

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Literal Royalty

UC Santa Barbara's [Risa Brainin](#) is about to have a dream come true, and the community will be one of its biggest beneficiaries. Brainin, professor and chair of the [Department of Theater and Dance](#), will collaborate with Joyce Carol Oates, one of the country's greatest literary figures, to produce a public reading of Oates's play "Bad Touch" Thursday, July 7, at 7 p.m. in the UCSB Art, Design & Architecture Museum.

The reading is part of UCSB's [LAUNCH PAD](#) Summer Reading Series, which brings professional playwrights to the campus to work with Brainin, guest artists and students to develop new plays. "Bad Touch" is the third and final production of the series.

For Brainin, LAUNCH PAD's artistic director, the opportunity to collaborate with Oates comes 21 years after directing the author's "Tone Clusters" at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. The production was Brainin's introduction to Oates and to her work, and she was hooked. "One of my favorite books was 'We Were the Mulvaney's,' " she recalled. "For many years, I fantasized about asking Joyce if she wanted to turn it into a play, but never did.

"Since I started teaching directing, I have used 'Tone Clusters' as a play for young directors to study and work on," Brainin continued. "A few months ago, after working on the play in class, I finally got the nerve to write to Joyce, tell her about LAUNCH PAD and ask if she wanted to turn 'We Were the Mulvaney's' into a play. She responded within the hour! While she didn't have the time (or perhaps the inclination) for that project, she sent me 'Bad Touch' for consideration. Of course, I

was thrilled for the opportunity to work with her on her latest play.”

Oates, who remembered Brainin, welcomed the chance to come to UCSB and collaborate on “Bad Touch.” “An invitation from Risa Brainin could not be resisted!” the author said. “The LAUNCH PAD series sounds just wonderful. It will be a pleasure and very helpful to work with Risa next week.”

“Bad Touch” revolves around Hypathia Applebaum, a feisty, idealistic young woman who moves to a small Midwestern town to teach. Before long, her sharp tongue and sense of humor land her in trouble. Originally written as a short story, its only publication was in the literary magazine AGNI in 1993. “The story was never published in any story collection of mine because I’d wanted to recast it as a play,” Oates explained. “The dramatic possibilities of a headstrong young woman in a conventional community seemed exciting to me.”

The play received its first professional reading at the New York Society Library in 2015. Oates revised it “immediately afterward, mainly editing and trimming,” she noted. Because “Bad Touch” is dominated by one character, she said, casting is crucial for the LAUNCH PAD reading. “All plays require very good casting, but some plays particularly require ‘perfect’ casting — this is one of them. There must be a convincing, believable Hypathia, otherwise the play will not work, or at least will be dramatically weakened. So I am eager to see how Risa has cast or will cast it.”

For her part, Brainin is eager to work with Oates again. “Joyce Carol Oates is one of the greatest writers of our time. Having worked on ‘Tone Clusters,’ I know her plays to be powerful. I can’t wait to be in the room together with actors working on this piece.”

This summer’s reading series is the first being held in the Art, Design & Architecture Museum, and Brainin promised it won’t be the last. “It has been wonderful to collaborate with the museum on the reading series,” she said. “Elyse Gonzales, Lety Garcia and all of the staff have been so welcoming. All of us in the Department of Theater and Dance are grateful for their generosity and hospitality.”

The reading is free and open to the public.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.