



ALTERNATIVE THEATER ENSEMBLE PRESENTS *DINÉ NISHŁĮ (I AM A SACRED BEING)* OR, A BOARDING SCHOOL PLAY

February 15, 2024—Alternative Theater Ensemble ([AlterTheater](#)) is proud to present *Diné Nishłį (i am a sacred being) or, A Boarding School Play*, written by **Blossom Johnson** and directed by **Daniel Leeman Smith**.

AlterTheater's commission culminates in a **workshop production** of Johnson's script **April 8-12, 2024**. The reading will be featured as the inaugural showcase of AlterTheater's **Indigenous Performing Arts Residency**, a collaborative initiative piloted by the **University of California Berkeley's Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies** and **Arts Research Center**. AlterTheater's residency extends from 2024-2026, offering the opportunity to produce new work by an Indigenous performance-based artist each spring of the residency's duration.

Diné Nishłį (i am a sacred being) or, A Boarding School Play is a humorous and poignant exploration of coming of age and coming into identity, set in 2001-2 at a prep school on the Navajo Reservation that was formerly an American Indian boarding school. With the backdrop of the events of 9/11 and the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, four teenage girls participate in a traditional song and dance group to celebrate their Navajo heritage. Along the way, they encounter the spirited opinions of their teachers, the ghosts of the school's history, and the visions of their future.

"This play celebrates Diné language, songs and culture in the best way I know," Johnson shares. "There are so many elements of Diné storytelling in this play, and I hope Diné people feel empowered and encouraged to learn something new about their culture. Maybe they will walk away with one song or remember a time when they were young and heard their grandparents singing."

The staged readings will feature performances by **Honokee Dunn** (Shawna), **Sage Hemstreet** (Rosie), **Lea McCormick** (Ms. B), **Zoey Reyes** (Kaylene), **Sabrina Saleha** (Jolene), and **Shawna Shandiin Sunrise** (Ms. K). Each reading will be followed by an open conversation with the playwright.

Blossom Johnson is a Diné storyteller, playwright, teaching artist and screenwriter. She is from the Yé'ii Dine'é Táchii'nii (Giant People) clan, and her maternal grandfather is from the Deeshchíí'nii (Start of the Red Streak People) clan. When she creates, she writes for her people. In her writing, she reveals truths that are hard to face but she balances the darkness with humor, so the viewer has a chance to breathe and laugh.

Blossom was awarded a residency with Willowtail Springs/Durango PlayFest. Additionally, she has been awarded AlterTheater Ensemble's AlterLab 2020-21, the 2022 First Peoples Fund Cultural Capital Fellowship, La Lengua/ AlterTheater Ensemble's Decolonization Stories Commission 2022, The Playwrights' Center 2022-2023 Jerome Fellowship, and is proud to be a recipient of the Minnesota State Arts Board Creative Support for Individuals 2023. Blossom holds an MFA in Dramaturgy from Columbia University and a BA in Theatre from Arizona State University.

Daniel Leeman Smith is a proud two-spirit citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma currently based in New York City. He is a director, playwright, and theater educator whose work is often positioned at the intersection of community, art, education, and activism with a focus on Native joy. Daniel is a doctoral candidate in the program of Educational Theatre in Colleges and Communities at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, where his work is grounded in applied theater and ethnodrama with a focus on decolonial practice in the theater. He is currently an Adjunct Professor of Theatre Studies in the Department of Drama at the NYU Tisch School of the Arts where he currently teaches Approaching Indigenous Theatre. He is a member of the Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab, as well as an alumnus of the SDC Observership Program, and Lincoln Center Education's Teaching Artist Development Lab. He earned his BFA and MA at Oklahoma City University and completed the graduate theater conservatory program in physical and devised theater at the SIT Company. Daniel is also the 2014 recipient of the New York City Pride Award.

AlterTheater seeks to create a more just, equitable community by supporting the creative growth of theater artists from historically underrepresented communities, and telling stories that reflect the full complexity and diversity of our community. Their work centers the spiritual and emotional well-being of Black and Indigenous people, casting roles in ways that break stereotypes rather than reinforce them and creating opportunities for both established and emerging artists to learn and support each other in their craft.

For more information, please contact [Zoë Sonnenberg](#).

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