

LEVIATHAN LAB

425 West 18th Street, Suite 11F | New York, NY 10011 | 347-581-3047 | leviathanlab.org | EIN: 61-1732369

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LEVIATHAN LAB, THE PERFORMANCE PROJECT AT UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT,
THE SONG COLLECTIVE, BETTERFLY PRODUCTIONS, AND NEW YORK THEATRE WORKSHOP
PRESENT

A ONE-NIGHT-ONLY BENEFIT READING OF

LEARNING HOW TO READ BY MOONLIGHT

a play with music by **GAVEN D. TRINIDAD**

directed by **NICHOLAS POLONIO**

with guest community reader **BABA ISRAEL**

Thursday, March 26, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Speyer Hall | 184 Eldridge Street, Manhattan

Tickets: \$5-\$100

RESERVE TICKETS: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/learning-how-to-read-by-moonlight-tickets-1982766835981>

A FUNDRAISER FOR THE ADULT ENGLISH CLASSES AT UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT

No one will be turned away for their ability to pay. Should you need pricing accommodations, please contact Ariel Estrada at ariel@leviathanlab.com.

New York, NY, March 16, 2026. [Leviathan Lab](#), [The Performance Project at University Settlement](#), [The Sóng Collective](#), [Betterfly Productions](#), and [New York Theatre Workshop](#) present a one-night-only benefit reading of *LEARNING HOW TO READ BY MOONLIGHT*, a new play with music by [Gaven D. Trinidad](#) (Rising Leader of Color, Theatre Communications Group), directed by [Nicholas Polonio](#) (Associate Director, *SLAVE PLAY*, Broadway) with puppets by [Maria Camia](#) (Jim Henson Foundation Grantee). The reading takes place Thursday, March 26, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. at Speyer Hall, 184 Eldridge Street in Manhattan. Tickets range from \$5 to \$100, with no one turned away for their ability to pay. All proceeds support the Adult English Classes at University Settlement, which offer free ESOL instruction at multiple levels to adult immigrant students throughout the week. Established in 1886 as the first Settlement House in the United States, University Settlement has worked alongside its neighbors in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn for nearly 140 years to name and fight poverty and systemic inequality.

Under the moonlight, six-year-old Eddie imagines a dragon eating moons. His mother prays to a statue of Santo Niño. His father waits alone in Manila for their daily phone calls. Songs from a mythical giant turtle travel across oceans but are drowned out by the voices of Presidents Duterte and Trump on television and across the internet. As fantasy and reality become indistinguishable, a young, immigrant Filipino family is forced to confront the one question it can never answer: "Where do I call *home*?" The play is performed in English and Tagalog.

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The play employs a defining structural element: at every performance, a guest narrator joins the cast, a local community organizer, activist, or artist chosen to highlight and celebrate the communities the play speaks to and with. Having neither rehearsed the full script nor seen the play before, they experience the story for the first time alongside the audience. For this reading, that community reader is Hip Hop theater artist, poet, and educator [Baba Israel](#), Artistic Director of The Performance Project at University Settlement and co-founder of Playback NYC, the first playback theater company to integrate freestyle Hip Hop.

The play is performed in English and Filipino, bringing the full texture of the community it centers onstage and into the room.

LEARNING HOW TO READ BY MOONLIGHT was developed with the long-time support of Leviathan Lab and made its world premiere in May 2025 in Boston in a co-production between CHUANG Stage and Company One. It earned a Boston Critics' Pick and toured to immigrant communities across the city during its run.

THE CAST

The all-Filipino cast features **SERGIO MAURITZ ANG** (FROM NUMBER TO NAME, East West Players) as Eddie; **VANESSA RAPPA** (Off-Off-Broadway: SCRIBBLED LINES, Poetic Theater Productions) as Jimmy; **KRISTIAN ESPIRITU** (Off-Broadway: HERE LIES LOVE; INTERSTATE, East West Players) as Nanay; **CLARO DE LOS REYES** (Off-Broadway: NO-NO BOY and SHOGUN MACBETH, Pan Asian Repertory Theatre; Film: *The Plane* [Jean-Francois Richet, dir.]; Founder/Director, Atlantic Pacific Theatre) as Tatay; and **PATRICK ELIZALDE** as Kuya.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

Additional creative team members include projection design by **CINTHIA CHEN** (Off-Broadway: AMERICAN (TELE)VISIONS, NYTW; SUITE/Space Resident, Mabou Mines). **SARAH SAMONTE** serves as Stage Manager, with **SOOMIN SUN** as Assistant to the Director. The production is produced by **GAVEN D. TRINIDAD**, **CAROLINA ĐỒ** (Co-Producing Artistic Director, The Sóng Collective and Betterfly Productions), and **ARIEL ESTRADA** (Producing Artistic Director, Leviathan Lab).

CARE ADVISORY

LEARNING HOW TO READ BY MOONLIGHT explores urgent issues faced by Filipino communities in the United States, including mental health, racism, government-sanctioned police violence, and xenophobia. Leviathan Lab invites its audiences to bear witness to each other's humanity and to lean in with empathy and love so that all may support one another throughout the production.

SUPPORT LEVIATHAN LAB: leviathanlab.org/supportleviathanlab

PERFORMERS' UNIONS

We wish to express our gratitude to the Performers' Unions:

ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION

AMERICAN GUILD OF MUSICAL ARTISTS

AMERICAN GUILD OF VARIETY ARTISTS

SAG-AFTRA

through Theatre Authority, Inc. for their cooperation in permitting the Artists to appear in this program.

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ABOUT LEVIATHAN LAB

Leviathan Lab is an award-winning not-for-profit creative studio advancing Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) performing artists and their work. Through the speaking of AANHPI artists' words, and the presentation of AANHPI bodies, presence, and gestures, Leviathan opens spaces that repair harm, center social justice, and prove the power of art to change the world. We function as a laboratory where artists can be courageous, experiment, and thrive, even as they create works that move the communities they are rooted in. www.leviathanlab.org

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE PROJECT AT UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT

The Performance Project at University Settlement creates community-centered performance and social practice arts in partnership with intergenerational participants. University Settlement works alongside 40,000 New Yorkers in Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn each year, building on collective strengths to achieve healthy, stable, and remarkable lives. Established in 1886 as the first Settlement House in the United States, University Settlement has named and fought poverty and systemic inequality for nearly 140 years, developing responsive social programs in genuine partnership with neighbors. The Adult English Classes offer free ESOL instruction at a range of levels to adult immigrant students during daytime, evening, and weekend hours. The Performance Project at University Settlement is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, and supported in part by public funds from the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. www.universitysettlement.org

ABOUT BABA ISRAEL

Baba Israel is a Hip Hop theater artist, poet, educator, and consultant raised in New York by parents who were core members of the Living Theatre. He is the Artistic Director of The Performance Project at University Settlement and co-founder of Playback NYC Theatre Company, the first playback theater company to integrate freestyle Hip Hop. The company brings theater to hospitals, prisons, shelters, theaters, and festivals, reaching communities that are systematically denied access to live performance. Israel has toured and developed work in thirty-four countries, frequently as a cultural ambassador with the U.S. State Department. He has shared the stage with artists including KRS-One, Outkast, and Philip Glass, and holds an MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts from Goddard College, where he studied with Daniel Alexander Jones. www.babaisrael.com

ABOUT GAVEN D. TRINIDAD

[Gaven D. Trinidad](http://www.gaventrinidadtheatre.com) (they/he) is a brown, first-generation, gender non-conforming Filipino American theater maker, playwright, director, dramaturg, and arts administrator based in New York City. Recognized as a Rising Leader of Color by Theatre Communications Group (TCG), Gaven brings a deep commitment to storytelling that centers Asian American, Global Majority, LGBTQIA2S+, and neurodiverse voices. Their original work has been developed and produced by Leviathan Lab, Company One, CHUANG Stage, and Orchard Project, among others. Gaven is a current member and co-facilitator of the Ma-Yi Writers Lab, and serves as Marketing Manager of Audience and Community Engagement at Signature Theatre Company. As an artist living with Bipolar Disorder, they are dedicated to responsible, empathetic representation of mental health and neurodiversity on and off the stage. *LEARNING HOW TO READ BY MOONLIGHT* received a Boston Critics' Pick at its world premiere and is a core work in Leviathan Lab's ongoing artistic life. www.gaventrinidadtheatre.com

ABOUT NICHOLAS POLONIO

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Nicholas Polonio is a Filipino-American theater director based in New York City whose work centers detailed performances of revelatory human behavior. He serves as Director-in-Residence at Leviathan Lab. He has directed and developed work with Ars Nova, New York Theatre Workshop, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Bedlam, Ma-Yi Theater Company, Hangar Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and the American Playwriting Foundation. As Associate Director, his credits include *SLAVE PLAY* (Broadway, West End, and the Mark Taper Forum), *PUBLIC OBSCENITIES* (Soho Rep), *JELLY'S LAST JAM* (Encores!, New York City Center), and *X: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MALCOLM X* (Metropolitan Opera). A former New York Theatre Workshop 2050 Directing Fellow and Drama League Directing Fellow, he is currently on directing faculty at the Playwrights Horizons Theater School at NYU Tisch. Proud member of SDC. www.nicholaspolonio.com

ABOUT CAROLINA ĐỒ

Carolina ĐỒ is a theater maker, playwright, community organizer, and proud descendant of Vietnamese freedom fighters and refugees. She is a Co-Founding Producing Artistic Leader of The Sóng Collective and Associate Director for Community Engagement at PlayCo. An alum of the Soho Rep Writer-Director Lab, JACKLabs, and the Orchard Project Greenhouse Lab, her writing has been supported by residencies and fellowships at MacDowell, JACK, The Hearth, and Naked Angels, and has been recognized as a finalist for the Sokhary Chau Fellowship, Leah Ryan Fund, and the Bushwick Starr. She is currently a Ma-Yi Lab Playground member and part of the Episodic Theater Project Writers Cohort. Her community organizing is grounded in radical care, with work spanning anti-deportation efforts, mutual aid, and support for undocumented communities. Founding member of Asians4Abolition. carolinado.com

ABOUT MARIA CAMIA

Maria Camia is a Brooklyn-based Filipino-American visual theater artist and puppeteer from Virginia Beach who bridges indigenous Filipino roots with galactic futurism in her work. She holds an MFA in Theater from Sarah Lawrence College, and her original productions have been presented at the Chicago International Puppet Festival, Dixon Place, and La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club. She is a two-time recipient of the Jim Henson Foundation Workshop and Production Grants for her full-length works *NEW MONY!* and *THE HEALING SHIPMENT*, and a recipient of the Miranda Family Grant, the Puffin Grant, and the NYC Women's Fund for Media, Music, and Theatre. She previously co-directed and designed puppets for *LEARNING HOW TO READ BY MOONLIGHT* in Leviathan Lab's 2023 workshop production. www.maricama.com

ABOUT NEW YORK THEATRE WORKSHOP

New York Theatre Workshop is one of America's leading not-for-profit theaters and a community of artists and audience members committed to understanding the world through live performance. For over forty years, NYTW has cultivated a space where common humanity is affirmed and audiences are challenged and moved by the vision of its artists. NYTW supports theater-makers through residencies, fellowships, and workshops that give artists the freedom to experiment without the pressure of commercial outcomes. Productions developed at NYTW have won the Pulitzer Prize and twenty-five Tony Awards, including the original productions of *Rent* and *Hadestown*. www.nytw.org

ABOUT THE SÓNG COLLECTIVE

The Sóng Collective is a New York City-based theater company whose mission is to reclaim the Vietnamese American narrative by creating development and performance opportunities for emerging artists of color. Founded in 2019, The Sóng Collective nurtures a community of artists whose work

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explores identity, race, intersectionality, immigration, and the refugee experience, with a commitment to injecting Vietnamese American stories, as told by Vietnamese American artists, into the American theater canon. The organization has collaborated with over 150 artists, supported fifteen new plays, and hosted three writers labs. thesongcollectivenyc.org

ABOUT BETTERFLY PRODUCTIONS

[Betterfly Productions](http://www.butterflyproductions.com) is a New York City-based production company that collaborates with artists from immigrant communities around the world to tell stories for both stage and screen. Founded by [Vas Eli](#) and [Carolina Đỗ](#), Betterfly centers the stories that the mainstream has historically excluded, with a particular commitment to work that reflects the full complexity of immigrant lives.
www.butterflyproductions.com

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