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Crowded Fire Theater Presents the West Coast Premiere of *Manning*

September 5–26 at the Potrero Stage in San Francisco

Written by Benjamin Benne | Directed by Adin Walker

JULY 20, 2026, SAN FRANCISCO, CA — Crowded Fire Theater presents the **West Coast** premiere of [*Manning*](#), a poignant and unexpectedly whimsical new play by acclaimed playwright **Benjamin Benne**. Directed by **Adin Walker**, *Manning* runs **September 5–26** at the **Potrero Stage in San Francisco**. **Press night is Saturday, September 12 at 8pm.**

A moving meditation on masculinity, family, and the ways we search for connection after loss, *Manning* blends the fantastic with heartfelt humanity. Following the death of their wife and mother, a father and his two sons spread her ashes in their backyard garden. When a giant zucchini mysteriously appears overnight, each family member begins to discover a unique language for grief through their encounters with the supernatural vegetable. As the extraordinary takes root in the ordinary, they must determine whether they can also cultivate a shared vocabulary for healing together.

"I am excited for audiences to experience Benjamin Benne's soaring *Manning* with this extraordinary company of artists," said director **Adin Walker**. I am very grateful to **Crowded Fire Theater** for producing this West Coast premiere and for bringing us together to, literally, roll up our sleeves and tend to the garden. We hope you'll join us at Potrero Stage."

"**Crowded Fire** is thrilled and honored to introduce Benjamin Benne's vital artistic voice to the Bay Area", said co- executive director **Nailah Harper-Malveaux**. As we collectively envision a future free of patriarchal supremacy, this play invites us to imagine what a healthy and whole masculinity might look and feel like. Bursting with magic and mystery, *Manning* digs below the surface in its exploration of grief, manhood and how we learn what seems instinctual."

The cast features **Michael Torres** as Julio, **Caleb Andrew Cabrera** as Sebastian, **Alonso Melgoza** as Freddy, and **Michele Apríña Leavy** as Ana. The production also features puppeteer **Ixtlán Flores** and musician **Sarah Jiang**.

Adin Walker (Director) returns to Crowded Fire following choreography for *Last of the Love Letters* and acrobatic movement direction for *Limp Wrist on the Lever*. An accomplished director, choreographer, and movement artist, Walker previously served as movement director and associate director with the internationally touring Phantom Limb Company, whose productions have appeared at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival. Walker's recent Bay Area credits include *Jagged Little Pill* and *Indecent* at Center REP, as well as productions with Golden Thread Productions and New Conservatory Theatre Center. Walker recently completed a PhD in Performance Studies at Stanford University, where they directed and choreographed *Fun Home*.

Benjamin Benne (Playwright) is from Los Angeles & Orange County and is currently based in Brooklyn, NY. He is a 2026 Page 73 Writers Group member and was named part of "LA Vanguardia: The Latino innovators, instigators and power players breaking through barriers" by the *Los Angeles Times*. He began pursuing playwriting in 2013, following the passing of his father; his work explores intimate, realistic relationships mixed with surreal, fantastic, and numinous elements that spur expansive, existential questions about grief and loss, death and the afterlife, faith and the Divine. His produced plays include *Alma* (Center Theatre Group's Kirk Douglas Theatre, American Blues Theater, ArtsWest Playhouse, Curious Theatre Company, Central Square Theater, The Spot, Chance Theater, Passage Theatre Company), *In His Hands* (Mosaic Theater Company, First Floor Theater), *Manning* (Portland Stage), and *What / Washed Ashore / Astray* (Pillsbury House Theatre). Other forthcoming productions in 2026 include *at the very bottom of a body of water* (Boston Court Pasadena) MFA: David Geffen/Yale School of Drama. www.benjaminbenne.com

Cast

Caleb Andrew Cabrera (Sebastian) is a San Francisco-based Chicano actor whose Bay Area credits include productions with Crowded Fire Theater, Shotgun Players, Magic Theatre, San Francisco Playhouse, California Shakespeare Theater, Cutting Ball Theater, Central Works, Capital Stage, and Theatre Battery, among others. He has also collaborated with Pixar and is delighted to return to Crowded Fire to help tell this story of Latine grief and joy.

Michele Apríña Leavy (Ana) has been a Resident Artist with Crowded Fire Theater since 2005, where she has originated roles in numerous new works and serves on the company's Literary Committee. Her extensive Bay Area credits include American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, California Shakespeare Theater, Marin Theatre Company, TheatreWorks, and Center Repertory Company. Leavy is a Senior Continuing Lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of California, Davis, and serves on the Advisory Committee of the Latinx Theatre Commons.

Alonso Melgoza (Freddy) makes his Crowded Fire Theater and professional Bay Area debut. A recent graduate of the University of California, Irvine, where he earned a BFA in Music Theatre with honors in acting, Melgoza's recent credits include *In the Heights*, *Grease*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *The Prince of Egypt*. Previous favorite roles include Melchior in *Spring Awakening*, Mac in *The Sweetheart Deal*, and Lorin in *Gloria*.

Michael Torres (Julio) is an award-winning actor, director, and educator whose decades-long career includes performances with Crowded Fire Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, California Shakespeare Theater, Shotgun Players, San Francisco Playhouse, Aurora Theatre Company, Teatro Campesino, and Campo Santo, which he co-founded in 1996. His recent stage work includes *The Untime* and *Hamlet* at Marin Shakespeare Company. Torres serves as Chair of the Theatre Arts Department at Laney College and is the founder of The Fusion Theatre Project.

Creative Team

Carlos-Antonio Aceves (Scenic Designer) is a multidisciplinary Theater Maker whose practice focuses on new plays. Selected scenic and projection designs credits include: *Macbeth* (The Magic Theatre); *Returning to Haifa* (Golden Thread Productions); *Gary a Sequel to Titus Andronicus* (Oakland Theatre Project); *The Boiling* (Magic Theatre) *The Day The Sky Turned Orange* (SFBATCO and Z Space); *Yaga* (Marin Theatre); *Where Did We Sit on the Bus* (Liberty Theatre Company); *Sunset Baby* (Lorraine Hansberry Theatre); *The Displaced* (Crowded Fire Theatre); *BREAKDOWN* (San Francisco Mime Troupe); *PrEP Play or Blue Parachute* (New Conservatory Theatre Center); *Carrie: The Musical*, (projection design American Conservatory Theatre) YC; *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* (West Edge Opera); *Cyrano* (Aurora Theatre Company); *The Boiling* (Magic Theatre); and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, (Shotgun Players).

Tristan Fabiunke (Lighting Designer) is a San Francisco-based lighting designer and recent graduate from SF State. Most recently: Lighting Designer for New Canon's production of *Romeo and Juliet*, Associate Lighting Designer for SF Playhouse's production of *Hairspray*, Programmer and Assistant Lighting Designer for *West Edge Opera 2*.

Alexandria (Alex) Fakayode (Sound Designer) is an artistic collaborator & theatrical sound designer based in Oakland & the greater Bay Area. *Manning* marks her second show with Crowded Fire, following her work as Assistant Sound Designer on CFT's Afrofuturistic production of *Shipping & Handling* in 2024. Alex's work can be seen at different theater companies around the Bay Area, including Shotgun Players, Altarena Playhouse & Lorraine Hansberry Theater.

Sarah Jiang (Musician/Composer) is an actor, violinist, vocalist based in Oakland, and is thrilled to make her debut with the Crowded Fire Theatre in *Manning* as composer and performer. Select credits include: *Angustias*, *The House of Bernarda Alba* (Oakland Theatre Project), *Once* (Berkeley Playhouse), *Barbie Chang*, *I Too Sing America* (SF Bay Area Theatre Co); *Julie*, *Tinderella*, (Custom Made Theatre -Bay Area Critics Circle Winner). Sarah has performed for the late jazz-legend Hugh Masekela, Bill Gates and Melinda French Gates.

Meg Neville (Costume Designer) is a Bay Area based costume designer whose recent credits include *Private Lives* (The Guthrie), *Pictures From Home* and *Yaga* (Marin Theater), *Dracula* and *Little Women* (Theatreworks), *Glass Menagerie* (Center Rep). Meg has worked nationally and locally at Berkeley Rep,

A.C.T. , The Magic, Oregon Shakespeare Theater. Southeast Rep, Arizona Theater Co, Dallas Theater Company. Yale Rep, Hartford Stage, Center Stage, BAM, The Public, Second Stage, Chicago Opera Theater, and many others.

Performance Information

Manning

Written by Benjamin Benne

Directed by Adin Walker

Dates: September 5–26, 2026

<https://www.crowdedfire.org/manning/>

Venue:

Potrero Stage

1695 18th Street

San Francisco, CA 94107

Tickets: Sliding scale beginning at \$25.

Preview performances are Pay What You Can, with admission available for \$1 and up online or by cash donation at the door. As always, no one will be turned away for lack of funds.

Live Audio Description and Haptic Access Tour on Saturday, September 13 by Mylo Cardona of Gravity Access Services for visually impaired audience members. Haptic Access Tour begins at 1 hour before curtain.

For tickets and additional information, visit Crowded Fire Theater's [website](#).

About Crowded Fire Theater

Crowded Fire Theater (CFT) is a critically acclaimed company for new play production on the West Coast. Known for developing and producing poetic, bold, relevant works by up-and-coming playwrights, CFT contributes to the creation of a contemporary canon that reflects the diverse world in which we live.