

## ENTERTAINMENT

# 'The Last Play by Rickérby Hinds'

The autobiographical piece holds significance for the playwright

By Jessica Koslow

LA Downtown News Contributor

When the Latino Theater Company chose Rickérby Hinds as one of its 10 playwrights commissioned to write works on Latinidad, or its Circle of Imaginistas, the professor of theater, film and digital production at UC Riverside was stuck. He started one play, then stopped. He started another, but the words did not flow.

"One day it just hit me," Hinds explained. "What if I wrote a play about trying to write a play, which is something I vowed I would never do: writing about writing."

What he did write, "The Last Play by Rickérby Hinds," opens on Saturday, April 26, at The Los Angeles Theatre Center and runs through Sunday, May 25, with six previews from Thursday, April 17, through Friday, April 25.

"I decided that I would write this in the state of mind that this would be the last play that I write," he continued. "With that freedom, 'The Last Play' started to flow. The play itself is being narrated by the playwright as the playwright is writing the play that they are narrating."

In this work, the character — a playwright named Rickérby Hinds — decides that to overcome his writer's block, he will bring to life the characters from his previous plays, and they will inspire him.

However, once the characters are animated and free, they realize that they have been trapped in a space that Hinds refers to as a heap, where they were not being produced.

This leads to greater enlightenment as they recognize that the playwright is attempting to create more characters that are unlikely to be produced. Instead of helping him, they decide to kill him, which, in this context, translates to no longer inspiring him, resulting in his demise as a writer.

"It is about this Afro-Latino playwright making the case for their existence," Hinds said. "The character has moments of rants, where he goes off about something, and moments of memoirs, where he remembers something that played a role in getting him to where he is in his life, such as the last time he saw his father. Or being so happy when he heard August Wilson died because he knew the Black slot at regional theaters would open up. Or the first time he heard someone telling stories in Honduras. The character Hinds has to convince the characters that he deserves to live, which in this case means to write."

In working on this play, Hinds felt the most free he has ever been in his career as a playwright. It represents his most personal work since his thesis, "Birthmark," which chronicled his family's immigration from Honduras to the United



Rickérby Hinds is a playwright and professor of theater, film and digital production at UC Riverside.

(Chris Mortenson/Staff)

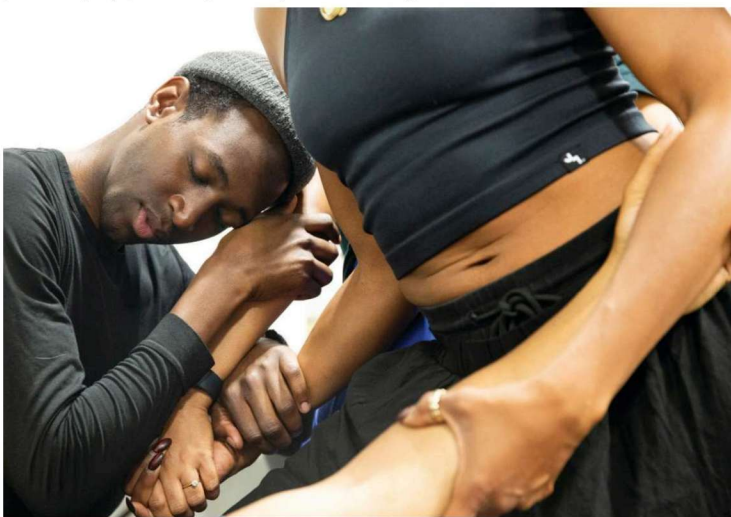
States and the experience of his father's death.

"This play allows me to address things that I have never had the opportunity to in any of my work," said Hinds, whose previous plays include 'Daze to Come,' 'Blackballin,' 'Straight From Tha Underground,' 'Keep Hedz Ringin' and 'Buckworld One.' "This play, unlike any other, is such a living thing. It is a surreal kind of space that I am existing in; I am seeing the play evolve and develop."

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Writing a play like this can make a playwright feel exposed and vulnerable. Hinds addressed uncomfortable topics and less-than-proud moments, such as the time he believed his play would be produced on the Mark Taper Forum stage, only for the artistic director to attend a reading and fall asleep.

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The cast of "The Last Play by Rickérby Hinds" works on choreography for the opening scene.

(Chris Mortenson/Staff)



"The Last Play by Rickérby Hinds" is "about this Afro Latino playwright making the case for their existence," Hinds said.

(Chris Mortenson/Staff)

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"I have to balance my vulnerability and insecurities with writing an amazing play," Hinds shared. "Ultimately, how do I engage an audience, bring an audience to a place where they feel that loss in something that they have done in their own lives? It is great and awkward being in the room. It is a fascinating space to be in."

Hinds has been navigating the dual space between academia and theater for more than two decades. He views himself as straddling the two worlds.

"The academic space is a great space for artists to be able to create work, exist, and have support," he said. "I am an outsider, but I am also on the inside. I would joke academia is not created for artists. We are interlopers in this space. In the play, I question Rickérby's presence in academia because his plays have

not been performed in prestigious theaters. How is this person a professor at a university? It is self-deprecating in ways that are enlightening, humorous and thought-provoking."

Hinds moved to the United States around the age of 13. In middle school, he observed his classmates to understand how he was expected to act as a teenage Black man in this world. During his senior year of high school, a play written by his English drama teacher, Rory Pullens, deeply affected him. As an undergraduate, he wrote a play honoring Martin Luther King Jr., and the moment he saw the audience react, he was hooked. These experiences helped define the Afro Latino hip-hop storyteller Hinds is today.

"This is a story that I am supposed to tell right now," he said, "as if it is the last chance I get to say something to the world."