

—THE **UNMUTED** COMPANION—



# BABEL

BY JACQUELINE GOLDFINGER



National New Play Network  
Rolling World Premieres

AN NPN ROLLING WORLD PREMIERE

## **UNMUTED COMPANION**

for *Babel* by Jacqueline Goldfinger

CREATED BY YUNINA BARBOUR-PAYNE, DRAMATURG

**THE UNMUTED COMPANION** is a dramaturgical component designed to enhance your **CATFUNMUTED** experience. We've designed the UC Volumes to act as counterparts to the six BOLD, NEW PLAYS, in this year's digital experience. You can sample, survey, or study these online offerings—with no fear of spoilers!

Each companion will give you—

- A sneak peek into the 2021 Season
- An introduction to the creative teams
- An exploration of the world of the plays
- A deep-dive into the new play process

Come and join us as we **thinktheater** and **talktheater**.

We promise not to “give you all the 2021 goodies” – just enough to make you eager for more.

## A LETTER FROM ED HERENDEEN

**Can you imagine a world without LIVE theater?** The theater is an art form performed by living artists witnessed by a live audience in the very specific HERE and NOW. The artists and the spectators come together in communion and perfect harmony with each other in the same moment. Somewhere during this sacred moment, the spectator's consciousness is awakened and enlightened. Together this community of audience members becomes one with the artists on stage. Live theater is an awesome experience. Live theater is urgent and simply indispensable. The energy created in a live performance can change lives. The power emanating from a live work of art is SPELLBINDING!

**So I ask you: Can you imagine a world without live theater?**

It is impossible for me to imagine a world without live theater. I miss casting and callbacks. I miss face to face, in-person collaborations with designers. I miss the back and forth, lively discussions of production meetings. I miss finding creative solutions to the budget challenges. Most of all, I miss the rehearsal room and the rehearsal process: that first Company Read Thru, those inspirational "break-thru" and "AHA" moments, sitting next to the living playwright...listening to their every breath as they respond in the moment.

Yes, I miss rehearsal. And I miss the audience – our ultimate collaborator and partner in producing and developing new work.

**I cannot imagine a world without live theater.**

I would miss the risks, the challenges, the emotions, the thrill and excitement of transporting a living audience to those special places...sacred places that only exist in the imagination.

Live theater, live storytelling provokes philosophical and political ideas. Ever since the Greeks invented drama on stage, the theater has shaped, stimulated, provoked, and entertained humans.

Yes, I miss live theater. BUT - we want to connect with you NOW! We cannot wait. We want to share our creative process with you NOW! **We are CATFUNMUTED!**

This digital - **UNMUTED EXPERIENCE** is an exciting prelude of what is to come in our 2021 Theater Festival. Our next season begins here! An innovative online experience that begins the process of creating the future of LIVE contemporary theater next summer in our beloved SHEPHERDSTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA.

I am honored to introduce you to six contemporary playwrights. Artists that have the extraordinary ability to converse with the voices of the past. Terence Anthony confronts oppression, incarceration, and human rights in his historical play *The House of the Negro Insane*. Jacqueline Goldfinger and Victor Lesniewski imagine the voices of the future in their plays *Babel* and *The Fifth Domain*. Their plays warn us about government control, abuse of power, and cybersecurity. Kevin Artigue, Chisa Hutchinson, and Caridad Svich imagine the pain and the horror of our fragile present in their plays: *Sheepdog*, *Whitelisted*, and *Ushuaia Blue*. Plays truly set in the present...in the here and now... that hold us accountable for racism, gentrification, greed, and climate grief.

Yes, this is a prelude of a new repertory of six new plays that listens to the past, examines the present, and imagines an uncertain future.

Yes, I can imagine sharing our **UNMUTED EXPERIENCE** with you. This digital repertory invites you to escape and engage by surrounding yourself with new works that deserve your attention...new work that is **alive** and **dynamic**...the **heart** and **soul** of what makes the **Contemporary American Theater Festival** compelling and necessary - right now and forever.



Ed Herendeen  
Founder & Producing Director

## INTRODUCTION TO OUR PLAYWRIGHT

### Envisioning a future world is no easy task.

Playwright **JACQUELINE GOLDFINGER** uses her work to not only imagine the future, but to critique society before its pressing ethical issues emerge. Jacqueline was raised in the rural South and is primarily known for her work in the Southern Gothic genre. In an interview with Tom Beck of the *South Philly Review*, when asked about the inspiration for her dark comedy *Babel*, she shares:



“Well, I’ve always been a fan of sci-fi, and I love the fact that sci-fi stories can really allow us to explore questions that are scary, but in a way that is a little more understandable and bearable and with humor and heart. When I got pregnant - I have 7-year-old twins - we got some [negative] test results back from our doctor. Luckily everything’s fine, but it was exactly that. It was getting these test results coming home, going down the Google rabbit hole of ‘what does this mean, what could it mean?’ And I had not realized how far reproductive technology had come in terms of being able to both test in utero cells as well as what they could manipulate. So I just found it fascinating and then I had the babies and thank goodness, thank God they were healthy, knock on wood. And then I spent five years raising the babies for kindergarten so it was just in the last year and a half, two years that I was able to come back to the idea of this would be a really great play. It’s juicy.”

Jacqueline prides herself on writing characters “rooted with a sense of history whose urgency is reflected in contemporary issues,” and *Babel*’s characters Renee, Dani, Jamie, and Ann have different perspectives that reflect timeless attitudes toward parenting, life, and human development.

### LEARN MORE!

[Jacqueline’s Website](#) • [Jacqueline’s HowlRound Page](#) • [Jacqueline’s interview in The South Philly Review](#)

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

*Babel* is a dark comedy set in a futuristic city on a beach, somewhere among a community of genetically superior individuals. Exploring the topics of science technology, reproductive health, nature, and morality, this play propels the audience into the future to observe a pair of expecting parents who find themselves in a vulnerable predicament. Renee and Dani are a successful couple who have just undergone the initial steps to certify their unborn babies gain approval to contribute to the population. After getting pregnant, their friends Jamie and Ann grapple with the decision they will have to make, if their child is not certified. Within this future context, certification is the process parents must undergo in order to ensure their descendants meet the criteria for success set forth by society. As both couples hope to expand their families, their uncertainty of the future grows.

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**“I grew up in the deep South, where everything is biblical. If someone spills a Coke on themselves at McDonald’s it is a sign from God that they shouldn’t be doing what they are doing that day. So, I grew up in a very deeply religious area of the world. And when I first started researching reproductive technologies, it reminded me of Babel. It reminded me of that ancient quest that humans have always had in them. That every culture is reaching for perfection and always failing.”** –Jacqueline Goldfinger



## KEY CONCEPTS IN THE TEXT



**BABEL:** The story of Babel appears in the book of Genesis. In the primeval story, humans - who at the time spoke one language and lived in a harmonious society - tried to build a tower, also known as the “Gate of God,” tall enough to reach heaven. To punish humans for their arrogance, God put a curse on the people to speak multiple languages. They could

no longer easily communicate with one another to continue building the tower. The story of Babel is often cited to explain the origins of diversity within humanity.

**STORKS:** The myth of the stork delivering babies is rooted in Greek mythology. The long necked stork became a symbol of Hera’s (Zeus’ wife) jealousy when she turned a rival into a stork. In the 21st century, the stork became an American myth to explain ‘where babies come from.’ This story describes childbirth as an idealized and detached process, in which an often heteronormative, cis-gendered couple patiently wait for their bundle of joy.



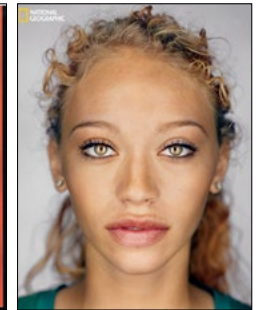
**LEARN MORE** about the biblical and ancient mythology that inspired *Babel*:

- [“Why Storks Bring Babies.” In History Daily](#)

**EUGENIC STERILIZATION:** Eugenics is a philosophical movement that emerged in the early 20th century. Within the movement, leaders argued that it was possible to enhance humanity through manipulation of biological traits. A group of scientists-initiated studies attempted to determine how to arrange reproductive genes - within the human population - to increase characteristics defined as “desirable.” Major figures associated with the philosophy of Eugenics include Francis Galton, Winston Churchill, and Theodore Roosevelt. In addition to its application as a philosophy, it also expanded into academic disciplines more focused on the realm of genetic mutations. Outside of the United States, Eugenics was frowned upon because of its prevalence within Nazi doctrines during War World I.

**GENETIC MUTATION:** Organized in two major types, hereditary or somatic, gene mutations are permanent changes in the genetic code of human beings. Scientists have explored changing hereditary materials in humans to prevent diseases and negative long term health effects. Adversely, genetic mutations may also lead to genetic disorders and severe complication related to birth and human development. Genetic alternation is not a new topic of conversation. Look at major cover stories from the last ten years which convey the fascination with the impact of reproductive technology expansion. There is growing popularity of technology designed to predict the future of the human race. Consumers across the world are now equipped to access intimate knowledge of genetic coding through at home DNA testing like 23 and Me and Ancestry. Though Goldfinger’s play is set well in the future,

there are historical and contemporary events that mirror the guiding questions *BABEL* presents. The controversy around reproductive health, genetic mutation, and potential side effects are questions scientists are asking right now. *BABEL* brings the audience into the living rooms of parents forced to make difficult decisions about the well-being of their children and society.



Pictured from left to right: 2010 Time Magazine Special Edition Cover, 2012 Time Magazine Cover, 2014 National Geographic Cover prediction of what humans will look like in the year 2050.

**LEARN MORE** – consider major headlines that have been associated with imagining the future of humanity:

- [“They Will Be Studied for the Rest of Their Lives.” How China’s Gene-Edited Twins Could Be Forever Changed By Controversial CRISPR Work](#)
- [“Experts are calling for a Ban on Gene Editing of Human Embryos. Here’s Why they are worried”](#)

**REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY:** In the last fifty years, reproductive technologies have expanded to offer aspiring parents opportunities to shift parenting culture. Medical advancements in the realm of fertility have designated expecting parents as collaborators in the fertility process. Today, parents have the ability to predict pregnancy outcomes, preview genetic identifiers, track the process of embryo development, and anticipate challenges that await after birth - all with the push of a few buttons and the presence of a few machines. Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) provide expecting parents with fertility resources, in-utero treatments, insights, and reproductive assistance. ART influences parenting culture because of its ability to manipulate the natural process of fertility through medical manipulation. While ART provides opportunities to individuals who may otherwise experience complications related to pregnancy, there is also uncertainty regarding the health, intellectual, physical, and social well-being of children who are affected by these medical processes. Reproductive technology presents complex questions surrounding the ideas, the ethics, and the social value of contemporary reproductive culture.

**LEARN MORE** about reproductive technologies and protections put in place to ensure ongoing research:

- [“What is Assisted Reproductive Technology” Center for Disease Control](#)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SCENE

In *Babel's* fourth scene "Blessed Relief," Renee encounters the Stork for the first time on stage.

Renee vents to the Stork as she worries about the advice she has received from her doctors about the health and well-being of her unborn child. Renee is plagued with uncertainty as she compares the fate of her baby to the fate of the child of her best friends, Ann and Jamie. As she contemplates the criteria for a successful pregnancy, she isolates herself from her friends and loved ones. As you read Renee's monologue, notice the juxtaposition between her relationship and Ann and Jamie's relationship.

## EXCERPT FROM THE DIALOGUE

Get a sneak peak of the dialogue from Scene 4!

### PLAY SETTING

Time: The Future

Place: A place near a beach

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

#### RENEE

a female in her 30s/40s. DANI's wife, nurturer, Race Flexible

#### DANI

a female in her 40s, RENEE'S wife, senior executive determination, Race Flexible

#### ANN

a female in her 20s/30s, JAMIE's wife, high strung, Woman of Color

#### JAMIE

a male in his 30s/40s, ANN's husband, affable, Race Flexible

#### RENEE

They, look,

Dani and I, the stupid shit we did together. And we have our certificates, we are certified, and we still Fucked, Shit. Up. And Ann,

Fucking Ann,

Fucking Practical Brass Tacks Probably Only Does It Missionary-style Ann?

What the hell would she be at Bakersfield LTD without Dani,

Dragging her up the corporate fucking ladder.

So, no.

No. They would not.

They would not exile us.

They would not refuse to let their kid play with our kid.

They would not, do, whatever, I don't know, whatever people do, when people they

know, friends, closer than family, have a kid who is uncertified. Or uncertifiable.

You know.

They just,

They get us.

And behavior can be sorted out, right?

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## CONSIDER THIS ETHICAL QUESTION FROM OUR PLAYWRIGHT

- What would we be like as parents if we could genetically engineer our children?
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## FEATURED DESIGN ELEMENT: **COSTUME TECHNOLOGY**

The technology focus for *The Making of Babel* is the development of the show's costumes. Within a production process, a costume designer's role is to create personal and collective visual aspects for a show. Combining visual design with practical material, costume design is rooted in character, reflects ideas of the play, and represents the personal life of the characters. Costume designers collaborate with actors, directors, and creative designers to convey tone, mood, style, time, place, and information about individual characters to represent the world of the play.

A costume designer straddles several goals including aiding the individual and collective concepts established by the directors and other designers, as well as working with actors to create pieces that are specific to the needs of their body and physicality.

### CONSIDER THIS

- **What was the last CATF production you saw in which you can recall the design elements evoking a feeling or emotional experience as an audience member?**
- ***Babel* is set in the future. How might you imagine the fashion for the future?**

For Costume Designer **Yao Chen**, one of the unique opportunities to demonstrate the visual story is made possible through the character of the STORK.

Check out Jacqueline 's note on the visual representation of the STORK in the excerpt from the script below!

#### Scene 4. Blessed Relief

*Renee smokes a joint, holds the wine glass.*

*A Stork Mascot enters.*

*The Stork's features are exaggerated and frozen in unnerving enthusiasm, much like a sport's team mascot.*



To learn more about the work of our Costume Designer Yao Chen, [check out her website](#).

**"Jacqueline has written a play that has huge ideas, and as a designer you have to find a way to distill those ideas to their essential elements that also compel you to feel something and have a real experience in the moment that is visual storytelling."**

—Peggy McKowen

**"Theater is an art form we experience in 3D, and the stories that are told from the design point of view, what you feel or think when you walk in and see the set, what assumptions you make by what the characters are wearing – those are just as much a part of the storytelling as my words. The character of the Stork is not easy to design. It is, I wouldn't say intentionally difficult, but I definitely knew it was the one impossible thing, as Paula Vogel says, that I was putting into the play. Because you have a stork that has to be alternately hysterical until it's not. You have to have a stork that can be empathetic, until it's a monster."**

—Jacqueline Goldfinger

## The Creative Team

DIRECTOR

**MEGAN  
SANDBERG-ZAKIAN**

SCENIC DESIGN

**JESSE DREIKOSEN**

LIGHTING DESIGN

**TONY GALASKA**

SOUND DESIGN

**DAVID REMEDIOS**

COSTUME DESIGN

**YAO CHEN**

CASTING DIRECTOR

**PAT MCCORKLE, CSA**

## A CLOSER LOOK AT A COSTUME DESIGNER'S LANGUAGE, PROCESS, AND TOOL KIT

**RENDERINGS:** Costume renderings are visual statements that convey the costume design and demonstrate the color style, texture, accessories, and silhouette for an actor's attire onstage.

**COMPOSITION:** A composition is an ongoing process of developing looks for characters on stage informed by their characterization and central factors of the play.

**SILHOUETTE:** A silhouette is a depiction of the line and mass of a costume that works to identify the time and place of a costume.

**SWATCH:** A swatch is a material used by the costume designer to determine appropriate texture and color of fabric utilized in the construction of actor costumes.

**PALETTE:** A color palette is often determined in conjunction with the set design and accounts for the depth, intensity, and mood that may be conveyed between the performance and audience.

To learn more about a designer's process [visit our consulted resource](#).

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## A COSTUME DESIGNER'S PROCESS

### GATHER DATA ABOUT THE PLAY

The costume designer analyzes the text and researches historical conventions.

### COLLABORATE IN PRODUCTION MEETINGS

During on-going production meetings, the designer learns about and supports the director's concept.

### DEVELOP COMPOSITIONS

The designer composes styles for single or multiple characters over the duration of the play.

### PRESENT IDEAS

The designer presents initial ideas to the design team, including swatches and color palettes.

### DEVELOP COSTUME PLOT & RENDERINGS

The designer creates sketches of how the entire cast should look on stage together at any given moment in the play.

### COLLABORATE WITH COSTUME SHOP

The designer gives their renderings to the costume shop for construction. They might attend fittings and make adjustments to the designs.



## FURTHER EXPLORATION

To learn more about the topics of this play and to engage in a deeper dive while you wait for CATF 2021, check out the links below.

### CONSULTED SOURCES

- [Personal Eugenics Education Project](#)
- [Genetics History and the American Eugenics Movement](#)
- [The Forgotten Lessons of The American Eugenics Movement](#)
- [What is a gene mutation and how do mutations occur?](#)
- [What's behind the message that storks deliver babies](#)

### COSTUME DESIGN WEBSITES

- [National Design Portfolio Review: Merz, Melissa, ed. The art and practice of costume design. CRC Press, 2016](#)
- [United States Institute for Theatre Technology \(USITT\)](#)
- [Costume Design Process on Film](#)
- [Master Class](#)
- [Costume Design: The Design Process](#)
- [Working in the Theatre - Costume Design](#)

### SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

- Merz, Melissa, ed. *The art and practice of costume design*. CRC Press, 2016.
- O'Hara, James B., and T. Howland Sanes. "Eugenic sterilization." *Geo. LJ* 45 (1956): 20.
- Pernick, Martin S. *The black stork: Eugenics and the death of "defective" babies in American medicine and motion pictures since 1915*. Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Pollatsek, Shura. *Unbuttoned: The Art and Artists of Theatrical Costume Design*. CRC Press, 2016.
- Veeck, Lucinda L. *An atlas of human gametes and conceptuses: an illustrated reference for assisted reproductive technology*. CRC Press, 1999.