

# DKC O&M

## TOWN&COUNTRY

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### BACKSTAGE News

Want to see the future of Broadway? Peek behind the curtain. BY NAVEEN KUMAR

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATHRYN WIRSING

“I feel like Cinderella at the ball,” says playwright Douglas Lyons, who makes his Broadway debut this month with the comedy *Chicken & Biscuits*. “I’m speechless, humbled, and ooh baby I’m ready.”

Marquees are once again lighting up midtown Manhattan, as an age old artform aims for a historic fresh start—but this season a group of new names will be illuminated. Alongside perennial juggernauts driven by aspiring witches and talking jungle cats, a rising class of theater visionaries are pushing Broadway’s boundaries with stories and forms different from anything we’ve seen before.

If this season is marking the dawn of a new age in American theater, it’s also announcing a rising class of writers and directors ready to make their mark by bending Broadway’s accepted rules or breaking them entirely. This year 16 playwrights and directors are making their Broadway debuts, and these newcomers are conceiving novel means of expressing essential truths about the present—and of imagining an unpredictable future.

“We as storytellers must experiment and challenge ourselves to create characters and stories in new, inventive ways,” says playwright Keenan Scott II, whose *Thoughts of a Colored*

*Man*, directed by Steve H. Broadnax III, arrives at the Golden Theatre. The play fuses rhythm and poetry to excavate the inner lives of seven Black men over the course of a single day in Brooklyn. “It’s our responsibility as artists to reflect the times, while weaving in a layer of hope for what’s to come,” Scott says.

Playwright Antoinette Chinonye Nwandu and director Danya Taymor have similar aims

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as they team up on *Pass Over*, an incisive remix of the Book of Exodus and *Waiting for Godot* that interrogates the constant threat to Black lives posed by the police. The three-actor production was the first play performed on Broadway post-shutdown, and it’s the first by a Black writer at the August Wilson Theatre.

Of course, not all truths need to be imagined; some can be recreated verbatim. Tina Satter, the director and conceiver of *Is This a Room*, transformed an FBI transcript into a taut and gripping drama about the arrest of Reality Winner, a young military contractor accused of leaking a top secret government document. “Life, culture, and stories are always inherently evolving at a molecular level to be in resonance and conversation with themselves,” Satter says. The production, which previously ran to great acclaim off-Broadway, plays in repertory with another searing docudrama, Lucas Hnath’s *Dana H.*, at the Lyceum Theatre.

A few blocks north, at Circle in the Square, a family reunited by a funeral is forced to grapple with a newly revealed secret in Lyons’s *Chicken & Biscuits*, starring Michael Urie and Norm Lewis. The production will make its director, Zhailon Levingston, 27, the youngest Black director in Broadway history.

“I’m a supreme champion of new works,” Lyons says. “I’d love to see a future Broadway season without any revivals. Theater is powerful, it has a reach, and I want to make sure we aren’t reaching the same people over and over again.” TAC



GROOMING BY JULIETTE PERREUX



**DOUGLAS LYONS**  
The playwright’s *Chicken & Biscuits*, directed by Zhailon Levingston, opens at Circle in the Square October 10.

**TINA SATTER**  
*Is This a Room* will mark writer-director Satter’s Broadway debut when it opens October 11 at the Lyceum.

**STEVE H. BROADNAX III AND KEENAN SCOTT II**  
*Thoughts of a Colored Man*, written by Scott and directed by Broadnax, opens October 31 at the Golden Theatre.

**DANYA TAYMOR**  
*Pass Over*, directed by Taymor and written by Antoinette Chinonye Nwandu, is open now at the August Wilson.