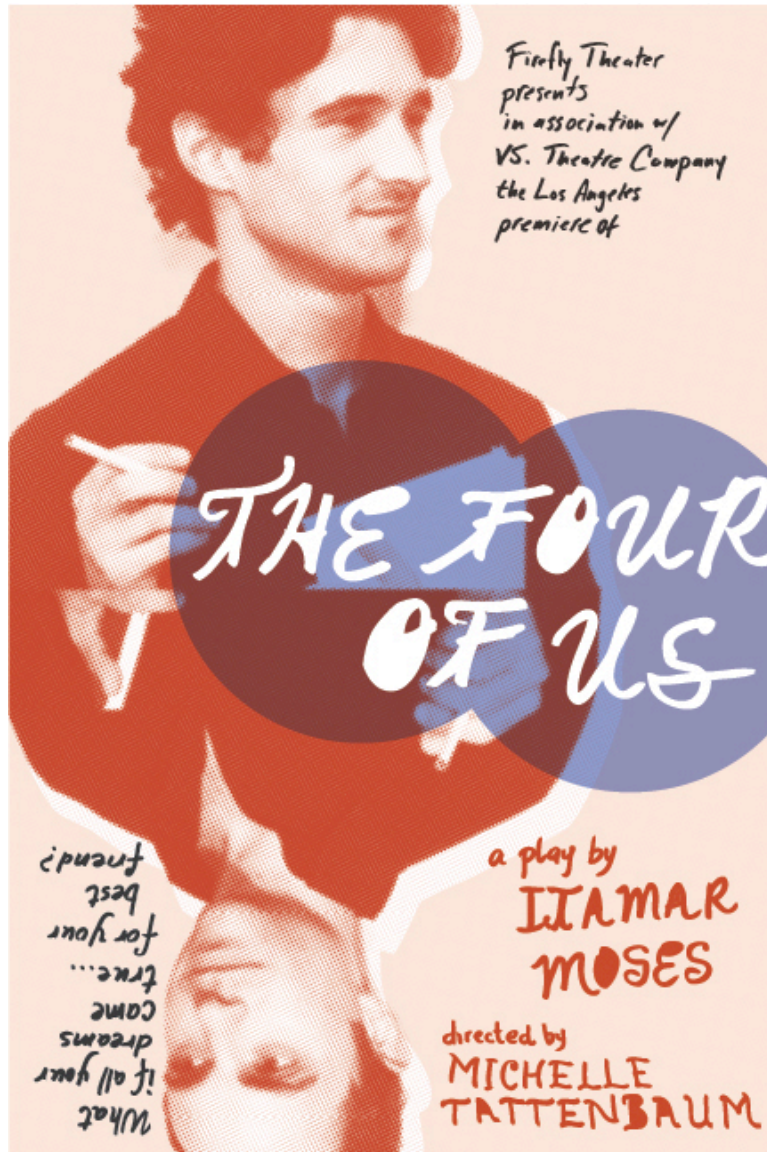


# *The Four of Us*

press packet



## Contents:

- ☐ Press Release;
- ☐ Program;
- ☐ Press Excerpts & Awards; and
- ☐ *Los Angeles Times* feature article.

**FIREFLY THEATER SET TO PREMIERE ITAMAR MOSES' WORK IN LA**  
**"THE FOUR OF US" BEGINS SEPT. 5 FOR LIMITED ENGAGEMENT**

*The Four of Us*, a touching new comedy by one of America's leading young playwrights, is set for its Los Angeles premiere by Firefly Theater in association with VS. Theatre Company. Performances at the Elephant Theatre Lab begin Friday, September 5 for a limited engagement through Sunday, October 19. Opening is Friday, September 12 at 8pm.

Firefly's production of *The Four of Us* will introduce the work of award-winning playwright **Itamar Moses** to Los Angeles. Tom Stoppard has called Itamar Moses "a splash in the making," and, at 31, Mr. Moses is now one of America's leading playwrights of any age. This fall, he will have five simultaneous premieres across the US, including three in California (Berkeley Rep, The Old Globe in San Diego, and this Firefly/VS production in Los Angeles), one in Chicago (American Theatre Company), and Off-Broadway at Manhattan Theatre Club.

What if all your dreams came true...for your best friend? *The Four of Us* follows Ben, whose first novel vaults him into literary stardom, and his friend David, a struggling playwright, who is thrilled by Ben's success...and crushed by it. From the dreams of aspiring youth to the realities of adulthood, this poignant two-man comedy explores friendship and memory, the gap between our hopes and our lives, and the struggles between our egos and our capacity to love. *Time Out New York* called the recent MTC run of *The Four of Us*, "an extremely clever and enjoyable study of friendship...funny, touching, and wickedly smart," and *The New York Times'* Charles Isherwood called it "a clever comic drama with a nifty twist...a touching, appealing play."

The LA production, directed by **Michelle Tattenbaum**, will feature **Steven Klein** and **Ryan Johnston**. Klein's acting and producing in Los Angeles has garnered dozens of LA theatre awards and nominations, and his local stage credits include Charles in *An Infinite Ache* (Black Dahlia); the Foole opposite James Gammon's *King Lear* (MET Theatre); Yellow Kid in *Ragged Time* and Sean in *Orson's Shadow* (Black Dahlia); and his LA debut in *Shopping & Fucking* at Celebration Theatre. Johnston's recent credits include playing Patrick McCreary in *Grand Theft Auto IV*; and in LA theatre, Johnston has won acclaim for his starring role in Jane Martin's *Flags* at the Odyssey Theatre and has worked with Firefly Theater, The Ark Theatre, and the Black Dahlia. Last fall, Johnston and Klein produced and starred in the Off-Broadway premiere of *Flags* at 59E59, presented by Firefly Theater. The design team for *The Four of Us* includes **Mark Guirguis** (set and props), **Leigh Allen** (lights), **Rachel Myers** (costumes), and **Joel Spence** (sound). The production stage manager is **Iлона Pacek**.

Playwright **Itamar Moses** is the author of the full-length plays *Outrage*, *Bach at Leipzig*, *Celebrity Row*, *The Four of Us*, *Yellowjackets*, *Back Back Back*, and *Completeness*, and various short plays and one-acts. He is presently adapting Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* for the stage with composer Michael Friedman and director Daniel Aukin. His work has appeared Off-Broadway and at regional theatres across the country and in Canada, and has been published by Faber & Faber, Heinemann Press, Playscripts Inc., Samuel French, Inc., and Vintage. He has received new play commissions from The McCarter Theater, Playwrights Horizons, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The Wilma Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, South Coast Repertory, and Lincoln Center Theater (Allison M. Blinken Fund Commission). Itamar holds an MFA in Dramatic Writing from NYU and has taught playwriting at Yale and NYU. He is a member of the Dramatists

Guild, MCC Playwrights Coalition, Naked Angels Mag 7, and is a New York Theatre Workshop Usual Suspect. He was born in Berkeley, CA, and now lives in Brooklyn, NY.

This will mark director **Michelle Tattenbaum**'s first collaboration with Firefly Theater and her LA debut. Ms. Tattenbaum directs extensively in NY and in regional theatre. In the 2006-2007 season, she directed and co-produced *The Sublet Experiment*, a site-specific, touring production that played to sold-out crowds in New York City for over six months. Some recent NY highlights: *The Chromium Hook* (by Itamar Moses) for the NY Musical Theatre Festival, MTC, and Lincoln Center Directors' Lab; *Untitled Short Play* and *Szinhaz* for Naked Angels; *Gallathea* (which she also adapted) at Here Arts Center; and *An Archipelago Of Clouds* and *Laughing All the Way From the Sperm Bank* at FringeNYC. Recent regional highlights: *Tales From the Bad Years* at Goodspeed Musicals; *Pinocchio*, *Anatol*, and *Gallathea* at the Hangar Theatre; *Educating Rita*, *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*, *Cats*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Baby* at the New London Barn Playhouse; and two summers at Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. Michelle was a two-time Drama League Directing Fellow and is a Yale Theatre Studies graduate.

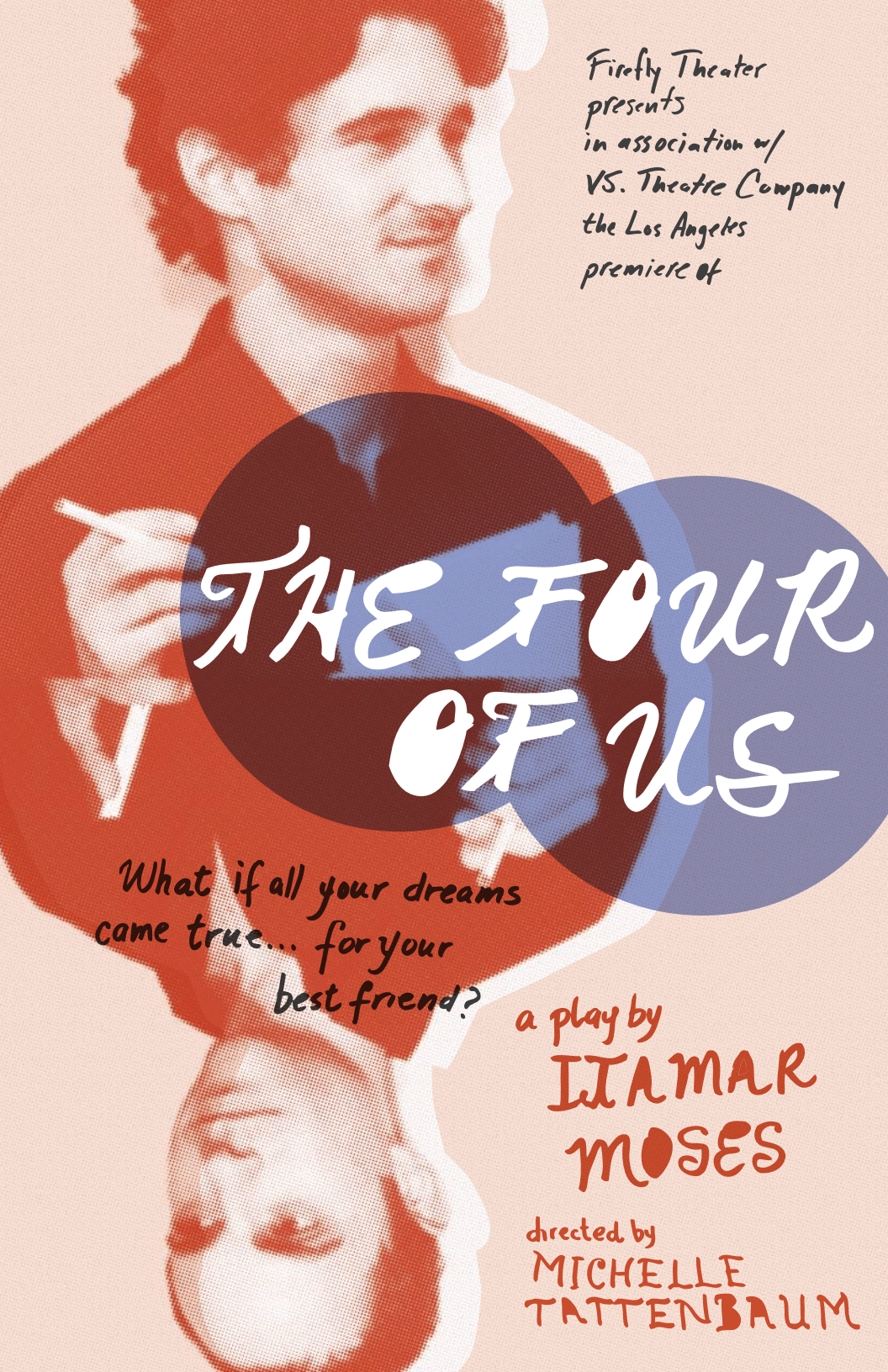
***The Four of Us*** will be presented at The Elephant Theatre Lab, at 1076 N. Lillian Way (at Santa Monica Boulevard) in Hollywood. Preview performances are Friday, September 5 at 8:00pm; Saturday, September 6 at 8:00pm; Sunday, September 7 at 3:00pm; and Thursday, September 11 at 8:00pm. Opening night is set for Friday, September 12 at 8:00pm. Performances run through October 19, Thursday through Saturday at 8:00pm with Sunday matinees at 3:00pm. There is no performance on Thursday, October 9. Preview tickets are \$15 and regular seats are \$25. Tickets are available via phone at (800) 838-3006 and online at [www.fireflyinc.com](http://www.fireflyinc.com).

The **Firefly Theater** was founded in 1996 at Yale and then moved to LA along with its founder, Steven Klein, where it has mounted productions from Mamet to Shephard to Shakespeare. Meanwhile, Klein worked closely with fellow Yale alum Matt Shakman on the founding of the Black Dahlia Theatre. Klein's LA theatre work as an actor and producer has earned over 25 awards and nominations while helping the Black Dahlia get named "One of a dozen young American companies you need to know" by *American Theatre*. As a producer, his work includes the LA world-premiere of Geraldine Hughes' acclaimed *Belfast Blues* and its subsequent international runs. In all, Klein's work includes award-winning productions in Boston, Philadelphia, Belfast, Off-West End London, and Off-Broadway. For more information, visit [www.fireflyinc.com](http://www.fireflyinc.com).

###

[08/15/08]





Firefly Theater  
presents  
in association w/  
VS. Theatre Company  
the Los Angeles  
premiere of

# THE FOUR OF US

What if all your dreams  
came true... for your  
best friend?

a play by  
**ITAMAR  
MOSES**

directed by  
**MICHELLE  
TATTENBAUM**



FIREFLY THEATER  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
VS. THEATRE COMPANY  
PRESENTS

# THE FOUR OF US

BY Itamar Moses  
DIRECTED BY Michelle Tattenbaum

## featuring

BEN  
DAVID

Ryan Johnston\*  
Steven Klein \*

TIME 1998 - 2008, though not in that order

\*appears courtesy of Actors Equity Association

NOTES: THE PLAY RUNS 95 MINUTES WITH NO INTERMISSION.  
HERBAL CIGARETTES WILL BE SMOKED ON STAGE.

PRODUCED BY	Johnny Clark Kimberly Rose-Wolter Steven Klein
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS	Beth Sirull & Jon Shuster Ryan Johnston
PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER	Ilona Pacek
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	Brenda Goldstein
NY STAGE MANAGER	Kate J. Cudworth
SET DESIGN	Mark Guirguis
LIGHTING DESIGN	Leigh Allen
COSTUME DESIGN	Rachel Myers
SOUND DESIGN	Joel Spence
ASSISTANT SET & PROPS DESIGNER	Amanda Wilczynski
PUBLICITY CONSULTANT	Ken Werther
GRAPHIC DESIGN	Maria De La Guardia

The *Four of Us* received its initial workshop at American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco, California. World Premiere at The Old Globe, San Diego, California under the aegis of Louis G. Spisto, Jack O'Brien, Jerry Patch. Originally produced in New York by the Manhattan Theatre Club, Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director, Barry Grove, Executive Producer, Daniel Sullivan, Acting Artistic Director 2007 – 2008 Season.

The *Four of Us* is produced by special arrangement with the Mark Christian Subias Agency, New York.

## BIOS

**ITAMAR MOSES** (Playwright) is the author of the full-length plays *Outrage*, *Bach at Liepzig*, *Celebrity Row*, *The Four of Us*, *Yellowjackets*, *Back Back Back*, and *Completeness*, and various short plays and one-acts. He is presently adapting Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* for the stage with composer Michael Friedman and director Daniel Aukin. His work has appeared Off-Broadway and at regional theatres across the country and in Canada, and has been published by Faber & Faber, Heinemann Press, Playscripts Inc., Samuel French, Inc., and Vintage. He has received new play commissions from The McCarter Theater, Playwrights Horizons, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The Wilma Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, South Coast Repertory, and Lincoln Center Theater (Allison M. Blinks Fund Commission). Itamar holds an MFA in Dramatic Writing from NYU and a BA from Yale and has taught playwriting at both schools. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild, MCC Playwrights Coalition, *Naked Angels* Mag 7, and is a New York Theatre Workshop Usual Suspect. He was born in Berkeley, CA, and now lives in Brooklyn, NY.

**MICHELLE TATTENBAUM** (Director) is making her Firefly Theater and Los Angeles debut with *The Four of Us*. Michelle collaborates extensively with Itamar Moses and has directed his musicals *The Chromium Hook* (NY Musical Theatre Festival, MTC, and Lincoln Center Directors' Lab) and *Reality!* (Cape Cod Theatre Project) as well as his plays *Untitled Short Play* and *Szin haz* (Naked Angels); *Authorial Intent* and *Idea* (Manhattan Theatre Source); and the upcoming *But You Will Get Used to It* (the Flea). In the 2006-2007 season, she directed and co-produced *The Sublet Experiment*, a site-specific, touring production that played to sold-out crowds in New York City for over six months. Some recent NY highlights: *Gallathea* (which she also adapted) at Here Arts Center; and *An Archipelago Of Clouds* and *Laughing All the Way From the Sperm Bank* at FringeNYC. Recent regional highlights: *Tales From the Bad Years* at Goodspeed Musicals; *Pinocchio*, *Anatol*, and *Gallathea* at the Hangar Theatre; and two summers at Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. Michelle was a two-time Drama League Directing Fellow and is a Yale Theatre Studies graduate.



**STEVEN KLEIN** (David / Producer) founded Firefly Theater and worked closely with fellow-Yalie Matt Shakman on his founding of the Black Dahlia Theatre, where Steven remains Staff Producer. Klein's theatre acting and producing in LA has garnered over 25 awards and noms, and his local stage highlights include Charles in *An Infinite Ache* and Sean in *Orson's Shadow* (Black Dahlia); the Foole opposite James Gammon's *King Lear* (MET); and Gary in *Shopping & Fucking* (Celebration Theatre). His theater acting and producing outside of LA has included award-winning shows in his hometown of Boston, and in Philadelphia, Belfast, Off-West End London, and Off-Broadway. TV includes *Star Trek Enterprise*, *Pizza Time* (pilot), and *Sons of Anarchy*, and film includes *The Grand Design*, directed by Eric Stoltz. Wanting to make movies with the cross-disciplinary collaboration typical to theater, Steven and Bruce Cohen (Jinks/Cohen) co-founded a film collective, making 35 shorts from 2001–2005. With numerous projects growing from these, Steven founded Firefly Films, which has had projects in competition in 18 film festivals internationally.



**RYAN JOHNSTON** (Ben / Associate Producer) began his work in acting, directing, and producing while studying theatre and vocal music at the University of Nebraska and has been collaborating with Firefly since 1998. LA highlights include: directing and producing Sam Shepard's rarely staged *The Unseen Hand* and a workshop production of *Julius Caesar* (Firefly Theater); playing *Trinculo* in *The Tempest* (The Ark) and David in the world-premiere of *Farewell Miss Cotton*, by Keith Josef Adkins (Black Dahlia); producing *Measure for Measure* (Waging Theatre) and starring in the west coast premiere of Jane Martin's *Flags* (Odyssey Theatre). Along with Steven Klein, he produced and starred in Firefly's 2007



Off-Broadway production of *Flags at 59E59*. TV credits include *The District* (CBS) and *To Live and Die in LA* (pilot), and Johnston can now be seen as Patrick “Packie” McCreary in *Grand Theft Auto IV*. He currently resides in New York, but finds himself in Los Angeles often to cycle the Santa Monica mountains and see the friends and artistic collaborators who live here.

**JOHNNY CLARK** (Producer) is the co-founder and Artistic Director of the critically-acclaimed VS. Theatre Company, a Los Angeles based theatre company dedicated to producing new works and/or west coast premieres. Prior to VS., Johnny was the producing director for Interact Theatre Company. He is also an actor and just recently starred as “Robert” in the VS. production of *On An Average Day* here in Los Angeles (Elephant Theatre) and in Chicago (Victory Gardens Theatre). Prior VS. credits: *The Credeaux Canvas*, *Modern Dance for Beginners*, *Navy Pier*, *Beggars in the House of Plenty*, *Waste of Shame*, and *Eric Larue*. Other favorite stage credits: *Death of a Salesman* (Odyssey Theatre), *Never Swim Alone* (West Coast Ensemble), and Chicago productions of *Life and Limb*, *Brilliant Traces*, and *A Hatful of Rain*. He has done several commercials and independent films, including *Liars Club*, which he co-wrote, produced, and starred in. This film won First Prize at the Rhode Island Film Festival and received a limited theatrical release.

**KIMBERLY ROSE-WOLTER** (Producer) has worked as an actor, writer, producer and director. Wolter is a co-founder and Artistic Director of the critically acclaimed VS. Theatre Company. In its four seasons VS. has become known, as “one of the best places to catch intensely personal and intimate shows done extremely well.” (The Burbank Leader, “Recommended”) Wolter had worked as producer on *Credeaux Canvas*, *Modern Dance for Beginners*, *Navy Pier* as well as *Beggars in the House of Plenty* and *Waste of Shame*. As a writer Wolter’s first feature film, *TRE*, which she also starred, opened in theaters February 2008. Previously winning Special Jury Prize at San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival and was nominated for The Maverick Award and Best Actress at The Method Festival. Wolter’s sophomore script *Knots* is currently in development. Wolter has recently completed *Shoot My Life*, a satirical short about reality TV, which she directed, wrote, produced and starred. It has been to The San Diego Asian Film Festival as well as The Palm Springs Short Film Market. Wolter is currently working on her second feature script, *Women of Winter Moon*.

**ILONA PACEK** (Production Stage Manager) is a native of Los Angeles who has been working as a stage manager for over ten years. Her credits include *The Book of Liz* with the Blank Theatre Company; *Hurlyburly*, *Alfie*, *Bus Stop*, *King Lear* and the *Edge of Allegiance III* at the MET Theatre; *dawgs*, *Come a Little Closer*, *Antioch and Latins Anonymous* at the Los Angeles Theatre Center. Ilona would like to thank both Steven and Michelle for the opportunity to work with such a talented group of actors and designers. A special thanks goes to her family and to Brett for all of their encouragement and support.

**BRENDA GOLDSTEIN** (Assistant Stage Manager) is a Los Angeles native who has recently graduated from CSUN with a BA in Theatre Arts. She is excited about working on her first post-graduate show as well as trying yet another job within the theatre world. While in college, Brenda worked on almost every backstage crew possible. This will be her first show as an assistant stage manager. Brenda would like to thank her family and friends for their support.

**KATE J. CUDWORTH** (NY Rehearsal Stage Manager) Off-Broadway: [title of show], Vineyard Theatre. Other NY Credits: *Rent*, National Tour ‘07-’08; *Private Life of the Master Race*, Roust Theatre Company; Two seasons with Bronx Opera Co.; Readings with the Vineyard Theatre, *America-in-Play*, et al. Regional: *Sleepless Variations—A Cabaret with Mary Testa*, and *Trumbo*, Barrington Stage Company; *Breakfast Lunch & Dinner*, *Fences*, and *I Am My Own Wife* at Hartford Stage.

**MARK GUIRGUIS** (Set Design) has design for many venues including Theatreworks; San Diego Repertory Theatre; ASK Theatre Project’s Common Ground Festival; The Circuit

Playhouse; and Playhouse on the Square, where credits include *Side Man*, *Dinner with Friends*, *It Ain’t Nothing But the Blues*, and *Jekyll and Hyde*, for which he received an Ostrander award. As a lecturer and designer at Stanford University, Department of Drama, his numerous credits include *Equus*, *Cloud Tectonics*, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He is currently design faculty at the University of California, San Diego, Department of Theatre and Dance.

**LEIGH ALLEN** (Lighting Designer) is a recent recipient of the Career Achievement Award for Lighting Design from the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle. Some of her works include: *Champagne* (Regent Cruise Lines), *Shimmy!* (Princess Cruise Lines), *Snoopy on Ice* (J. Schultz), *Beauty and the Beast* (Musical Theater West), *The Red Road* (Native Voices), *Killer Joe* (Ovation Award: Production of the Year), *The Fab Four* (South Bay CLO), *The Prince of LA* (The Old Globe in San Diego), and *Vincent in Brixton* (Pasadena Playhouse). She has also received the LA Drama Critics Circle and LA Weekly Lighting Design Awards for *Johnny Got His Gun*.

**RACHEL MYERS** (Costume Design) recently designed *Agamemnon* (Getty Villa, directed by Stephen Wadsworth), *Of Equal Measure* (Center Theatre Group, Kirk Douglas Theatre), *A Little of More* (Robert Wilson’s Watermill Center), *The Spin Cycle* (Rubicon Theatre Company), *Don Juan* (A Noise Within), and *Dark Play* (The Theatre at Boston Court). She has designed sets and costumes at Williamstown Theatre Festival, The Falcon Theatre, The Hudson Theatre, El Portal Theatre, The Renberg Village Theater, New Haven’s Festival of Arts and Ideas, Disjecta Theatre Space, Circus Theatricals, and The Yale School of Drama and Yale Cabaret. Rachel also works as a Production Designer for film and recently designed projects with Getty Images, L’oreal of Paris, and Triskelion Entertainment, as well as working on Tim Burton’s *The Corpse Bride*. Rachel received her MFA in Design from the Yale School of Drama and now lectures at California State University Channel Islands in Costume Design, Set Design, and Drawing. She is a member of United Scenic Artists local 829. Her upcoming production is *Ion* (The Shakespeare Theatre, DC, directed by Ethan McSweeney). (www.3pennydesign.com)

**JOEL SPENCE** (Sound Design) has had his work featured in the Black Dahlia’s productions of *Finally*, *Secrets Of The Trade*, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, and *Tryst*. Joel also does sound effects, live Foley, and performs as “Sound Effect Joe.” Joel Spence, Esq. in the radio show, *The Thrilling Adventure and Supernatural Suspense Hour* on the second Saturday of every month at Mbar in Hollywood. Joel grew up in San Antonio, TX and went to S.M.U. in Dallas where he received a B.F.A. in Acting. After graduating, he moved to Minnesota and co-founded The Hidden Theatre. In 1995, he joined Theatre de la Jeune Lune and by 2000 had performed in over 20 Jeune Lune productions, including *Tartuffe*, *Hamlet*, *Three Musketeers*, and *Chez Pierre*. Since moving to Los Angeles in 2002, he has appeared on TV shows such as *Dirt*, *The District*, *Judging Amy*, *Andy Barker PI*, and *My Name Is Earl*. Joel also teaches improv at Upright Citizens Brigade, where he performs regularly.

**AMANDA WILCZYNSKI** (Assistant Set & Props Designer) is a recent graduate of UCSD. UCSD credits: (SD) *Dakghar and Waiting for Lefty*; (ASD) *The Further Adventures of Suzanne* and *Monica and Bureau of Missing Persons* (New Play Festival 08), *Balm in Gilead*, *Red State*, *Blue Grass and Wildflower* (New Play Festival 07), *Second Sites*, and *Santa Ana Winds* and *The Nightshade Family* (New Play Festival 06); (ALD) *Surf Orpheus*.

**THE FIREFLY THEATER** was founded in 1996 to mount new and classic plays while focusing on finding more rigorous ways to define and measure the success of theatrical ventures. Begun at Yale, the Firefly Theater moved to LA along with its founder, Steven Klein, where it has mounted productions from Mamet to Shephard to Shakespeare while continuing to investigate how best to structure a theater and its work to reduce costs and increase measurable impact in its community. Firefly Theater today works with Firefly Films to nurture new American stories for the stage and screen. In addition, Firefly Theater is now in the early stages of building an integrated network of locally run, semi-autonomous

## SPECIAL THANKS

Special Thanks Sent Warmly To:

Catlin Adams

Ron Avni & Sarah Byrne

Tom Barad

Craig De Lorenzo

The Entire Staff of the Elephant Theatre

David Fletcher and Washington's Best ([www.washbest.com](http://www.washbest.com))

Lisa Fung

John and Karla Johnston

Sari Kamin at the Mark Christian Subias Agency

Rob Kendt

Jim Knable & Rosey Strub

Ira Liss

Shakespeare & Company

Dianna Mannheim

Nick Micozzi

Geno Monteiro

Amelia Petersen

The Residents of 425 and Their Significant Others

Matt Shakman

Ami Shukla & Dan Fields

Jon Shuster & Beth Sirull

Allison Sie

Craig Siebels

Mark Subias

Ken Werther

and

The Timothy Dwight Dining Hall, Yale University

THE REMAINDER OF THIS PROGRAM IS FOR ANOTHER  
FIREFLY THEATER & VS. THEATRE COMPANY COLLABORATION,  
RUNNING CONCURRENTLY WITH *THE FOUR OF US*.



*Pugilist Specialist*, by Adriano Shaplin, was awarded the coveted Edinburgh Fringe First award, the Herald Angel award, and The Scotsman's 2003 "First of the Firsts" award, and it completed an extended London run before opening Off-Broadway at 59E59 and moving to the Culture Project. Scotland on Sunday wrote: *Pugilist Specialist* is a "beautifully constructed, searingly intelligent play," suggesting playwright Adriano Shaplin "is set to join the likes of Arthur Miller and David Mamet in the pantheon of great modern American dramatists." *Pugilist Specialist* uses a metaphorical landscape and powerful, poetic writing to explore gender, violence, and the corrupting influence of power. In the breakdown of a fictional black-op mission to bring down a Middle East Leader, layers of personal and political intrigue peel away. In a time of war and in the midst of an election year, *Pugilist Specialist* asks important questions.

As an audience member for *The Four of Us*, you are entitled to 50% off tickets to *Pugilist Specialist*. Speak to house management to arrange for purchase.

**Awards & Press for *The Four of Us*, by Itamar Moses  
presented by Firefly Theater**

**Awards as of 12.26.08**

2008 Ticketholder Awards, *Entertainment Weekly*

- Runner Up; Play of the Year
- Runner Up; Best Playwright
- Best Actor in a Play (Steven Klein)
- Runner Up; Best Actor in a Play (Ryan Johnston)

2008 Maddy Awards for Excellence in Theatre

- Itamar Moses, Playwright
- Steven Klein, Actor
- Ryan Johnston, Actor

**Press**

"'GO!'...clever, surprising...we travel down the road of their long-standing friendship, exploring their psyches in depth as scenes shift seamlessly between the past and the present in the tightly woven and complex structure...especially funny...deft direction..."

- *LA Weekly*

"...well observed. Humorous truth can make small moments ping...blur[s] the boundary between art and life, leaving us always a little doubtful about what we're viewing. The effect is thematically ingenious..."

- *LA Times*

"Los Angeles is being treated to a fine production of *The Four of Us*...both these actors do a terrific job of keeping the 90 minutes crackling. The direction by Michelle Tattenbaum is taut and fast paced. More importantly she keeps the proceedings real...Go see this one..."

- *StageHappenings*

"...playwright Itamar Moses likes to play games with audience expectations...a funny and perceptive exploration of the idiosyncrasies of male friendship...Under the assured guidance of director Michelle Tattenbaum...Ryan Johnston and Steven Klein, who share a terrific chemistry..."

- *Backstage West*

"Then I went to see *The Four of Us*, and again I was astounded at the writing ....Not a beat skipped or missed, enormously entertaining, and in the end really moving and thought-provoking... a play of some depth about friendship and artistic ambition and envy, and a play about art, about what artists are creating when they create, what the relationship between memory and art is. And the way in which the artist sort of reinvents himself and his sense of reality by sort of fictionalizing memory... I was incredibly impressed by it....a great thrill."

- *Tony Kushner, excerpted from his interview for the 9/7 LA Times feature on Itamar Moses*



Los Angeles Times

ARTS & BOOKS

MUSIC • THEATER

**theater**

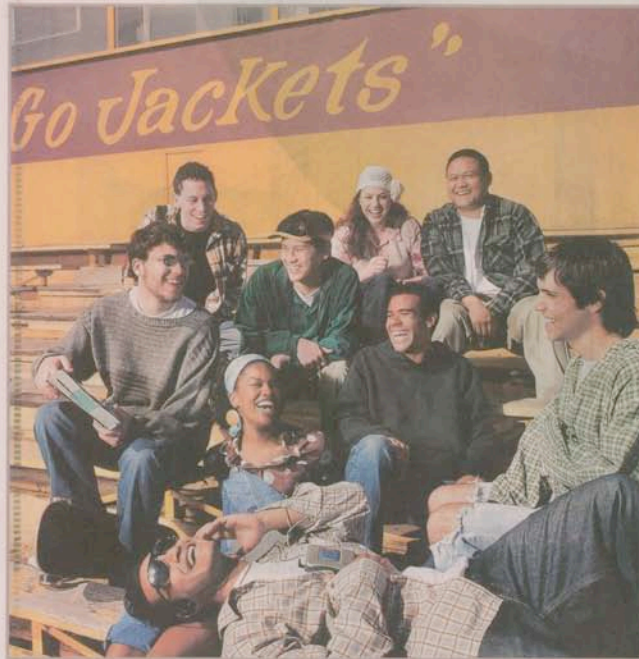
Itamar Moses' name is printed on performance schedules coast to coast. The writer of 'Bach at Leipzig' is one busy guy. *Page 4*

F4 SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2008

LOS ANGELES TIMES

CALENDAR

## FALL PREVIEW | THEATER



GO TEAM! Moses' "Hillsidejackets," at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, posers, ruses, class and progressive politics in Berkeley in the early 1990s.

# A rapid expansion

ITAMAR MOSES HIT THE NATIONAL RADAR WITH 'BACH AT LEIPZIG.' YES, HE TOOK A DRUBBING IN NEW YORK, BUT HE'S EVERYWHERE THIS FALL.

By ROB WEINERT-KENDY  
 Special to The Times

WRITING plays is occasionally a profession, arguably an art form, unmistakably a craft (hence the odd spelling of "playwright," distant cousin of the wheelwright).

But might writing plays also be a mode of thinking — a way to make sense of the world?

"I'm uncertain about a lot of things — I disagree with myself a lot," says Itamar Moses, 31, a Brooklyn-based playwright represented this fall by no fewer than six productions across the U.S., with more to come in the winter.

"I like the process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and then doing that over and over again. Maybe it is my way of approaching truth: to state something I think is true, then figure out why it's wrong, then try to find something more nuanced and figure out why that's wrong — and then to keep burrowing deeper into

that. Playwriting is a form in which that kind of how it works."

That's how it works, at least, in Moses' previous — and prolific — hands. In "Bach at Leipzig," which recently closed at Shakespeare Santa Cruz, six 18th-century German opponents, vying strenuously for a vacant post, broke and embody debates over Protestant theology and the future form. In "Back Back Back," which opens Sept. 25 at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre (where Moses in this season playwright-in-residence), three pre-bellum players square off over the use of swords in their sport.

In the sprawling "Yellowjackets," which opened this weekend at Berkeley Rep, students at Berkeley High School wrangle over a backdrop of race, class and progressive politics in an interrelated structure Moses jokingly confesses to "steal from 'The Wire.'" And at the opposite end of the spectrum, the sparsely-chambered play "The Four of Us," which opens Friday at the Elephant Theatre Lab in Hollywood, takes a direct of autobiography — Moses was a pal of Jonathan Raban Poir when the young novelist rubbed a jaw-dropping sedition for his first book, "Everything Is Illuminated" — and turns it into an alternately raucous and playful meditation on envy, aspiration and memory.

Add an upcoming Chicago production of his television-themed play "Celebrity Row" and October's Manhattan Theatre Club production of "Back Back Back," and one might reasonably conclude that this is Itamar Moses' moment — the time for this ambitious young playwright-as-thinker, already beloved of theater insiders, to break through to a wider audience. That may be true, though in fact Moses has already weathered at least one brief, train-like moment as the Next Big Thing.

### He's a tough kid

IT WAS in fall 2005 when Moses' writing, Shoppesque Jane "Bach at Leipzig," bowed in a glittering off-Broadway production, tearing an admiring introductory note by no less than Tom Stoppard himself. The New York press, never fond of being scooped, snuffed a rat. In notices that



REFLECTIVE: "Writing," says Moses, 31, "has been one of my major salvations from feeling that the bottom is falling out."

seemed to review the hype as much as the show, the New York Times declared it "below" and the Village Voice called it "time-wasting nonsense." Many critics acknowledged Moses' promise but dismissed the play as too clever for its own good.

"You can either discover a play or take it apart," says Jerry Fitch, director of artistic development at the Manhattan Theatre Club, who has championed Moses' work, both at NYC and in his previous post as co-artistic director at the Old Globe. "If Tom Stoppard has already discovered you — well, that really worked to Itamar's disadvantage. The critical reception severely damaged him, but he's a tough kid, and he came back from it. I told him: 'Now they've had their dinner on you, you're all right.'"

Indeed, though he and his friends attest to the difficulty of that post-"Bach" period, the

play has garnered raves in subsequent regional runs, and Moses never stopped getting commissioned and hired.

In person now, Moses is affable, open, even sunny, and it's tempting to see this as a California thing — Moses, a Berkeley native, now lives in Brooklyn's trendy posy neighborhood, Park Slope, and seems perennially at home in a light sweater, T-shirt, shorts and sandals.

But what seems to have saved him, above all, is not his still factor but a certain rigor of mind, a habit of using the raw material of life as timber for intricately designed theatrical structures with a formal beauty and coherence of their own.

Because you have control over your writing, because you are making all the choices about what to write, when to stop, what to put in, what to change — writing has been one of

my major salvations from feeling that the bottom is falling out," Moses says.

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Or rather, that was all he could perceive at the time. In "Yellowjackets," he recalls Berkeley High in the early 1990s, a time when the ultra-diverse, overflowing school was phasing out "tracking," a program of tested advancement that shamed the school's progressive credentials by seeming to affirm a class- and race-based achievement gap.

Reflecting the school's multilayered system, Moses has structured the play along separate tracks. From episodes here to tonight: "It's about how you can't actually separate different strata of society, because they're on top of each other. It's all interdependent."

Melville "Tatendbaum," a longtime friend and associate who's directing the L.A. production of "The Four of Us," notes that a confusion of form and content distinguishes all of Moses' work.

"If you're going to do the novelizing of drawing attention to a play's theatricality, then you'd better be saying something about the human condition," she says. "Itamar is rigorous, he's not going to write a play that draws attention to itself as a play unless he's saying something about humanity or relationships or the power of storytelling."

Even so, in his studies at Yale and New York University and in his early plays, Moses played a leading aptitude, and certainly a preference, for theatrical form and language, and the subjects of his early work are historical or real-life figures: composers in "Bach at Leipzig," Ibsen and Brecht in "Outrage," domestic terrorists such as the "Thalidomide," Timothy McVeigh and Nancy Wake in "Celebrity Row."

"I think initially I was both more interested in and had a better understanding of structure than I did of lower life," Moses concedes. "Bach" and "Celebrity Row" aren't very historically accurate, but they gave me a place to start, a structure to work inside of — real historical situations and real people. Either I wasn't sure that the things in my actual life could be that firm as structural boundaries, or I didn't trust my craft to take the measure of what really happened and turn it into something that worked as a piece of storytelling."

It was this reluctance to do the obvious — use his life as dramatic fodder — that grabbed the attention of theatrical gatekeepers as much as his intellectual ambition, brilliant craftsmanship and tender age.

"It's your thinking, man's writer," says Tony Tenenbaum, artistic director of Berkeley Rep, who's directing "Yellowjackets." "That's not in fashion so much."

### From the inside out

WITH "The Four of Us," Moses at last gave himself permission to tap his own life for material. Inspired by Moses' friendship with fellow Brooklynite Poir, the play tells the story of two close friends, one a wildly successful novelist named Benjamin and the other a struggling playwright named David, whose tight bond is tested by their varying fortunes.

It's as much a play about artistic rivalry and ambition as it is "Bach at Leipzig," only this time it's personal.

"I don't think that 'Bach at Leipzig' is an intentional play, but it was written from the inside in," Moses says. "The Four of Us" is the first play of mine that was written from the inside out."

Moses may now be more comfortable mining his own life for drama, but he's using similar tools. The sort of heightened language that he uses for the historical scenes in "Outrage" or "Bach at Leipzig" is no more highly crafted than the ultra-classical, conventional language he uses in "The Four of Us," says Tenenbaum. "This is just as specifically written out."

Moses is at pains to stress that, real-life parallels aside, "The Four of Us" is not autobiographical, nor is it meant as a take-off to a successful former friend (the record, he and Poir are reportedly still friends). "It's in both of those characters," Moses says. "I've been on both sides of that relationship many times."

Tatendbaum, who has directed several of Moses' short plays and headed workshops that later had full productions under other directors, can attest to that. "Itamar is my Benjamin," she says. "He probably had a number of Davids, but I'm certainly one of them."

Another Yale compatriot, Steven Klein, who is co-producing and starring in the L.A. production, doesn't say where he fits in this pecking order, but he does think the play embodies an "essence of American life, that we are taught to compare ourselves to other people, to find metrics of our success. From my experience, it's a little harder or stranger for artists, because other than commercial success we're not given a metric, and that's difficult to deal with."

Perhaps toughened by the hype and backlash over "Bach at Leipzig," Moses remains agnostic on the ideal way to measure his own

"There doesn't seem to be a phase for playwright in between emerging and either disappared or being part of the establishment," Moses muses. "It's like, you're emerging until you're old, and then you're part of the old guard. Get out of the way, old man."

Kushner, who's never met Moses but admires his writing, is likewise not surprised that the younger writer bounced back from the "Bach" snafu.

"I didn't know his work at all when I saw 'Bach at Leipzig,' and I was dazzled by it," says Kushner. "The way it was treated [by the critics] was depressing. That was a very odd moment. But I don't think that any really interesting writer ever gets completely demoralized by bad reviews, at least not the first time. No one as good as he is at risk of being homesick."

"The Four of Us," Elephant Theatre Lab, 1000 N. Lillian Way, Hollywood, 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday. Ends Oct. 26. B21, B22, B23, B24, B25, B26, B27, B28, B29, B30, B31, B32, B33, B34, B35, B36, B37, B38, B39, B40, B41, B42, B43, B44, B45, B46, B47, B48, B49, B50, B51, B52, B53, B54, B55, B56, B57, B58, B59, B60, B61, B62, B63, B64, B65, B66, B67, B68, B69, B70, B71, B72, B73, B74, B75, B76, B77, B78, B79, B80, B81, B82, B83, B84, B85, B86, B87, B88, B89, B90, B91, B92, B93, B94, B95, B96, B97, B98, B99, B100.

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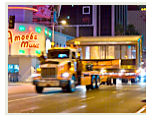
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# Itamar Moses is just looking to make sense of it all

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**REFLECTIVE:** "Writing," says Moses, 31, "has been one of my major salvations from feeling that the bottom is falling out." The Berkeley native now lives in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

**The inquisitive 31-year-old playwright has pieces headed to stages across the U.S. -- giving him plenty of places to work things out.**

By Rob Weinert-Kendt, Special to The Times  
September 7, 2008

NEW YORK -- WRITING plays is occasionally a profession, arguably an art form, unmistakably a craft (hence the odd spelling of "playwright," distant cousin of the wheelwright).

But might writing plays also be a mode of thinking -- a way to make sense of the world?

"I'm uncertain about a lot of things -- I disagree with myself a lot," says Itamar Moses, 31, a Brooklyn-based playwright represented this fall by no fewer than six productions across the U.S., with more to come in the winter.

"I like the process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and then doing that over and over again. Maybe it is my way of approaching truth: to state something I think is true, then figure out why it's wrong, then try to find something more nuanced and figure out why that's wrong -- and then to keep burrowing deeper into that. Playwriting is a form in which that's just kind of how it works."

That's how it works, at least, in Moses' precocious -- and prolific -- hands. In "Bach at Leipzig," which recently closed at [Shakespeare Santa Cruz](#), six 18th century German organists, vying strenuously for a vacant post, invoke and embody debates over Protestant theology and the fugue form. In "[Back Back Back](#)," which opens Sept. 25 at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre (where Moses is this season's playwright-in-residence), three pro baseball players square off over the use of

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steroids in their sport.

In the sprawling "[Yellowjackets](#)," which opened this weekend at Berkeley Rep, students at Berkeley High School wrangle over a backdrop of race, class and progressive politics in an interlaced structure Moses jokingly confesses he "stole from 'The Wire.'" And at the opposite end of the spectrum, the spare, two-character play "[The Four of Us](#)," which opens Friday at the Elephant Theatre Lab in Hollywood, takes a shred of autobiography -- Moses was a pal of Jonathan Safran Foer when the young novelist nabbed a jaw-dropping advance for his first book, "Everything Is Illuminated" -- and turns it into an alternately rueful and playful meditation on envy, aspiration and memory.

Add an upcoming Chicago production of his terrorism-themed play "[Celebrity Row](#)" and October's Manhattan Theatre Club production of "[Back Back Back](#)," and one might reasonably conclude that this is Itamar Moses' moment -- the time for this ambitious young playwright-as-thinker, already beloved of theater insiders, to break through to a wider audience. That may be true, though in fact Moses has already weathered at least one brief, Icarus-like moment as the Next Big Thing.

#### 'He's a tough kid'

IT WAS in fall 2005 when Moses' whirling, Stoppardesque farce "Bach at Leipzig" bowed in a glittering off-Broadway production, bearing an admiring introductory note by no less than Tom Stoppard himself. The New York press, never fond of being scooped, smelled a rat. In notices that seemed to review the hype as much as the show, the [New York Times](#) declared it "hollow" and the Village Voice called it "time-wasting nonsense." Many critics acknowledged Moses' promise but dismissed the play as too clever for its own good.

"You can either discover a play or take its pants off," says Jerry Patch, director of artistic development at the Manhattan Theatre Club, who has championed Moses' work, both at MTC and in his previous post as co-artistic director at the Old Globe. "If Tom Stoppard has already discovered you -- well, that really worked to Itamar's disadvantage. The critical reception severely damaged him, but he's a tough kid, and he came back from it. I told him, 'Now they've had their dinner on you, you'll be all right.'" "

Indeed, though he and his friends attest to the difficulty of that post-"Bach" period, the play has garnered raves in subsequent regional runs, and Moses never stopped getting commissioned and hired.

In person now, Moses is affable, upbeat, even sunny, and it's tempting to see this as a California thing -- Moses, a Berkeley native, now lives in Brooklyn's crunchy-preppy mecca, Park Slope, and seems preternaturally at home in a light surface beard, T-shirt, shorts and sandals.

But what seems to have saved him, above all, is not the chill factor but a certain rigor of mind, a habit of using the raw material of life as timber for intricately designed theatrical structures with a formal beauty and coherence of their own.

"Because you have control over your writing, because you are making all the choices about what to write, when to stop, what to put in, what to change -- writing has been one of my major salvations from feeling that the bottom is falling out," Moses says.

When Moses was a senior at Berkeley High, seeing the American Conservatory Theater's production of Tony Kushner's "Angels in America" inspired him to become a playwright. The relatively happy child of Israeli immigrants, he felt the dramatic calling but conspicuously lacked dramatic grist. He now laughingly describes his first playwriting effort as " 'Dawson's Creek' via 'Angels in America' -- a bunch of teenagers being all angsty and hanging out in high school, saying, 'We're going to graduate and never see each other!' Those were the stakes, because that was all that had happened to me."

Or rather, that was all he could perceive at the time. In "Yellowjackets," he revisits Berkeley High in the early 1990s, a time when the ultra-diverse, overflowing school was phasing out "tracking," a program of tiered advancement that shamed the school's progressive credentials by seeming to affirm a class- and race-based achievement gap.

Reflecting the school's multilayered system, Moses has structured the play along separate tracks. Form gestures here to content: "It's about how you can't actually separate different strata of society, because they're on top of each other. It's all interdependent."

Michelle Tattenbaum, a longtime friend and associate who's directing the L.A. production of "The Four of Us," notes that a confluence of form and content distinguishes all of Moses' work.

"If you're going to do the navel-gazing of drawing attention to a play's theatricality, then you'd better be saying something about the human condition," she says. "Itamar is so rigorous; he's not going to write a play that draws attention to itself as a play unless he's saying something about humanity or relationships or the power of storytelling."

Even so, in his studies at Yale and New York University and in his early plays, Moses displayed a blazing aptitude, and certainly a preference, for theatrical form and language, and the subjects of his early work are historical or real-life figures: organists in "Bach at Leipzig," Socrates and Brecht in "Outrage," domestic terrorists such as the Unabomber, Timothy McVeigh and Ramzi Yousef in "Celebrity Row."

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"The sort of heightened language that he uses for the historical scenes in 'Outrage' or 'Bach at Leipzig' is no more highly crafted than the ultra-casual, conversational language he uses in 'The Four of Us,'" says Tattenbaum. "This is just as specifically written out."

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*"The Four of Us," Elephant Theatre's Lab Space, 1076 N. Lillian Way, Hollywood. 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, 3 p.m. Sundays. Ends Oct. 20. \$25. (800) 838-3006.*

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