir Musical), *A Chorus Line* (Vocal Director, Muir Musical), *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Mitch Mahoney, Muir Musical), *American Idiot* (Heather, Muir Musical). Select Credits: *Lizzie: The Musical* (Alice, Wildsong Productions), *Pásale Pásale* (Joseph, La Jolla Playhouse WOW Festival, Túyo Theater). @es.pie09

**John Soto (Andrew u/s)** is honored and excited to be an Understudy for his first and last department show at UCSD. John John is an artist in every sense of the word and has been in numerous productions and student films throughout his experiences. Some of John John's credits include Chuck Biggs "*She Kills Monsters*" (*West Valley College*), Jack "*English Made Simple*" (*West Valley College*), George H. Jones "*Machinal*" (*West Valley College*), Prince Gustaf "*Seven ten Split*" (*Santa Clara County Players*), Garcin "*No Exit*" (*UCSD*), Jesse "*Best Years*" (*UCSD*), Kevin "*Another College Musical*" (*UCSD, TTV*), Ahi "*Family Dinners*" (*UCSD*), Cortez "*Malintzin: Traitor or Captive*" (*UCSD*) and recently he just directed, wrote and starred in his short Film "*For What it's Worth*" (*UCSD, TTV*). John John has also been in an E40 musical, just made his Spotify debut with the release of the *Another College Musical: Cast Album*, and this summer he will be studying theatre at NTI's theatre Makers Summer program at the Eugen O'Neil in Connecticut. John John is a part of the sixth college student council as the Fourth Year Senator, the Former Member's Development chair For the Mixed student union, and an Executive Producer at Triton Television. John John is grateful to be a part of *809 Almond* as an understudy and is thankful to Stephen and Mylan for the opportunity to share this creative space with the entire cast and crew. He hopes you enjoy the show and remember that one day they will name Sixth College after him.

**Charity Reid (Angela u/s)** is a fourth year transfer student from Santa Monica College with an AA in Liberal Arts & Humanities. SMC credits: *Treasure Island* (Siren) *Alice V. Wonderland* (Ensemble), *Broken Mirror: a Frankenstein Odyssey* (Patti). UCSD credits: *I'm Really Glad I Got To Get To Know You* (Dragon), *Fables Unfold* (Wendy Darling / Goosey). *809 Almond* is her first UCSD Theatre Department production.

**Justin Valine (Jonathan u/s)** is a third-year transfer student at UC San Diego majoring in Theater Arts. He is originally from Sacramento, California. From there, he moved to Los Angeles where he attended Santa Monica College and participated in a number of productions. He received two Associate of Arts degrees, one in Theater Arts, and another in Communications. Santa Monica College credits include (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nigh Time*), (*Treasure Island*), (*War Words*), (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), and (*Murder on the Nile*). He has also worked

as a fight choreographer at SMC. Credits include: (*The Three Musketeers*) and (*Sherwood: The Adventures of Robin Hood*). He is also heavily involved in Company 157, working on numerous

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## The Cast *cont.*

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productions. He directed (*& It's Not Getting Better*) and you might have seen him act in (*Up's and Downs*), (*Feywild*), or (*Figments of Lamentations*). He is so excited to be working on his first department show and is very grateful for the opportunity.

**Taylor Mapes (Loren u/s)** is a fourth-year transfer student and Theatre major at UCSD. She is from Temecula, California, which is where her theatre journey began, and is now living in San Diego. She received her A.A. in Theatre Arts from Mt. San Jacinto College in 2022 and will be graduating from UCSD in Fall 2024. Her previous works include leading roles as Elizabeth (*Pride and Prejudice*), Sara (*Getting Sara Married*), and Joy (*The Tin Woman*), and some non-acting roles with assistant directing (*Evil Dead- The Musical*), and wardrobe for UCSD's Theatre and Dance Department's winter production of (*X*). This is her first acting role in a UCSD production and she is honored to have the opportunity to work with such talented artists. She wants to thank Stephen and Mylan for the opportunity to explore these important and very challenging themes, and her mom for her constant support.

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## The Creative Team

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**Eleanor Williams (Set Designer)** is a second year-year MFA student. UC San Diego credits: *Cancelina* (WNPF '24), *The Promise*, *Thicker Than...* (WNPF '23), *The Winter's Tale*, *X* (Assoc. Video Design, ASD), *Dance Nation* (ASD). She received her BS in Mechanical Engineering and BA in Theater from Lafayette College. Lafayette design credits: Shakespeare's *R&J*.

**Alina Bokovikova (Costume Design)** is an artistically diverse costume designer and an alumna of UC San Diego, who is happy to return as part-time faculty to her alma mater. She also holds a Master's Degree in Education from Russia, and for the past seven years, she led the Costume Design program at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. She has received several regional design awards, presented her works at the "Costume Design at the Turn of the Century" exhibition in Moscow, and was featured in "American Theatre Magazine." Selected credits for opera: *The Shining Atlanta Opera/Opera Parallele*, *If I Were You* San Francisco Opera, *Flight* Minnesota Opera, *La Bohème* Opera San Jose. Selected theatre credits: *Dolls House* The Old Globe Theatre, *Fences* California Shakespeare Company, *Tokyo Fish Story* TheatreWorks, *Hedda Gabler* Cutting Ball Theatre, *School*

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## The Creative Team *cont.*

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for *Lies* North Coast Repertory Theatre. She is resident costume designer for annual Panto at the Presidio Theatre and is currently working on the production of *Peter Pan*. Thank you to all company members for their collaborative spirit.

**Taylor Olson (Lighting Designer)** is a second-year MFA student from San Diego, California. She received her B.A. in Theatre Arts for Design and Production from California State University, Fullerton. She is the Technical Director and Resident Lighting Designer for Disco Riot, an organization all about building a movement through movement to make art culture in San Diego more relevant, impactful, and collaborative. Taylor has worked with Fresh Congress, Malashock Dance, FACT/ SF, La Jolla Playhouse, California Ballet, and collaborating with choreographers and multidisciplinary artists throughout Southern California. UCSD Credits: Orlando (LD), I Found A Zipper (LD), Bunny Bunny (ALD), Machinal (ALD) Select credits: For A (LD, FACT/SF), Cenotas (LD, DISCO RIOT), Bhangin' It (ALD, La Jolla Playhouse)

**Padra Crisafulli (Sound Designer / Composer)** is a second-year MFA student. UC San Diego credits: No Singing in the Navy (Music Director), Cancelina (SD/C), X (Co-SD), Orlando (SD/C), I Found a Zipper (SD/C), Boxed (SD/C), Mortal Digits (co-creator), blu (SD), As You Like It (LJP, ASD), FallWorks '22 (AS+VD). Other selected design credits: Iphigenia in Splott (Hollywood Fringe), Purgatorio (Edinburgh Fringe), One Day Down (Kelly Connelly Theater), The Reporter's Mixtape (Park Avenue Armory), Frozen Fluid (National Women's Theatre Festival, Director + SD). They received their BFA in directing from Carnegie Mellon University in 2020. (They/them).

**Juhi Sabharwal (Production Stage Manager)** is a third year Theatre and Linguistics Major from Mumbai, India. UC San Diego Credits: X (PA), *मेहा & Neel* (ASM), The Winter's Tale (ASM). Other credits include Company 157's *Women in Rubber* (PSM), *Embers Adrift* (PSM), *I \_\_\_\_ You* (PSM), *A Night of Tens* (ASM) and Muir Musical's *American Idiot* (PA). She would like to thank her mentors, family, and friends for all of their love and support!

**Annais Scott (Assistant Director)** is a second-year theatre major. Select UC San Diego credits: *Romeo and Juliet* (Assistant Stage Manager), *I'm Really Glad I Got To Know You* (Indiana), *Can You See It To?* (Art Critic 2), *Figments of Lamentations* (Assistant Director), *I Found A Zipper* (Production Assistant). Thank you for coming!

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## The Creative Team *cont.*

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**Charlotte Yu (Assistant Director)** is a second-year theatre major and education studies minor. UC San Diego credits: *The Comedy of Errors* (Puppetry Designer), *A Flea in Her Rear* (Guanli), *Best Years*, *Family Dinner*. Yay. Other Credits: *Salty Water* (Blindspot Collective), *She Kills Monsters* (Taipei American School), *Almost, Maine* (Taipei American School), *Little Shop of Horrors* (Taipei American School) @charlotteyu99 (She/her)

**Abby Miranda (Assistant Scenic Design)** is a third year transfer theatre major, empathies in Scenic Design and Artistry. UC San Diego Credits: *Studio Shakes: Romeo and Juliet & Comedy of Errors* (SD)

UCSD Company 157 / Labs Credits: *& Its Not Getting Better* (SD), *FeyWild* (ASD), *Once Daily* (SD)  
Santa Rosa Junior College Credits: *Addams Family Musical* (ASD), *Gloria* (Props D), *The Spongebob Musical* (SM / Paint Charge), Summer Repertory Theater 2022 Scenic Design Assistant (Scenic and Props Intern). They currently work at Birch Aquarium as an Exhibits Artist Assistant. (They/She)  
Website: <https://abbymiranda.weebly.com>

**Faith Garcia (Assistant Costume Design)** is a 4th year Theatre major with a minor in dance. This is her last department show at UC San Diego. She has an Associates Degree in Theatre from Long Beach City College. UC San Diego Credits include: *Neha & Neel*, *X*, *Azucar!* (ACD)

**Aunya Graham (Assistant Lighting Design)** is a 4th year Visual Arts: Media major who is so grateful to be working with Taylor again for her final show with the UCSD department. They are so happy to work with the department again and work alongside such talented creatives. Her credits include *Romeo and Juliet*, and *I Found a Zipper* and multiple productions with Muir Musical and Company 157.

**Jordyn Lowe (Assistant Sound Design)** is a 4th year Theatre major, and is so honored to be working alongside outstanding artists as an assistant designer for her last UCSD department show. Select UCSD credits include: *Hell's Canyon*, *X*, and *Flash and Knox* (Company 157). Enjoy the show!

**Yareli Garcia (Assistant Stage Manager)** is a 2nd year Sociology- Law and Society major and Theatre Minor. This is her first UCSD department show. Other productions include: *Antigone* (EMHSA), A

Fairytale Courtroom (EMHSA), Magic! Magic! (EMHSA), Grease (CMSA), Aladdin (CMSA), and Alice at Wonderland (CMSA)

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## The Creative Team *cont.*

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**Ziyi Fang (Assistant Stage Manager)** is a 2nd year Business Economics major with a Theater minor. This is her first UCSD department show. She is excited to be on the 809 Almond stage management team and grateful for the opportunity!

**Jill Liang (Production Assistant)** is an environmental policy major and theatre minor from San Francisco. It has been such a joy watching 809 Almond come to life! Her UC San Diego performance credits include *Comedy of Errors*, *Women In Rubber: The Heroes We Invent* (Company 157), *Family Dinner. Yay.* (LAB), and *Can You See It Too?* (LAB)

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## CONNECT WITH US

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