OLGA EL

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Brooklyn NY

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Olga El is an award-winning emerging playwright, performance activist, and folkloric dancer who aims to engage audiences in ways that inspire change—on the level of the personal, communal, or beyond—that will lead to a more just, compassionate, and healthy society. She has won several awards, many of which can be found in the "SELECTED HONORS" section of this document.
In 2011 she founded The Kandake Dance Theatre for Social Change which creates free and low-cost community initiatives, shows, and other offerings that are immersive, accessible, and unique. Her plays have been translated and performed in Spanish she has performed for HBO, Dance Africa, BAM, PlayStation Theater, Webster Hall, House of Yes, Dixon Place, TED Med, Park Avenue Armory, The Lincoln Center, and more. www.TheKandake.com

SELECTED HONORS

2026: Henley Rose Playwright Award - 3rd Place
2026: Writer in Residence - Mouths of Babes Theatre
2026: Lambda Literary Writers Retreat - Playwriting Fellow
2026: Ojai Playwrights Conference - Round 2 (Equal to Semi-Finalist)
2026 (in process), 2025: $50K Creative Capital Award - Round 2 Invitee
2026: BAC Charlene Victor and Ella J. Weiss Cultural Entrepreneur Fund - Top 30 Candidates
2026: Dominion Stage Playwright Competition - Finalist
2025, 2023: June Bingham New Playwright Commission - Semi-Finalist
2025, 2024: $10K Ryan Hudak Award - Top 20 Candidates (of 200+)
2025: Theatre of Gentle Furies Commission - Finalist, 1 of 2 shortlisted playwrights
2025: Lambda Literary's Writers Retreat - Top 30 Playwriting Candidates
2024: Playwrights' Center Core Writer Program - Finalist
2024: $30K MAP Fund - Final Round (cut by random elimination)
2024: Steinbeck Fellowship - Semi-Finalist

SELECTED PLAYWRITING & DIRECTING

Works-in-progress in NYC unless otherwise marked:
Negro Leather Shoes (Staged Reading) @ AMT New Works Series—3/31/26
Negro Leather Shoes (Staged Reading) @ Scotopia Festival (North Carolina)—3/21/26
The Art of War and Hip Hop (Staged Reading) @ The Tank—3/1/26
Negro Leather Shoes (Staged Reading Online) presented by National Black Theatre—9/15/25
1001 Nights: Love Stories on Death Row (A Rock Opera) presented by Fresh Fruit Festival—5/1/24, 5/2/24, 5/3/24
1001 Nights: Love Stories on Death Row (A Rock Opera) (Staged Reading Online) presented by National Black Theatre—2/19/2024
Jaguar Woman (Staged Reading Online)—4/25/21
Jaguar Woman (Excerpt) @ The Brooklyn Music School—10/5/19
Jaguar Woman (Staged Reading) @ WOW Café Theatre—9/29/19
Las 1001 Noches: Historias de Amor en el Corredor de la Muerte presented by Comisionado Dominicano de Cultura—3/3/17, 3/4/17, 3/5/17
Las 1001 Noches: Historias de Amor en el Corredor de la Muerte presented by Comisionado Dominicano de Cultura—6/9/16
1001 Nights: Love Stories on Death Row (A Rock Opera) (Excerpt) presented by Theatre for the New City—6/15/15
1001 Nights: Love Stories on Death Row (A Rock Opera) (Excerpt) presented by Jamaica Performing Arts Center—5/28/15
1001 Nights: Love Stories on Death Row (A Rock Opera) @ WOW Cafe Theatre—5/15/15, 5/16/15
1001 Nights: Love Stories on Death Row (A Rock Opera) presented by Dixon Place—5/6/15
1001 Nights: Love Stories on Death Row (A Rock Opera) (Excerpt) presented by Atelier Orientale w/ Anahid Sofian—11/9/14
1001 Nights: A Rock Opera (Love Stories on Death Row) @ WOW Café Theatre— 8/22/14, 8/23/14, 8/29/14, 8/30/14

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTWRITING
The Forest Protector: Online Game—Ongoing

2024: "Outstanding Dance" Fruitie Award for *1001 Nights...*
2023: Hedgebrook: Vanetta Cutchin Memorial Fellowship
2023: Liberation Theatre Residency
2023: Ma's House Residency w/ Shinnecock Nation
2022: Sewanee Writers' Conference - Playwriting Fellowship
2022: Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights' Conference - Semi-Finalist
2022: DQT's "Classics in Color"
2022: Writers' Colony of Eureka Springs
2021: 1st Place in Scriptwriting - 90th Annual Writers' Digest Competition
2019: MCC - Off-Broadway Full Script Solicitation
2019: Brooklyn Arts Council Award
2017: Citizens Committee for NY Award
2016: "Best Musical" New York Latin ACE Award for *1001 Noches…*
2016: Set on Freedom Artist-Activist Retreat
2016: "Outstanding Musical" HOLA Award for *1001 Noches…*
2015: The Public Theater - Off-Broadway Full Script Solicitation
2015: JPAC Dance Residency

AWARDED - UNABLE TO ATTEND
2023: BAC's Theater of Change
2023: VCCA Residency

ASSOCIATIONS
Dramatists' Guild - Member (2024 - Present)
Playwrights' Center - Member (2025 - Present)
PEN - Member (2025 - Present)

EDUCATION
Pratt Institute: BFA: Writing For Performance, Publication, Media

TESTIMONIALS

INDUSTRY

"That dance solo was **kick ass**." - **Abdel Salaam**, Artistic Director of Dance Africa at **Brooklyn Academy of Music**

"Olga has a gift for deeply theatrical storytelling. Her plays live on the **flaring edge** between Peter Weiss and Cirque Du Soleil. It's unusual to see a playwright playing around so brazenly with the very apparatus of theatre, and it's a quality I admired in her writing." - **David Adjmi**, author of ***Stereophonic* on Broadway** (Most Tony Award-Winning Play of 2024)

"I **friggin' loved** your pages! They made me think of if Isabel Allende wrote a play." - **Chisa Hutchinson**, Screenwriter & Playwright re: *Jaguar Woman*

"**Inspiring**!" - **Hossam Ramzy**, Egypt's late, **premier composer** re: the music and dance of *1001 Nights...*

"**Olga is a tremendous artist** with an incredible voice. Her play was a stunning experience: nuanced, funny, and heartfelt. Working with her was a pleasure." - **Ocean Harris**, Actor & New Work Development Director at **AMT Theater** re: *Negro Leather Shoes*

"I was **blown away** by your work." - **Zoë Reeve**, Artist & Development Director of **AMT Theater** re: *Negro Leather Shoes*

AUDIENCE

"**Visionary**!" - G. Wismoyo

"I love the story! Isn't the writing **fantastic**?" - Random audience member to the co-director of Liberation Theatre

"Most Off-Broadway bores the sh*t out of me. **This didn't**!" - L. Aaron