How does your theatrical garden grow?
At the Hop in summer, new plays are the thing

Photos: (from top) By So Falling, a prior VoxFest presentation; Colman Domingo and Anais Mitchell, NYTW guest artists. Courtesy of the artists.

HANOVER, NH—At Dartmouth, summer is the time for encouraging the development of new theatrical works. This year, the Hop and the Dartmouth Department of Theater offer three series of new and developing plays, bringing together Dartmouth students, faculty, alumni, professional theater artists from New York and around the country—and giving Hop audiences the chance to be a part of the future of American theater.

The first series is VoxFest, a festival for the development of innovative new projects initiated by Vox Theater, a collective of Dartmouth alumni working in theaters across the US. Vox Theater will be in residence at Dartmouth from June 29-July 6, presenting work on Saturday and Sunday, July 5 and 6, 2 and 7 pm in the Hop’s Warner Bentley and Moore theaters. A $13 pass ($5 for Dartmouth students) admits the bearer to all four shows. In addition, there are two free events. For a full schedule, go to http://www.dartmouth.edu/~theater/productions/voxfest2014.html

In this, its second year, VoxFest features an imaginative and energetic line-up: Pox, in which a dying man believes he is a 19th-century dandy; In Deserto, to be created during the week prior to the show by Vox Theater and Dartmouth students; Road Kill Giant, a darkly comedic circus play; and A Star Has Burnt My Eye, a solo show about 1950s Greenwich Village singer-songwriter Connie Converse, who went from a teetotalling New Hampshire upbringing to the heart of the Beats. In addition are two free events: Vox Barter, a collage of new work by Vox Theater and Dartmouth students; and Haze, a participatory, ambulatory event led by Niegel Smith that "consider[s] the ways in which social, political and religious organizations both support and impede a broad and inclusive view of self and others."

The second series shines a light on theater by Dartmouth undergraduates. The 2014 Eleanor Frost & Ruth and Loring Dodd Student Play Festival, Friday and Saturday, July 25 and 26, features multiple performances of Frost contest winner, Locust Walk, a political drama set in Philadelphia City Hall, by Michael McDavid ‘15; and Dodd contest-winning play, Inheritance, an examination of immigration’s effect on a family, by Robert Esnard ’14. Tickets are $4, $2 for Dartmouth students, $3 for all other students.
In August, get a ringside seat for the creation of new American theater: in its 23rd summer residency at Dartmouth, New York Theatre Workshop brings established and emerging theater artists to Hanover to present readings of six new works-in-progress—including a theatrical version of singer-songwriter Anais Mitchell’s acclaimed "folk opera" Hadestown, based on the Greek myth of the musician Orpheus and his love, Eurydice. Two works are presented each Saturday (August 2, 9 and 16) at 5 and 8 pm. On each Tuesday of the residency (July 30, August 6 and 13) at noon, the artists there that week take part in an informal "brown bag" public discussion of their work and process. The informal sessions are free, the play presentations cost $13 per show ($5 for Dartmouth students and $9 for youth tickets), and all are in the Warner Bentley Theater, the black box theater in the lower level of the Hopkins Center. "brown bag" public discussion of their work and process. The informal sessions are free, the play presentations cost $13 per show ($5 for Dartmouth students and $9 for youth tickets), and all are in the Warner Bentley Theater, the black box theater in the lower level of the Hopkins Center.

One of the country’s leading "developmental theaters"—i.e., helping artists write, stage and refine new works for the stage—NYTW is in residence at Dartmouth three weeks each summer, this year from July 28 through August 17. The residency involves six theatrical works-in-progress, being hammered on by visiting writers, directors, performers and others.

This summer's NYTW Dartmouth residency offers a fascinating menu of theatrical works-in-progress, featuring such dramatis personae as a Southern pro-bono defense attorney, an elderly mother in the early stages of dementia, a Hindu family offering refuge to persecuted Sikh neighbors, and the characters of the Orpheus myth, transported to a post-apocalyptic/Depression-era America, in a folk opera by an acclaimed indie-music artist.

 Normally, each of the three weeks brings in a new set of artists to work on that week's two selections. This year, Hadestown will be in residence all three weeks. During the first week, Mitchell will work with musical director Or Matias and musical arranger Michael Chorney; week two will bring in director Rachel Chavkin, assistant director Sanaz Ghajarrahimi and 10 actors; and week three will add five musicians, with the work-in-progress presented on August 16 at 8 pm.

As works-in-progress, the offerings in the NYTW at Dartmouth series are usually presented as readings, sometimes with some stage movement but without sets or costumes.

Other projects this summer are:

- **August 2, 5 pm: Toast**, written and performed by Lemon Anderson, director TBA. An electrifying new play by acclaimed spoken word artist and Tony Award-winning writer Anderson (The Public’s County of Kings: The Beautiful Struggle, HBO’s “Def Poetry”), Toast ingeniously weaves major characters from black oral narratives into a gripping story about a group of inmates fighting to keep their minds free amidst the 1971 riots that
rocked Attica Prison. Honoring the spoken word narratives recited in pool halls, bars and prisons across America by generations of black poets, Toast shows us men trying to live free in a system—and a world—designed to keep them chained. The play was developed, in part, at the Sundance Institute Theatre Program, with funding provided by Time Warner Inc., and the MAP Fund, a program of Creative Capital supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

- **August 2, 8 pm: Dot**, written by [Colman Domingo](http://www.colmandomingo.com), directed by [Sean San Jose](http://seansanjose.com) and performed by a cast of six, is a darkly comedic piece that tells the story of a woman suffering from early stages of dementia who plans on killing herself. Her three adult children struggle to cope with this decision, as well as their own personal disasters. Last at the Hop with NYTW in 2011 with his play *Wild with Happy*, Domingo has won OBIE, Lucille Lortel, GLAAD, Connecticut Critics Circle, Audelco, Bay Area Theater Critics Circle and Internet Theater Bloggers awards and has been nominated for Olivier, Tony, Drama Desk and Drama League awards. His plays have been produced at The Public Theater, The Vineyard Theater, Theatreworks, Philadelphia Theater Company, Baltimore Centerstage, The Tricycle Theater (London), Theater Rhinoceros, Thick Description Theater and the Brisbane Powerhouse Theater (Australia), and he is currently under commission from The American Conservatory Theater and People's Light and Theater Company.

- **August 9, 5 pm: The Hunters**, written by [Jen Silverman](http://www.jensilverman.com), performed by a cast of three, with the director to be announced, tells the tale of twin men who are both hustlers and become embroiled in a troubling question about their late Vietnamese grandfather. Silverman has been produced off-Broadway), off-off Broadway and regionally. She is the recipient of the Kennedy Center’s Paula Vogel playwriting award, an NYFA grant, a Lilly Award and the Yale Drama Series Award. Selected for the 2014 Cherry Lane Mentor Project (under playwright mentor Lynn Nottage).

- **August 9, 8 pm: Forever**, written and performed by [Dael Orlandersmith](http://www.daelorlandersmith.com), directed by Neel Keeler, director, with Joy Meads, dramaturge, was inspired by Orlandersmith’s own experiences in Paris at the famed Père Lachaise Cemetery –final resting place of such legendary artists as Marcel Proust, Richard Wright, and Jim Morrison. Observing strangers from around the world making pilgrimages to their favorite artists’ gravesides, she investigates the complex legacy she received from her mother, a legacy of bitterness, abuse and frustration but also of poetry, music and art. A Pulitzer Prize finalist and the winner of Obie, Guggenheim, and PEN awards for playwriting, Orlandersmith has had plays commissioned and presented by theatres across the US. Currently based in Los Angeles, Keeler is Associate Artistic Director of Center Theatre Group, and before that served on the staffs of Remains Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Lincoln Center Theater, the American National Theatre, and [Jerome Robbins’ Broadway](http://www.jeromerobbinsbroadway.com).

- **August 16, 5 pm: The Shaking Earth**, written by [Mashuq Deen](http://www.mashuqdeen.com), writer, and performed by five actors under a director to be announced, is set in the autumn of 1984 in Delhi, India, when, following a series of related events including the government’s destruction of the Sikh’s Golden Temple and the assassination of then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, three days of Sikh massacres ensued. Inspired by these true events, the play it set in a Hindu household, where a closeted husband and his estranged wife both secretly offer refuge to Sikh neighbors, while their brother helps coordinate the violence going on outside. In present day, a survivor and her daughter cannot find a way forward as the past hangs over them. An emerging South Asian-American playwright and performer, Deen has received numerous notable prizes and fellowships, and his works have received staged readings at New York's Public Theater, Dixon Place and Queens Theatre in the Park and beyond.
Hadestown is a long-nurtured project by Mitchell, a Vermont-raised artist who has recorded five full-length albums. The most recent are Child Ballads, a collaboration with Jefferson Hamer, which won a prestigious 2014 BBC Radio Two Folk Award for Best Traditional Song, and 2012's Young Man in America, which was described by the UK's Independent as "an epic tale of American becoming." She has headlined worldwide as well as opening for such artists as Bon Iver, Ani DiFranco, The Low Anthem and Punch Brothers.

Mitchell wrote the first draft of Hadestown in 2006. She says she didn't set out to write about the Orpheus myth, but her songs just naturally led in that direction. The first staged production was in 2006 in Barre, Vermont. Numerous drafts and stagings later, the project resurfaced in 2010 as an album, with such well-known artists as Justin Vernon (the lead singer of Bon Iver), Ani DiFranco, Greg Brown and Mitchell herself singing the roles.

The album was widely acclaimed. Wrote Allmusic.com, "Her lyrics are poetic, and her melodies unpretentious, yet sophisticated...This 57-minute work goes by in a flash. Artfully conceived, articulated, and produced, Hadestown raises Mitchell's creative bar exponentially: there isn't anything else remotely like it." Reviewing a 2011 concert production of the songs, The British Theatre Guide praised Hadestown as "a remarkable piece of work...crying out for a full production."

Responding to that cry is Chavkin, a two-time Obie Award-winning and Drama Desk nominated director, and the founding Artistic Director of Brooklyn-based ensemble, the TEAM, whose work has been seen nationally and internationally was just ranked Best of 2013 on three continents. No stranger to projects involving music, Chavkin also directed Dave Malloy's electro-pop opera Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812, which was a 2013 "critics' pick" of The New York Times, Time Out New York and New York Post; and has directed multiple collaborations with storyteller James Monaco and composer Jerome Ellis and with playwright/performer/singer Taylor Mac.

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Founded in 1962, the Hopkins Center for the Arts is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50th-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.