



# DUT PRESENTATION AT 8AM

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Jodie du Plessis:

**Tuesday, 19 October at 14:00 (South African time)** to finish at 14:15/14:20, and followed by a Q+A session until 14:30 latest.

“20-minute presentation on your work. We'd love to hear about your experiences as an artist during the initial lockdown and how it helped you to unleash your creativity and inspired to you do the work that will be exhibited.”

Doc: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ry1Rn8Y9SbTMnnBZoQO1x8F56f6DeYy5/edit>

PowerPoint: <https://www.ellipsesplay.com/events/2021-10-19/2021-10-19.pptx>

## **8AM: Introductions**

Daniela Cobb:

I'm Dani (she/her). I am based in Georgia in the United States.

My fiancé Nhlanhla Ndlovu is born and raised in Durban!

I sing as and portray SPT0615-JD, the hero of ELLIPSES.

David Quang Pham:

I'm David (he/him), the creator of ELLIPSES. I am based in Michigan 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 am the Literary Fellow of Playwrights Foundation, a theatre organization in San Francisco who leads America's new play development. I have an active role in reading scripts, organizing readers, and advancing writers everywhere and anywhere.

Thank you, Jodie, Roshnee, and the Durban University of Technology, for the invitation and warm welcome.

**[1]** We are going to discuss how our musical, ELLIPSES, was concerted, and how cool it is.



## **8:03AM: How did the lockdown unleash our creativity and inspire ELLIPSES?**

David Quang Pham:

As a musical writer, I am giving years of my life away to this process. [2] Musicals, like *The Lion King*, went through many stages before getting to the real one. [2-] After some drafts, it must be passed on to other professionals. Then, actors sitting in chairs read or sing from the script. [2--] 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 2020, musicals and plays went through this process.

For ELLIPSES, the musical development is the same but has been largely virtual. It saves us from considering 1) expenses like venues since Zoom is available and 2) getting an audience. [3] I made connections everywhere online, so we had attendees from San Francisco, New York City, Philadelphia, not just Atlanta. The lockdown helped me as an artist who did not have much of a following. [3-] So, how did I end up in Georgia from Michigan?

[4] In 2019, one of my musicals became a finalist for a major New York theatre festival. I decided to get out of my bubble and seek more cities. Back when I was a student at Michigan State University, many of my friends are from Atlanta. [5] And they told me about Working Title Playwrights, a theatre organization with over a hundred members and dozens of performers. I signed up for their newsletter, and I sort of thought that I'll never meet them. Their classes and workshops are physically out of my reach.

## **8:05AM**

Then 2020. Everything's virtual. [6] Amber Bradshaw, our managing artistic director, invited me to join them on Mondays and the town hall. [7] In August 2020, Working Title Playwrights 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. They covered tuition, too. It meant the world because I am not well off.

**But I am rich in creativity.** [8] My first class is "Generating Story Ideas," which was about how to come up with new things. Our instructor's name is Addae Moon. So, I thought about creating an astrophysics play, which was [9] my background. I thought about the isolation that we are in. And the Moon is not enough. I thought of the whole Universe. I thought of singleness. I've met many single parents lately. [10] On August 16, 2020, a story about Singularity and their Galaxy children was drafted. We shared its first page to a dozen writers in the class and everyone loved it. [-9] Including Aliyah Curry, who gave our musical its first ever feedback and would be our director. We just created a brand-new family musical and an original mythology.



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[11] Later in October, we had our first reading. Scene one is acted out. Five performers read in front of thirty professionals. The responses were positive, and they wanted to know more.

[12] In November, the logo was designed. In geometry, ellipses are ovals. In linguistics, ellipses are the three dots that mean omission. [12-] Typically, my main musicals' number of major characters are based on how many letters the title contained. There are eight characters. E is the dog Gravity. L is JD. Then the other white letters represent the other Galaxies: Cartwheel, Whirlpool, Triangulum, Andromeda, and Milky Way. And finally, S is Singularity, the single parent who has internalized darkness in their black-hole heart.

[13] In December, we had our second reading, focusing on the second act. And one of the five readers this time was Dani!

### 8:08AM

Daniela Cobb:

I played younger Singularity...

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### 8:09AM

David Quang Pham:

Then it was crunch time. Our first song was composed called "Anomaly is Everything" sung by the first member of our team (Abby Holland) around the holiday season, so it is powered by sleigh bells and music boxes. [14] A very hummable song.

[15] In February, it was our third reading. That reading focused on the Big Bang which shocked people, including Singularity which audiences did not expect. Now, they wanted the whole thing.

[16] Emily McClain was the first to read the full draft. I got a galaxy worth's of notes from her.

Then we assembled our team. [17] Amber connected our stage manager, Lexi McKay. [18] Then I asked my dramaturgy classmate Jordan Alexandria Ealey to be our brain. A dramaturg is typically the artists besides the playwright who knows the script inside out. [19] Dani returned as JD. [19-] And all cast members: Minka Wiltz, Parris Sarter, Vallea E. Woodbury, Jason-Jamal



Ligon, Skye Passmore, Daniel Sakamoto-Wengel, Evan Hill Phillips, Kait Rivas, Sofia Palmero. This was an astronomical undertaking as this was an 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.

[20] Between February and June, we recorded eight more songs. I sound engineered orchestras with Spitfire programs, where they have a library of quality instruments. [21] We also had another reading in May. But back to songwriting. For our hero's song, Dani and I orchestrated together. [22] The early drafts of "Cutting Edge" did not sound good...

### 8:11AM

Daniela Cobb:

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[23] [24]

### 8:13AM

David Quang Pham:

We went back and forth to the drawing board. [25] On a related note: The fresh aspect that got many people hooked was the animation. Long story short, I drew as a child and my artwork was displayed at libraries. Also in college, I coded 3D animations of planets for my astrophysics degree. [26] So, I had superhuman patience. And life is a lockdown, so there's nothing better to do, [27] other than to *force* our performers to photograph themselves with emotive qualities. [28] Anywho, my painting style is impressionistic, which is like in Winifred Brunton's. I like painting space. [29] These illustrations and animations were done through the Corel software, which I've used for a decade.

[30] But to a real award-winning filmmaker: Aliyah Curry became our first director after a year of supporting this process. [31] Then together, we are the creative team.

[32] Throughout July, we arranged a couple rehearsals totaling seven hours. After each reading, director Aliyah and dramaturg Jordan sat down with everyone. All performers dug into their Galactic characters and introspected. I saw how to improve the character development and pacing. Again, all musical development.



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And it all culminated into our concert and reading with over fifty audience members attending. My Zoomer generation and millennials love Milky Way because this baby sibling is trying to find themselves despite their body changing due to puberty. We need more self-love in the world. The others related to JD because their journey is about leaving their family to make a new one.

The future ahead for ELLIPSES seems bright. We are reaching out to theatres around the country and to universities for musical development. ELLIPSES has eyes from fellow astronomers and theatremakers who want something unique yet absolutely relatable. The next steps, which we are technically in, is present to the world an original mythology, family musical, crafted from me with a unique upbringing, and put together by a team of diverse and unheard artists.

[33] Longtime Broadway musical writers love the originality. [34] My favorite quote is from John Mabey, who said: “I love stories about families and yours is truly the most unique I've seen.” And that is the spirit! It has been a while since the world is gifted an original-and-timeless tale that can be passed on. And started off read and heard and seen as musical theatre. Theatre is ELLIPSES's Big Bang.

### 8:16AM:

[35] And we will let you hear our barks...

### 8:18AM:

[36]

Daniela Cobb:

Dankie for your spacetime.

Chat:

ELLIPSES

<https://www.ellipsesplay.com>

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Daniela Cobb: [https://instagram.com/lyriks\\_4\\_life](https://instagram.com/lyriks_4_life)

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