

# LARCHMONT BUZZ



News from Larchmont Village, Hancock Park and the Greater Wilshire areas of Los Angeles.

## The Fountain Theatre Takes It Outside

📅 March 10, 2021



A rendering of the Fountain Theatre's new outdoor stage and seating, scheduled to open in June.

Hollywood's Fountain Theatre celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020, although the celebration was virtual only. The gala at the Hollywood Roosevelt was called off, and the theater's doors closed the weekend of March 15, in the middle of a successful run of the world premiere *Human Interest Story*, by Fountain artistic director Stephen Sachs.

In an interview last week, Sachs noted, "2020 was supposed to be our greatest year ever."

The year 2021 is starting to look like it might claim that crown. The Fountain, which got City approval in January to open an outdoor theater on its adjacent parking lot, has just announced that it will open in June, with the Los Angeles premiere of *An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins. The play, which won an Obie Award in 2015, is based on a 19th-century play about an interracial relationship, itself adapted from an 1856 novel, *The Quadroon*.



**Playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins**  
Photo courtesy John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

“An Octoroon” playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins,

Judith Moreland will direct; cast has not yet been announced. Tickets have not yet been priced or made available for sale. But with COVID numbers dropping, the June opening seems assured.

Sachs recalls, “Shortly after the shutdown, I was downstairs in the theater by myself, contemplating our next move. We only have 80 seats, so if we were to bring audiences in with 6-foot distancing, that would reduce capacity from 80 to 12. It struck me: why don’t we go outdoors? We could spread out the audience, bring in more people, and it would be a wonderful solution to a devastating problem.”

The outdoors set-up will have 84 seats in pairs spread out across the space, as well as a concession area. The indoor restrooms are receiving enhanced ventilation. The rest of the building will allow actors and crew to spread out, as space is repurposed for dressing rooms and offices.

Sachs likens the Fountain’s outdoor solution to the Ford Theatre and the Hollywood Bowl. “We hope that being outdoors, under the stars, seeing a play at the Fountain Theatre, will become an annual summer tradition. All the stage equipment—18 individual, modular stage units—is collapsible and can be stored. We’ll use the stage for theater and outdoor flamenco concerts and would also like to invite other theaters to share it, for more plays, dance groups, music ensembles and jazz. That’s the grand scheme, but for now we’re just praying for June.”

It took months to get to the January approval, and months more of making the June opening happen. Sachs says, “We got a lot of support from our Councilman Mitch O’Farrell and the East Hollywood Neighborhood Council. That’s how it came to be. Finally the office of City planning gave us the go-ahead. Everything is COVID compliant. Target is for us to go into rehearsal in May, open in June and run through the summer.”

Sachs adds, “The Fountain is in a solid financial position because of increased fundraising, a very engaged board, a lot of community support and austere financial planning.”

The loss of the parking lot will be handled through the support of local businesses, who offered their parking lots for free. “There’s been a lot of community support,” says Sachs. “Out of this catastrophe, something truly wonderful is about to blossom and a temporary fix will become an improvement for city.”



## About Laura Foti Cohen

Laura Foti Cohen has lived in the Brookside neighborhood since 1993. She works as a freelance writer, editor and consultant. She's also a playwright affiliated with Neo Ensemble Theatre in Hollywood.

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