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The Sierra Madre Playhouse Continues to Talk Race in Theatre

BY PATRICK PIZZOLORUSSO
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A recent \$15,000 grant makes work at this California venue



The Sierra Madre Playhouse was recently bestowed a \$15,000 grant by the Sherri And Les Biller Family Foundation for its upcoming production of Thomas Gibbons' *Bee-luther-hatchee*. The foundation awards grants to "inspire and fund immersive educational experiences." They seek out productions with "content that promotes important and timely social issues." This is the first major foundation grant awarded to the Sierra Madre Playhouse. Over the past year, we have been the recipients of several smaller awards such as the Tournament of Roses and the L.A. County Arts grants, but this is a big date.

When applying for the grant, artistic director Christian Lebrano said, "We anticipated \$5,000. We are thrilled to be recognized and are honored to be in the same company as ACT in Seattle, the **Center Theatre Group**, and the Geffen. It's so validating to be part of this group of theatres." The money from the grant will go directly to producing *Bee-luther-hatchee* and funding talkbacks. Lebrano hopes to encourage and continue the conversations about race and the themes of race appropriation that

Bee-luther-hatchee is the story of Shelita Burns, an African-American editor who publishes *Bee-luther-hatchee*, the autobiography of a reclusive 72-year-old black woman named Libby Price. Shelita has never met Libby, and when the book wins a Pulitzer Prize, she decides to deliver it to her in person. To her profound shock, the actual author of the book is not whom Shelita expected. The play offers a provocative look at cultural appropriation and who has the right to tell someone's story. The play opened January 11 and runs through February 18. There are talkbacks scheduled after every performance as well as panel discussions to keep the conversation moving forward. Something Lebrano feels is necessary in today's political climate.

The Sierra Madre Playhouse is located in Sierra Madre, California, 40 minutes from downtown L.A. The remainder of this summer's musical, The Marvelous Wonderettes, and A Wrinkle In Time as part of their school outreach, The Firebird can be reserved at 626-355-4318 or at SierraMadrePlayhouse.org.

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