

The Zip Code Plays: Los Angeles

Celebrate the culture and history of the diverse neighborhoods of Los Angeles with *The Zip Code Plays: Los Angeles*, a series of six original audio plays, each set in a different L.A. ZIP code.

Featuring

Bernard K. Addison, Tony Amendola, Gigi Bermingham, Jon Chaffin, Dawn Didawick, Nike Doukas, Bo Foxworth, Harry Groener, Veralyn Jones, Luis Kelly-Duarte, Kavi Ramachandran Ladnier, Adrian LaTourelle, Abby Marks, Catia Ojeda, Lloyd Roberson II, Marcelo Tubert, Marlow Wyatt

Written by members of the Antaeus Playwrights Lab

Nayna Agrawal, Angela J. Davis, Alex Goldberg, Deb Hiett, Steve Serpas, Khari Wyatt

Directed by

Julia Fletcher, Jonathan Muñoz-Proulx, Ann Noble, Carolyn Ratteray, Steven Robman, Bernadette Speakes

Hosted by

Ramón de Ocampo

Audio Producer, Sound Designer, and Foley Artist

Jeff Gardner

Original Music by

Ellen Mandel

Sound Editor

Adam Macias

Dramaturg

Ryan McRee

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The Zip Code Plays: Los Angeles

90011: South Central Los Angeles Speakeasy

by Khari Wyatt

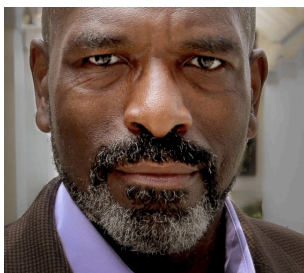
Directed by Bernadette Speakes

Featuring: Bernard K. Addison, Lloyd Roberson II, Marlow Wyatt

Sponsored by Ruth Eliel & Bill Cooney

In 1956 Leon Ivy returns home from a sojourn in Paris with a finished novel, a publisher, and big plans for his future – but times have changed along Central Avenue and his wife Bird and her new business partner, Daddy August, have enacted secret plans of their own. What are the costs of leaving home and what is the price of fighting for what you believe in?

Cast - 90011: South Central Los Angeles - Speakeasy



Bernard K. Addison



Lloyd Roberson II



Marlow Wyatt

Artist Bios

BERNARD K. ADDISON (DADDY AUGUST/CAB DRIVER): At ANTAEUS: *As You Like It*, *The Curse of Oedipus*. Theater: Citizen in *An American Lyric* (Kirk Douglas Theatre, part of Center Theatre Group's Block Party), *Ghost/Claudius* in *Hamlet* and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare Santa Cruz), *Off the Rails* (Native Voices), *Prometheus Bound* (Getty Museum), *Citizen*, *The Ballad of Emmett Till*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (The Fountain Theatre), *Mother Courage* (The Theatre @ Boston Court). Regional: Oregon Shakespeare Festival, California Shakespeare Festival, Denver Center Theatre Company, The Shakespeare Theatre. New York: Broadway (Electra). Film: *Celebrity*, *The Farm*. Recent TV: *Modern Family*, *Rake*.

LLOYD ROBERSON II (LEON IVY): At ANTAEUS: *Measure for Measure*, readings of *The Rover*; *Mayor of the 85th Floor*. Frequent participant of the Antaeus Playwrights Lab. Other Theater: *My Children, My Africa!* (Marin Theatre Company); *A Christmas Carol* (American Conservatory Theater); *Exonerated* (Lynx Performance Theatre); *Good Breeding* (Yerba Buena Center for the Arts); *Hamlet Machine* (Ion Theatre). TV/Film: *40*; *Easy Made Hard*; *The Institute*. Training: B.A., San Diego State University; M.F.A., American Conservatory Theater. Member: AEA, SAG.

MARLOW WYATT (BIRD IVY): a Kansas City native, Marlow is a magna cum laude graduate of Howard University's Theater Arts Department. She is a professional actor and playwright. Having performed in numerous Off-Broadway and regional theaters, notable reading and performance credits include: *Eight Nights* (Antaeus Theater); *Tar Beach Incidentals* (Westbeth Theater); *Insurrection: Holding History* (Celebration Theater); *Private Battle* (Watts Village Theater/Cornerstone Theater); and *A Raisin In The Sun* (Ira Aldridge Theater). Film: supporting roles in *Riot* (Showtime); *Ronnie/ The Killer Next Door* (Sundance) and *Faux Pas*. marlowwyatt.com

CREATIVE TEAM

RAMÓN DE OCAMPO (SERIES HOST): At ANTAEUS: *Measure for Measure*; *Henry IV, Part One* (Hal), *The Curse of Oedipus* (Oedipus), *Macbeth* (Banquo), *The Malcontent* (Mendoza), *King Lear* (Edgar), *Tonight at 8:30*, *Pera Palas*. Other LA: *Girl Most Likely To*, *Sick* (Playwrights Arena); *Dogeaters*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Neva* (Kirk Douglas). Regional: NY Public, Delacorte, Kennedy Center, EST, Signature, Lincoln Center Lab, NJSF, Ojai, O'neil, Yale, South Coast Rep, La Jolla Playhouse, Ma-Yi, etc. Film: *Happy Endings*, *xXx: State of the Union*, *Hamlet*. TV: Recurring roles on: *12 Monkeys*, *The West Wing*, *Medium*, *Killer Instinct*, *Sons of Anarchy*. Guest Star on *NCIS: New Orleans*, *Castle*, *Bones*, *CSI*, *NCIS*, and *Gang Related*. B.F.A., Carnegie Mellon. Awards: OBIE Award; Princess Grace Award. Narrator of more than a hundred audiobooks including the best selling *This is Where I Leave You* and the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. He has won 8 AudioFile Audiobook Awards including "Best Voice".

JEFF GARDNER (AUDIO PRODUCER, SOUND DESIGNER, FOLEY ARTIST): At ANTAEUS: *Eight Nights*, *The Abuelas*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Diana Of Dobson's*, *The Cripple Of Inishmaan*, *The Little Foxes*, *Native Son*, *The Hothouse*, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, *Picnic*, *Wedding Band*. Other Theater: Geffen Playhouse, The Kirk Douglas Theatre, The Wallis Annenberg Center, A Noise Within, Boston Court Pasadena, Circle X Theatre, Echo Theater, Rogue Machine Theatre, Skylight Theatre, IAMA Theatre, Odyssey Theatre, The Colony Theatre, The Shakespeare Theatre, Arena Stage, The Kennedy Center, and Williamstown Theatre Festival. An Ovation Award-winning sound designer, Jeff can be seen at L.A. Theatre Works, where he regularly performs live sound effects, and is the resident sound designer for the Westridge School in Pasadena. jeffthomasgardner.net

ADAM R. MACIAS (AUDIO EDITOR): At ANTAEUS: *Eight Nights, The Abuelas, Native Son*. Other theater: *Native Son* (Kirk Douglas Theater, Block Party 2019); *Les Miserables, Beauty and The Beast* (Video Designer & Sound Designer - Arcadia Performing Arts Center); *She Loves Me* (Sound Designer - Actor's Co-Op); *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory, The Giver* (Video Designer, Sound Designer, & Composer - Arcadia Performing Arts Center); *Rope, A Walk In The Woods, Cat's Paw* (Sound Designer & Composer - Actor's Co-Op Theatre); *Fuente Ovejuna* (Sound Designer & Composer - CSULA Arts and Letters). adamrmacias.com

ELLEN MANDEL (COMPOSER): is a composer of art songs and theater music. She has written songs to poems by e.e. Cummings, Seamus Heaney, W.B. Yeats, Glyn Maxwell and more, sung by Todd Almond, Daniel Neer, and Jessica Crandall, and music for over 70 plays from Shakespeare to Stoppard.

RYAN McREE (DRAMATURG): At ANTAEUS: *Measure for Measure, Eight Nights, The Abuelas, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Little Foxes*. Other Theaters: as Assistant Director: *Two Fisted Love* (Odyssey Theatre Ensemble), *bled for the household truth* (Rogue Machine Theatre), *Stupid Kid* (Road Theatre Company), *The Kentucky Cycle* (USC School of Dramatic Arts). As Director: *Gilberto* (New Opera West), *Royalton and 5th* (Skylight Theatre Fresh Brews), *The Woman Is Perfected* (Hollywood Fringe Festival), *Equus, Much Ado About Nothing, Six Degrees of Separation* (Aeneid Theatre Company). Training: B.A. Theatre/ Narrative Studies, USC.

KHARI WYATT (PLAYWRIGHT): Khari is the descendant of runaway slaves and inner-city America with its adversities, tragedies and triumphs; the son of high school sweethearts: a mother who is an artist and a father who courageously moved his young family from the rust-belt to our Nation's Capital to find a better life; the grandson of men who wore blue collars in auto plants and on railroad trains; the grandson of women who taught Sunday school and waitressed in greasy spoons. He is a writer. His work has placed in various competitions including, Disney/ABC Writers Fellowship, Sony Pictures Entertainment Diversity Writers Program, AMC One-Hour Drama competition, Austin Film Festival Screenplay Competition, and Writer's-for-Writer's Diversity Fellowship among others. Some of the fellowships and grants he has received came from the MacDowell Colony, the Guy Hanks/Marvin Miller Screenwriting Program, and the Panavision New Filmmaker Equipment Grant. He was recently selected to write and develop his play, *Starchild*, in the Circle X Theatre Company Evolving Playwrights Group. He was one of eleven writers of *#While We Breathe: A Night of Creative Protest*, a streaming theatrical event produced by Brian Moreland and Arvind Ethan David. Moving Arts, Chalk Repertory Theatre as well as the DC Black Theatre Festival have hosted his plays for readings and workshops. His play *Some Type of Ecstasy* was a semifinalist for the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference. His ten-minute play, *Ingredients*, was presented as part of the Moving Arts-LACMA's Night at the Museum. He currently is a writer for Moving Arts' web series, *Isolation Inn* being aired on YouTube in fall 2020. Wyatt is an alumnus of Howard University, earned an MFA in Film from Columbia University in the City of New York, and also completed the Summer Legal Institute at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. He is member of Antaeus Theatre Company Playwrights Lab, Moving Arts and the Playwrights Union.

Historical Information

90011—South Central Los Angeles

California Eagle Columnist Harvey Levette wrote about Central Avenue in 1935: “The dizzy white lights are dancing daringly again, lightsome, lilting, laughter, is tinkling from lips curved merrily in happy faces of white, brown cream or rich orange as the gay, many colored gowns of women of all races flutter like so many tropic butterflies.” Though only traces remain today, the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles was in the first half of the nineteenth century the epicenter of Jazz culture on the West Coast, so much so that it was known as “the West Coast Harlem” in its heyday.

In 1914, Sidney P. Dones opened the Sidney P. Dones Company at 8th Street and Central Ave, which offered real estate, insurance, and legal services. Dones represented a number of influential black business leaders who in the early 20th century made a conscious effort to create an enclave for African-Americans in Los Angeles. Next door to the black-owned California Eagle newspaper, Dones’ company was among the first of black-owned businesses, churches, and services that would be swiftly established in the area. By 1930 about 17,500 African-Americans lived near Central Ave, and by 1940 that number had jumped to nearly 43,000, about 4% of the total population of L.A. The jazz scene really began to flourish during WWII as that population more than doubled in only four years. Due to segregated housing and established practices of banks and insurance companies denying loans and financial services to blacks in predominantly white areas, South Central was one of the few places where black Angelenos could comfortably live. In 1940 70% of the city’s black population was confined to the Central Avenue corridor, and the name South Central became a blanket term for black Los Angeles as a whole.

In 1928, Dr. John Somerville and his wife Vada Watson, the first black man and woman to graduate from the USC Dental School and founders of the L.A. chapter of the NAACP, bought a corner lot at 42nd and Central and built a \$250,000 hotel using only black craftsmen and labor. The Somerville Hotel looked like a palace on Central Avenue, and the four-story luxury hotel became the unofficial town hall of black Los Angeles. It became a place for important thinkers and prominent figures in the black community to gather and discuss issues of the day, including W.E.B. Dubois, Thurgood Marshall, Langston Hughes, Joe Lewis, and



Josephine Baker. Despite the hotel’s success, the Somerville’s struggled during the Depression and were forced to sell it, and the new white owners renamed it the Dunbar, after poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. The hotel then rapidly changed hands a number of times until Chicago businessman Jimmy Nelson bought it in 1936 for \$87,500. It was under Nelson’s ownership that the Dunbar would acquire its reputation as arguably the most influential and celebrated venue on Central Avenue. It became a celebrity magnet for black America, and guests included Ella Fitzgerald, Cab

An audience watches a performance at Club Alabam. Credit: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

Calloway, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Fats Waller, Nat King Cole, Lena Horne, Billy Eckstein, Jelly Roll Morton, Ray Charles, and Count Basie.

In 1934 the Club Alabam opened next door to the Dunbar, and the corner of 42nd and Central became a buzzing thoroughfare. Big-name artists including Billie Holiday, Johnny Otis, and Gerald Wilson played at the Alabam over the years, and the club also featured stand-up comedians and a famous chorus line. Other famous clubs along the Avenue included the Downbeat, Elk's Hall, the Bird and Basket, the Lincoln Theatre, Dynamite Jackson's, and Ivie's Chicken Shack. The Lincoln Theatre was the largest African-American theatre on Central Ave, boasting 2,100 seats. It developed the name "the West Coast Apollo," and featured stars including Nat King Cole, Lionel Hampton, and Sammy Davis Jr., as well as hosting touring musical productions from New York.

In 1936 Samuel Browne, the first African-American music teacher in the Los Angeles public school system, started teaching at Jefferson High School. Over his 25-year tenure at the school he became a major influence on the up-and-coming jazz musicians of Los Angeles, and Jefferson High School maintained a continuous stream of new artists into the Central Ave jazz scene, keeping it fresh and thriving. He created a robust music curriculum that included music theory, music appreciation, harmony, counterpoint, orchestra, band, and choir, and would bring students to Central Ave to hear the musicians play and sometimes even brought performers like Jimmie Lunceford or Nat King Cole into the classroom. Browne's former student and jazz pianist Horace Tapscott recalled: "He was able to come in and to teach or to inspire, just come and talk with you. He made sure he kept an eye on you and he really dug you. "I dig you, man." That's what he'd tell you. "You don't understand that yet. But I dig you."

The prominence of the Avenue began to decline in the 50s. The 1948 Supreme Court Case *Shelley v. Kraemer* struck down racially restrictive housing covenants, and as neighborhoods began to de-segregate over the course of the 50s and 60s, the need for a concentrated focal point like Central Avenue was lessened. Black Angelenos also struggled with the complete deterioration of their relationship with the LAPD. Chief William Parker, who was the head of the LAPD from 1950 to 1966, earned the department a notorious reputation for brutality and racial profiling. His aggressive policing methods that included harassment of businesses and patrons along Central Avenue contributed immensely to the decline of the area's vibrancy and was also a leading cause of the 1965 Watts Riots. Nightclubs and juke joints were raided and shuttered. Historian Mike Davis writes in *City of Quartz*:

"In 1954 John Dolphin, owner of Los Angeles' premier R&B record store near the corner of Vernon and Central, organized a protest of 150 Black business people against an ongoing "campaign of intimidation and terror" directed at interracial trade. According to Dolphin, Newton Division police had gone so far as to blockade his store, turning away all white customers and warning them that "it was too dangerous to hang around Black neighborhoods."



Lionel Hampton in front of Club Alabam, ca. 1953. Credit: Shades of L.A. Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

Another crushing blow to the neighborhood was the California State Highway Commission's decision to build both the 110 and I-10 freeways through the heart of South Central. The path for Interstate 10 led to the demolition of Sugar Hill in the West Adams neighborhood, one of the most beautiful and well-kept African-American neighborhoods in the United States. Boyle Heights, which was home to a significant population of African-Americans who had moved from the Avenue, has similarly decimated by the junction of multiple highways. While the black communities in these areas organized and protested their case to Sacramento, their pleas fell on deaf ears. Even through the turbulent 1960s pockets of South Central retained some degree of its old vibrancy and artistic flourishing, despite the Dunbar's glory having long faded. After the Watts Riots, South Central became a hotbed for the Civil Rights movement. There was a political electricity in the air that kept the residents' spirits strong until the 1980s. Economic changes that had led to a wave of unemployment and disappearance of available jobs, coupled with the rise of gangs and the crack cocaine epidemic, devastated the area. During this difficult and turbulent time, even as South Central was gaining a wide reputation for its impoverished and struggling black community, its population became increasingly more Latinx, and by the year 2000 there were more Latinx than African-Americans in the area.

Unfortunately, relatively few traces of Central Avenue's glory days remain. The Dunbar still stands and has undergone multiple renovations, and currently serves as a source of low-income housing for the elderly. The Lincoln Theatre has also survived and is now a Latinx community church. The 28th Street YMCA, one of the only remaining club buildings founded by and for African-Americans and a major milestone for recreational life on Central Avenue, was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009. The Golden State Mutual Insurance Building, built in 1925 for one of the first major black-owned businesses in South Central, also still stands. The Central Ave Jazz Park, located right across the street from the Dunbar, is one of the venues for the Central Avenue Jazz Festival that has been held annually since 1996. The festival spotlights jazz, blues, and Latin Jazz artists who got their start in the area, local high school bands and choirs, and young musicians from across Los Angeles. It is a free, non-commercial event that aims to preserve the legacy of Central Avenue and promote the local community.

One of South Central's biggest hurdles today is gentrification. As USC continues to expand into the area, organizations such as Community Coalition and Strategic Actions for a Just Economy work to combat displacement of the residents who have always lived there. Local activist Skira Martinez says, "The history of South Central says and shows it all, and as a community, we have no choice but to actively resist by the many means necessary and available. For many, to say that this is life or death is not an exaggeration."



The Dunbar Hotel today. Credit: Our Weekly Los Angeles