

# DENISE YVETTE SERNA

DIRECTOR. DEVISER. ACTIVIST. CREATIVE PRODUCER. FACILITATOR



## SKILLS

*With 15+ years of professional theatre practice, projects have ranged from contemporary devising, cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary events, producing intimate salons, concerts, supper clubs, and play festivals, to large main stage, contemporary, and classical theatre in contemporary form.*

### Administrative Skills

Development of employee training curriculums  
Development of embodied practice curriculums  
De-escalation and conflict resolution  
Project Management  
Timelines and committee delegation  
Annual employee reviews/assessments  
Equitable Hiring and onboarding facilitation  
Intermediate Spanish & Basic ASL  
Microsoft Office Suite & Google Suite  
Moodle, Sakai, D2L, Zoom, Tessitura, DataArts,  
Canvas, Squarespace, WordPress, Wix  
Social media management  
Equity, Diversity, Access, Inclusion facilitation  
Production Management Operations, and Marketing

### Creative Skills

Cross-cultural and multilingual theatre  
Devised and Collaborative Creation  
Dramaturgy  
Intimacy Direction  
Biomechanics Actor Training  
Scenic design and construction  
Theatre of the Oppressed  
Exemplary musical aestheticism  
Stanislavski Acting Methodology  
Laban Movement Analysis Theory  
The Viewpoints  
Monologue selection and coaching  
Creative writing  
Support for AS Drama and Theatre A-level Drama/Theatre Examinations

## AWARDS & NOMINATIONS

**2022 Joseph Jefferson Award Winner - *Somewhere Over the Border, Teatro Vista*** - Best Director of a Musical (Midsize) - Denise Yvette Serna; Best Ensemble of a Musical; Best Production of a Musical (Midsize)

**October 13, 2020 - New York Times, Critic's Pick, Jesse Green** - *45 Plays for America's First Ladies*, The Neo Futurists  
**2022 City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events Individual Artists Program (IAP) grant** - \$5500 for enrollment in IDC professional certification Level 3, Intimacy Director for Live Performance

**Loyola University Faculty Forward Professional Development Fund** - Toward study with Theatrical Intimacy Education and travel to the Global Majority Intimacy Conference in 2023

**The Luís Alfaro Leadership Award** (2018 - 2019 ALTA Award Nominee)

**2018 Windy City Times "30 Under 30"** - Honoring the "best and brightest" LGBT Chicagoans making a difference  
**2019 ALTA Award Winner - *La Ruta, Steppenwolf Theatre Company*** - Outstanding Director of a Production (with Sandra Marquez); Outstanding Production - Play; Outstanding Ensemble; Outstanding Musical Direction - Zacbe Pichardo; Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Play - Charin Alvarez; Outstanding Scenic Design - Regina Garcia  
**2018 ALTA Award Winner - *The View Upstairs, Circle Theatre Chicago*** - Outstanding Musical Production  
**2022 Joseph Jefferson Award Nominations: *Somewhere Over the Border, Teatro Vista*** - Best New Work - Brian Quijada; Best Performer In A Principal Role in a Musical - Brian Quijada; Best Projection Design - Liviu Pasare

## EDUCATION

**The University of Essex and East 15 Acting School, London UK, MFA in Theatre Direction 2012-2014**

One of the most established directing courses in the U.K. designed specifically for professional theatre directors led by International and British practitioners of note.

**Cedarville University, Cedarville USA, BA in Theatre Performance and Design 2007-2011**

Leading private university fostering strong community outreach and social activism.

*\*I do not endorse the religious and political views of Cedarville University's President or any of its spokespeople.*

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## **SELECTED DIRECTING 2014-2024**

*Her Father's Daughter* (Studio Production), The Theatre School at DePaul University, Chicago IL  
*A Home Education*, About Face Theatre (Workshop & Staged Reading), Chicago IL  
*Boca a Boca*, Teatro Vista (Workshop & Staged Reading), Chicago IL  
*Candlewood Lake* (Workshop & Staged Reading), Ontario CA  
*Alma*, Curious Theatre (Regional Premiere), Denver CO  
*Somewhere*, Loyola University Chicago DFPA, Chicago IL  
*Blood of My Mother's*, Rivendell Theatre Ensemble Fresh Produce 2022 (Workshop & Staged Reading), Chicago IL  
*Somewhere Over the Border*, Teatro Vista (World Premiere), Chicago IL  
*La Fuente De Cascabeles*, Goodman Theatre (Staged Reading), Chicago IL  
*How Do We Navigate Space?*, Strawdog Theatre Company, Chicago IL  
*45 Plays for America's First Ladies*, The NeoFuturists (World Premiere), Tri-Coastal  
*The (M)others*, San Jose State University and New College of Florida, Tri-Coastal  
*Nine Lives of a Cat*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago & Prop Thtr, Chicago IL  
*Medusa*, Pop Magic Productions with Global Hive Laboratories, Chicago IL  
*December*, Goodman Theatre (Staged Reading), Chicago IL  
*The Revolutionists*, Strawdog Theatre Company, Chicago IL  
*Richard & Jane & Dick & Sally*, 2018 LTC Carnaval of New Latinx Work, Chicago IL  
*Near and Nigh*, El Semillero (Staged Reading), Chicago IL  
*#dadawillsaveus*, Nothing Without a Company (Devised Workshop), Chicago IL  
*Three Year Summer*, Prop Thtr Church of the New Play (Staged Reading), Chicago, IL  
*HOMESET*, Pop Magic Productions (Artist Salon Series), Chicago, IL  
*Just Like Us*, The Observatory (Staged Reading), Chicago, IL  
*Le Fruit Defendu*, History Lezons at Pride Films and Plays, Chicago IL  
*Climate Change Theatre Action*, Global Hive Labs, The Arctic Cycle & NoPassport Theatre Alliance, Chicago IL  
*After Orlando*, NoPassport Theatre Alliance, Chicago IL  
*(the)Forget\_Me\Knot*, Inappropriate Theatre Company, Chicago, IL  
*La Chingada*, Inappropriate Theatre Company & Crush Dance Collective, Chicago IL

## **SELECTED ASSISTANT DIRECTING:**

*La Ruta*, Steppenwolf Theatre Company (World Premiere), [Sandra Marquez, Chicago IL](#)  
*A Doll's House*, Writers Theatre, [Lavina Jadhvani, Chicago IL](#)  
*Cambodian Rock Band*, Victory Gardens Theater (Chicago Premiere), [Marti Lyons, Chicago IL](#)  
*HIR*, Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Chicago Premiere), [Hallie Gordon, Chicago IL](#)  
*Medusa*, The Cockpit, [Katie Merritt, London UK](#)  
*Medusa*, Pleasance Theatre, [Katie Merritt, London UK](#)  
*Earthquakes in London*, Steep Theatre Company (Chicago Premiere), [Jonathan Berry, Chicago IL](#)  
*The View Upstairs*, Circle Theatre Chicago (Chicago Premiere), [Derek Van Barham, Chicago, IL](#)  
*For the Love of...*, Pride Films & Plays (World Premiere), [Rachel Edwards Harvith, Chicago IL](#)  
*Heart's Core*, Refugee Women's Theatre Programme, [Cheryl Martin, Manchester UK](#)

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## **INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE RESIDENCIES INCLUDE**

### **Sheridan College, Ontario CA - New Musical Development Residency**

Direction of graduating students in Sheridan College's intensive professional training program and professional theatre practitioners through a developmental residency for the new musical "Candlewood Lake". Residency included a one-week workshop audition and six-week Workshop Rehearsal Process. Stand and Sing Workshop Presentations included a cast of nineteen, a piano, choreographed musical numbers and movement sequences, in a 225-seat house. Notable collaboration with Composer Tim Phillips, Playwright Carl Grose, and Music Director Oli Jackson.

### **Pocoapoco, Oaxaca MX - Active Access and Food in Devised Theatre**

30-day Spanish language field study of storytelling, food justice, visual art, community care, women driven artistic practice, traditional and contemporary meal preparation, Active Access education and methodology in creation and performance. Collaboration included: Creation of guide for Accessibility in Performance at *Pocoapoco*, and *LIMPIA: Nuestrxs Hechizos Para Desterrar La Lechuza Interior*. *LIMPIA* was presented with open-captions and audio description at an immersive staged reading at *Soltera Oaxaca*, and an immersive performance at *Pocoapoco*. Presentations included: dinner with mole negro/mole verde, live musical performance, costumes made from local plants, English and Spanish language poetry, prayers, and recipes, audience participation, original sound design, seed sowing.

### **The Russian Academy of Theatre Arts (GITIS), Moscow RU - Stanislavsky Acting Methodology and Biomechanics**

In depth study of contemporary, post drama, Eastern European and Russian practices rooted in the later methods of Stanislavsky, Knebel and the physical practices of Meyerhold at Russia's leading training institution. Instruction included: Intensive study of main principles of Stanislavskian acting and directing methodology with Mikhail Chumachenko, and rigorous Training in Biomechanics with Maria Shmaevich.

### **The Indonesian Arts Institute Denpasar (SENI Denpasar), Denpasar IND - Traditional Performing Arts**

Practical study of traditional dance, drama, mask, and puppetry with a focus on techniques for cross-cultural performance creation, pedagogy and traditional Balinese beliefs and aesthetic at world renowned SENI Denpasar in Bali. Devising and directing a Balinese interpretation of the Mexican folktale, La Llorona, fusing traditional Balinese performance styles and mythos with contemporary western dance, and Mexican iconography.

## **SELECTED CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**

### **The University of Chicago, Lecturer in Theater and Performance Studies, Chicago IL**

Lecturer of Theatre for Social Change and Bodies at Work: Art & Civic Responsibility. Theoretical and practical study of ethnographic and political theatre, multidisciplinary exploration, coalition building, ensemble training, Movement Action Planning, professional mentorship, and classroom instruction, field instruction, Artistic responsibility in contemporary artistic processes, tools and capacities of artists to transform civic practice and, conversely, how artists are grappling with the civic issues of body safety, anti-racism and accessibility in arts practice.

### **Loyola University, Faculty, Chicago IL**

Creator and instructor of Study Abroad (Italy) Studies in Dramatic Form TOPIC: International Devised Theatre  
Instructor of Introduction to the Theatrical Experience, Rehearsal & Performance, and Beginning Acting. Course revitalization, canonical disruption, ensemble training, professional mentorship, and classroom instruction, field instruction (in person and e-learning formats).

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## **DePaul University, Faculty, Chicago IL**

Instructor of Politics, Pop Culture, and the Stage and Rehearsal and Performance. Interrogation of Cultural Artifacts in conversation with social movements and narrative structure. Course revitalization, canonical disruption, ensemble training, professional mentorship, and classroom instruction, field instruction (in person and e-learning formats).

## **Aurora University, Faculty, Aurora IL**

Designer and Curator of inaugural Latinx Theatre Studies course. Instrumental in procuring grant funds and solo-facilitated the subsequent performance laboratory Inclusive Rehearsal and Theatrical Devising Techniques. Course revitalization, canonical disruption, and instruction (in-person and e-learning formats) for Theatre History, Play Production, and Intro to Theatre

## **Inclusive Rehearsal & Theatrical Devising Techniques Lab - in collaboration with Aurora University, Fusion Theatre Co, TeatroTrieste34, and Bouche Theatre, Aurora IL/UK/IT/CA**

Coordination of the international artists ensemble with university students interested in ACTIVE ACCESS and Anti-Exclusionary Devised Theatre. Exploration of Access Design and anti-exclusionary rehearsal practices while creating original performance using transatlantic digital rehearsal techniques.

## **West Side Show Room, Rockford IL - EDI Workshops for the Arts**

Course creation and facilitation of intensive digital workshops and digital classrooms.

EDI for Arts Participants, EDI for Arts Leaders (*Understand how to effectively manage groups of people with different identities as they navigate creative workspaces. Gain an in-depth vocabulary of EDI, understand intersectional identities, social location in the arts, and explore how your organization can be a force for social change. Through an understanding of systemic racism, the course covers access, privilege, prejudice and appropriation in the arts, and identifies opportunities for growth through allyship, advocacy, and activism*), and Anti-Racism Action Planning for Arts Organizations (*Anti-Racism Action Planning for Arts Orgs steps board members, committee members, administrators and/or key staff through a process that includes assessing where your org stands and what the needs of your community are. The workshop culminates in a written plan and public statement of accountability.*)

## **SELECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Intimacy Director for Live Performance** (IDC certification program – CERTIFICATION PENDING)

*Certification through IDC denotes a rigorous commitment to the study and practice of intimacy coordination and/or intimacy direction and a high level of proficiency in this discipline. IDC-certified professionals represent the highest standards of artistry and safety and are committed to pioneering this work with excellence and integrity.*

- IDC PROFESSIONALS “FOUNDATIONS OF INTIMACY” (LEVEL 1)
- IDC PROFESSIONALS “FOUNDATIONS OF INTIMACY II” (LEVEL 2)
- IDC PROFESSIONALS “ADVANCED TRAINING: INTIMACY DIRECTION FOR LIVE PERFORMANCE” (LEVEL 3)

### **Theatrical Intimacy Education Digital Workshop Series | Staging Sex**

*The Staging Sex series is all about the choreography: physical storytelling, mechanics, tools, and techniques while grounding everything in adaptability, inclusivity, and culturally-competent context.*

Power Play; Outercourse; Intercourse; Non-Consensual Intimacy

### **Theatrical Intimacy Education Digital Workshops**

Best Practices; Trauma Informed Practices; Intimacy Choreography for Live Performance; Creating A Culture of Consent: Community Agreements; Working with Trans and Non-Binary Actors; Staging Intimacy Beyond the Binary

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## **IDC PROFESSIONALS Digital Workshops**

Community Guidelines and Tools for Talking; Introduction to Trauma Informed Communication; Creating Spaces: Intimacy Directing New Work; Lean Forward: Intimacy Choreography Analysis; Intimate Stage Directions & Embodiment; Toweling Off for Actors

## **MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID - Certification from National Council for Mental Well Being until 11/14/25.**

A skills-based training course that teaches participants about mental health and substance-use issues. Topics Covered include Depression and mood disorders, Anxiety disorders, Trauma, Psychosis, Substance Use disorders, and ALGEE, the Mental Health First Aid mascot, and mnemonic for the 5-step action plan.

## **Bystander Intervention to Stop Anti-Asian/American and Xenophobic Harassment**

A virtual interactive training on using Right To Be's 5 D's of bystander intervention methodology.

## **Stand Up Against Street Harassment**

A virtual interactive training on bystander intervention from the Stand Up movement.

## **Bystander Intervention to Stop Islamophobic and Xenophobic Harassment**

A virtual interactive training on using Right To Be's 5 D's of bystander intervention methodology.

## **Steppenwolf Theatre Company Professional Leadership Program**

### **Multicultural Fellow and Development Apprentice (2015/2016), Chicago IL**

Provided integral support for individual giving campaigns, as well as donor acknowledgements and solicitations. Responsible for donor database management and prospect research. Provided research and for Foundation and Government grant proposals. Prepared for board of trustee meetings. Assisted with Corporate Arts Council and Steppenwolf Associates prospects and cultivation. Assisted with special events including Women in the Arts Luncheon and annual Gala.

## **artEquity 2016 Cohort**

### **Session 1: September 8-11, 2016; Session 2: October 27-30, 2016**

The artEquity Facilitation Program is an annual training offering theatre professional the opportunity to build the practical and analytical skills necessary to address diversity and inclusion issues at an interpersonal, group, and organizational level. The 2016 training consisted of two weekend-long intensive sessions at Penumbra Theatre in the Twin Cities. Led by a diverse team of staff and facilitators, participants explored and addressed issues of identity, privilege, structural power and ally-building, as well as best practices for organizational change.

## **Enrich Chicago/Chicago Regional Organizing for Antiracism (CROAR) antiracism training, May 6-8, 2018.**

This workshop provides an opportunity for the participants to explore an introductory analysis of systemic racism and to begin to discern how this analysis shapes their lived experiences and work in the arts. Participants will also examine basic strategies for dismantling racism within their organization. At this workshop participants are invited to: Create a shared language in their institution for talking effectively about systemic racism, how it operates in the larger society, and how it has an impact on institutions; Analyze what racism is, how it originates and operates institutionally and culturally, and how it has an impact on the identity of individuals; Engage in a comprehensive socio-historical exploration of the development of institutional racism in the United States; Begin to equip your organization with a framework for examining organizational culture and moving toward antiracist transformation of the organization.

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## **CCTA International: Global Hive Workshop**

### **Laboratory Workshop in London, UK in support of Climate Change Theatre Action 2017, International**

- Facilitating dialogue around climate change from an international perspective
- Creating and devising sensory elements to be utilized by artists at international CCTA events.
- Examining the potential of International Collaborative Creation, Form, and Presentation through technology
- Exploring the interaction between technology and the environment

## **MEDUSA International: Global Hive Workshop Series**

### **Laboratory Workshop series in collaboration with Fusion Theatre Company, La Compagnie Certes, TeatroTrieste34, Pop Magic Productions and En Las Tablas Performing Arts.**

- Facilitating dialogue around intersectional feminism, exclusionary industry practices, gender-based violence, and artistic expression of trauma from international perspective
- Devising original text, musical composition, and sensory elements to be utilized by multiple artists at international MEDUSA performances.
- Examining the culture of accessible cultural programming in international communities.
- Exploring the potential of integrated Access Design for artists and patrons with disabilities and crafting a new pedagogy for an Access focused devising process.
- Six-venue performance tour in Chicago - including a sold-out performance at Steppenwolf Theatre Company's LookOut Series (2019)
- Two-venue performance tour in London, UK - The Pleasance Theatre and The Cockpit (2020)

## **SELECTED YOUTH OUTREACH**

### **Mother-Tongue Teacher: English Summer Camp, Novellara, Italy/ Fabbri, Italy**

Curriculum curation, rehearsal facilitation and individual language instruction for non-English-speakers (aged 7-13) using multidisciplinary art and literature-based learning.

### **Raul Yzaguirre Middle School: Theatre Arts Grades 6-8, University Interscholastic League, San Juan, TX**

Planning, executing, and managing lessons in seven daily drama classes.

Directing a three-show season, including one collaborative musical production with PSJA High School.

Coaching and traveling UIL Speech team.

Integrating STAAR focused objectives into theatre curriculum.

Assistant Director, Assistant Forensics Coach, Workshop facilitator with PSJA High School

### **Directing in Drama Schools: Educational theatre assistantship at St. Marylebone C of E School, London, UK**

Directing annual submission to the Shakespeare for Schools Festival; *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Shaw Theatre*

Facilitating and directing Year 12 GCSE Solo Performance Examinations and Year 13 GCSE Devised Examinations

Assisting and leading workshops for years 7-13 drama classes.