

DUT PRESENTATION AT 9AM

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Jodie du Plessis:

Wednesday, 21 September at 15:15 (South African time) to finish at 15:15/15:35, and followed by a Q+A session until 15:45 latest.

“You will be allocated a 20-minute timeslot for your presentation, with a 5-minute Q&A session afterwards. This will be followed by a 5-minute handover into the next presentation.”

PowerPoint: <https://www.ellipsesplay.com/events/2022-9-21/2022-9-21.pptx>

9:15AM: Introduction

I’m David (he/him). I was born and raised in Michigan and am now residing in New York City in the United States. I am the musical theater science communicator whose purpose is to lead theatre artists to science and scientists to the performing arts. I attained a Bachelor of Science in Astrophysics and minor in Theatre at Michigan State University. I was the last Literary Fellow of Playwrights Foundation, a theatre organization in San Francisco leading new play development.

Thank you, Jodie, Runette, Dianna, and the Durban University of Technology, for reinviting and welcoming me back to DigiFest. I’m excited to give y’all a more physical update on ELLIPSES.

[1] We are going to start from the very last slide at last October’s DigiFest 8.

[2] I was about to say that you can revisit last year’s presentation, but Jodie’s computer rebooted during our talk so most of that recording is lost. Good news though: There is no evidence that slides are being reused. Daniela Cobb, my fellow speaker last year, is making good use of her time. **[2-]** She is performing in The Lion King tour. **[2--]** When they came to Detroit, I got to attend the production with two college friends and meet her fiancé Nhlanhla.

9:18AM: How did the 2020-2021 lockdown unleash our creativity and inspire ELLIPSES?

As a musical writer, I give years away to this process. **[3]** Musicals, like *The Lion King*, went through many stages before getting to the real one. **[3-]** After some drafts, it must be passed on to other professionals. Then, actors read or sing from the script. **[3--]** Then, they’re workshopped where only parts of the musical are showcased. Then the audiences give feedback. And we do these on repeat until the work is clean enough to get a full production. Before the lockdowns of 2020, plays went through this process. In August 2020, Working Title Playwrights in Atlanta, Georgia made me their second apprentice. **And that changed my life.** It was my first professional title in a theatre company. It is a chance for formal education in playwriting.



9:20AM:

[4] [4-] [4--] Working Title Playwrights assembled our team. This was an astronomical undertaking as this was a large-cast team in a hard-to-maneuver theatre landscape. But we managed in a safe and fun way for the rest of the apprenticeship. Here is the group photo of the ELLIPSES Atlanta team.

[5] In 2020-2022, ELLIPSES went through this virtual process. Then in 2022, musicals started returning to the physical process. I began applying to countless staged opportunities. ELLIPSES became a 2022 Eugene O'Neill Theater Center semifinalist. [5-] ELLIPSES is the top 50 out of 400 musicals who applied, which is a monumental accomplishment in my career. Broadway shows incubate at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. [5] In terms of graphics, the logo also changed its color scheme as the [5--] James Webb Telescope picked up these colorations.

9:22AM:

[6] Last December, a musical writer spoke about Backstory Theatre in Broomfield, Colorado. Backstory Theatre produces children's theatre. My peer told me to give ELLIPSES a shot in their annual Colorado New Musical Festival.

[7] Here are shots of their second annual festival in 2021.

[8] Here are the songwriters selected for the 2021 Colorado New Musical Festival.

[9] Preston Adams, an opera singer and graduate of University of Northern Colorado...

[10] And Kelly Bidstrup Graham, an educator and graduate of University of Colorado, are cofounders of Colorado New Musical Festival.

[11] I applied with ELLIPSES in January 2022.

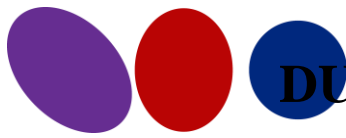
[12] Then in April, within a pool of several dozen applicants, it was selected alongside eight other musicals, mostly from Colorado-based musical writers. I represented an outsider's work, much like everyone here at DigiFest and me from the U.S.

We unilaterally decided that the song I wanted to develop was "Warps, Waves, and Wrinkles" with this children's theatre group. It is a big production number near the end of first act when Milky Way learns to accept their adolescent self.

[12--] Between June and July, the team in Colorado virtually communicated with me while I'm in New York. They asked me questions about intentions of the characters and to reorchestrate music.

9:25AM:

[13] Here is Working Title Playwrights's recording of "Warps, Waves, and Wrinkles."



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9:26AM:

[14] On July 17, I rode Delta from John F. Kennedy International Airport to Denver International Airport. It was my first flight since 2017. Here's a chronology of the week.

9:26AM:

[15] July 18, day one and my first time in Colorado. Needless to say: I goofed off. And speaking of "Romancing the Stone," the theme of this year's DigiFest. I climbed red rock formations. *Shh... Don't tell anyone.*

[16] July 19, Emma Day and I finally connected after virtually developing the music. Emma is my music director. She was also my driver from Denver to Broomfield.

[17] Here is Brunner Farmhouse. It was a 45-minute drive from 11th Avenue Hostel and public transportation is tumultuous. As a person who got used to 24-hour subways and buses, Denver does not have buses that came frequently. At the farmhouse, we got to see some showcases and check out rehearsals.

[18] July 20, we are on our way to one of the rehearsals. Emma miscalculated some routes to get to the space, but we ended up witnessing a double rainbow. A physics phenomenon and a sign.

[19] This is Backstory Theatre's rehearsal space. It was one of my earliest time that I developed my own work in a physical space. I was nervous when they asked for my thoughts, and I cannot turn off my camera. They can see my whole presence fidget. But they were really supportive and truthful, stating the flaws of my score. During these, they tried to play a mandolin for my string orchestration of "Warps, Waves, and Wrinkles." However, it had Jack Tyler's hand in a pretzel.

[20] (Show string shift to piano score of "Warps, Waves, and Wrinkles") So, I had to reorchestrate for piano. It's lame, but that is a lesson for me to speak to guitarists who know their stuff. I compose from trombone and piano.

9:28AM:

[21] Here is some rehearsal footage.

9:29AM:

[22] July 21, the show at Brunner Farmhouse in Broomfield, Colorado. Microphone checks. Food and water. Geez, it was dry heat. An audience of 50 families, children attended.

[23] The group photo of the ELLIPSES Denver team with singers Amanda Edwards, Lucia Graves, Elicia Hesselgrave, Riley Krull, Nicole Meredith, and Jack Tyler. In development,



“Warps, Waves, and Wrinkles” did not layman’s term anything. I was kind of anxious that the kids would come out of this confused and bored.

[24] But afterwards, they got the gist of the astrophysics terminology that I laid before them. Scutum-crux arm... We’re home on the Orion, arm so small and so minor. The kids know that the Solar System is located on the Orion arm of the Milky Way. They don’t have to know on the getgo what the other arms mean. The melody plants a curiosity in them and their parents to research what was being sung. It indirectly engages the audience into science enthusiasm.

9:31AM:

[25] This is the preview of what you’ll see in the exhibit and a part of the 15-minute showcase of “Warps, Waves, and Wrinkles.”

[26] To end on this theme and my favorite place in Denver: South Valley Park where the red rock formation rests. When a collaboration is created for the intention of creating a new musical, the playwright-composer determines whether the script is set in stone or whether the stone weathers the director’s and performers’ ideas and experimentations. I let my stone ELLIPSES go through a natural erosion this past year. Now, this stone got a chance to be artificially layered this past July.

[27] Out of this lockdown, I finally got to enjoy and not take for granted: nature.

9:35AM:

[28] You can follow what’s next for ELLIPSES and me at @ellipsesplay. Dankie for your spacetime.

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David Quang Pham: <https://instagram.com/workingtidal> | davidquangpham@outlook.com