

NEWS | OCTOBER 2016 | THE STATE OF THE PLAY | SEPTEMBER 21, 2016 |

AMERICAN THEATRE

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August Wilson.

The Top 20* Most-Produced Playwrights of the 2016-17 Season

August Wilson is the No. 1 playwright in America this season, but San Francisco playwright Lauren Gunderson isn't far behind.

BY DIEP TRAN

How do you become the most-produced playwright in America? For *Disgraced* author [Ayad Akhtar](#), who was last year's most-produced playwright, according to *American Theatre's* [Top 20 Most-Produced Playwrights](#) list, it took having a play on Broadway, then having that play be produced all around the country ([18 times](#) by last year's count). This season's most-produced playwright, August Wilson, has reached the top a different way: A full 9 of his 10 plays are in circulation.

Something similar is true for Lauren Gunderson, the second most-produced playwright of the season, and the most-produced living playwright in America, who reaches that spot on the strength of six separate titles. "It's kind of incredible!" the San Francisco-based Gunderson exclaimed over the phone when we told her the news. She also placed on last year's Top 20 list. "I framed last year's list—I'll have to get another frame." What's remarkable is that she reached this level largely without the New York stamp of approval; her popular play *I and You* had an Off-Broadway production last January, an import from Merrimack Repertory Theatre. Other plays on her roster this season include *Silent Sky* and *The Book of Will*.

Gunderson credits her productivity to working on three projects at a time, and attributes her popularity to relationship-building. "A lot of these companies are mounting the second or third play of mine that they've done," she explained. "If they had

success with *I and You* and *Silent Sky*, I point them to newer plays. It's really incredible—it does create a more continuous conversation, which is what we hope for the theatre.”

Some details about the data set: Similar to the methodology we use for our [Top 10](#) list, we looked at season announcements from 411 member theatres of Theatre Communications Group (you can peruse the full listings at tcg.org/profiles). Those productions numbered 1,946. And for our purposes here, we don't count composers or Shakespeare as authors (see “What We Noticed” below).

AMERICAN THEATRE'S TOP 20* MOST-PRODUCED PLAYWRIGHTS OF 2016-17

- [August Wilson](#): 17
- **Lauren Gunderson**: 16
(including 4 cowriting credits)
- Arthur Miller: 15
- Ayad Akhtar: 14
- Tennessee Williams: 14
- Robert Askins: 13
- Annie Baker: 12
- [Quiara Alegría Hudes](#): 11
(including 6 cowriting credits)
- Ken Ludwig: 11
(including 1 cowriting credit)
- Tony Kushner: 10
(including 2 cowriting credits)
- Suzan-Lori Parks: 10
- Nick Payne: 10
- **Karen Zacarías**: 10
- Rick Elice: 9
(including 1 cowriting credit)
- [Lucas Hnath](#): 9
- Matthew Lopez: 9
- [Lynn Nottage](#): 9
- Mark St. Germain: 9

(including 1 cowriting credit)

- Mike Bartlett: 8
- [Branden Jacobs-Jenkins](#): 8
- Molière: 8

**actually 21 due to ties*



Lauren Gunderson (Photo by Kristen Lara Getchell)

WHAT WE NOTICED

- **NOTABLE OMISSIONS:** Shakespeare continues his long reign as the most-produced playwright in America, with 91 productions this season (including adaptations). And Stephen Sondheim continues to be the most-produced musical theatre composer in America, with 15 productions this season. It's not just children who are listening...
- **HELLO AGAIN:** We welcome back last year's top playwrights Ayad Akhtar, August Wilson, Tennessee Williams, Lauren Gunderson, Ken Ludwig, and Rick Elice.
- **DIVERSITY, OR NOT:** *American Theatre* started counting the Top 20 playwrights in 2014 and so far, 2016-17 is the most diverse season yet, with 8 playwrights of color

and 6 women represented, an increase from last year (with 3 and 5, respectively).

- **NOT NEW YORK:** Gunderson admits that the top playwrights are usually those with more notoriety. “Usually the top of the list is a Pulitzer winner or someone as incredible and revered as August Wilson,” she says. But considering that Gunderson doesn’t (yet) have a Pulitzer or a major New York company produce her work, “It is a pretty exciting confirmation that you don’t have to live in New York, or even have that much of a presence in New York, to have a career.”

A version of this story appears in the October 2016 issue of American Theatre.

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