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27-year-old wins the Bay Area's highest playwriting honor

By Chronicle Staff

Feb 25, 2026



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"Push/Pull" by Harry Davis has won the illustrious Will Glickman Award for the best play to premiere in the Bay Area in 2025.



Matthew Kropschot, left, and Andre Amarotico in Central Works' "Push/Pull" by Harry Davis.

Robbie Sweeny/Central Works

The lean, poetic script, about two troubled young men — one a bodybuilder, the other recently released from a mental health facility — is the first professionally produced play by the 27-year-old Orinda resident. It also marks the first time that producing company Central Works, which specializes in world premieres, has won the award, which has been given annually since 1984.

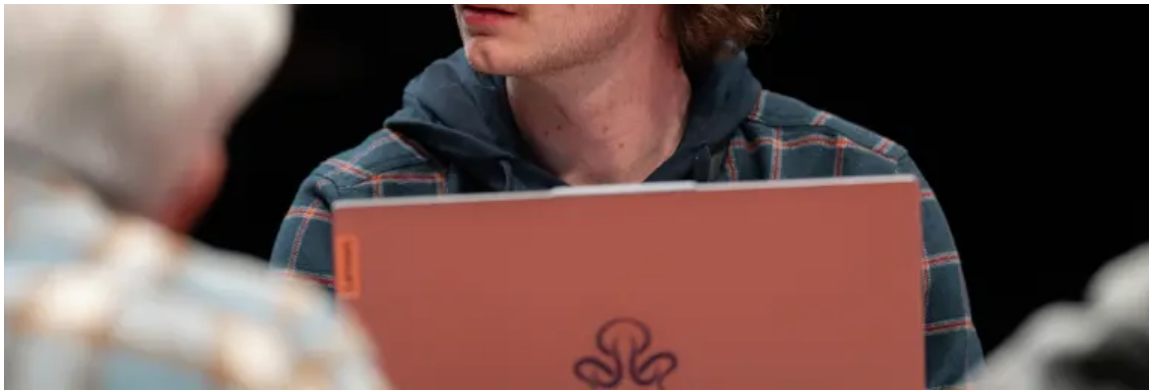


"It feels amazing," Davis told the Chronicle. "I feel really encouraged that this is the right path for me."

The Glickman Committee — composed of San Francisco Chronicle theater critic Lily Janiak as well as fellow theater critics David John Chávez (Mercury News and KQED), Chad Jones (Mercury News and [TheaterDogs](#)), Nicole Gluckstern (KQED and [HowlRound Theatre Commons](#)) and Jean Schiffman (Bay City News) — also gave an honorable mention to Luis Alfaro's "[Aztlan](#)." The Magic Theatre production, about a Central Valley man on parole seeking his long-lost brother, used Aztec iconography to elevate its down-on-their-luck characters to mythic heroes.

Davis — an Astoria, Ore., native who first moved to the Bay Area at age 2 — got the idea for "Push/Pull" when, after a breakup, he found himself spending more time in the home gym in his parents' garage. There, he got to thinking about an interview he'd read with Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Annie Baker; Davis, also an actor, performed in her "[The Antipodes](#)" with the Actors' Reading Collective.





Harry Davis — who's an actor in addition to a playwright — in Actors' Reading Collective's "The Antipodes."
Joseph Giammarco/Actors' Reading Collective

“She said that a lot of times the first thing she thinks of is the setting for the play, and I was like, ‘I’ve never seen a play that’s in a gym,’” he recalled. “It’s such a charged setting, and it’s a place that’s rich for metaphorical value.”



At first he mulled a public facility, but then he gravitated toward one in a home, inspired by his own surroundings “that’s more personal and intimate.”

At the same time, Davis’ brother Theo was preparing for his first amateur bodybuilding competition, just as the character of Nolan does in the play.

“That is a really intense, stressful moment in your life, because you’re starving yourself and you’re working out all the time,” Davis said. “It’s just such a personal achievement, and it’s your body.”

Davis got connected to Central Works when, after studying the art form as an undergraduate at UC Santa Barbara, he took a playwriting class with Gary Graves, the theater company’s co-director, at the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre.



Matthew Kropschot, left, and Andre Amarotico in Central Works' "Push/Pull" by Harry Davis, who won the Will Glickman Award for the best play to premiere in the Bay Area in 2025.

Robbie Sweeny/Central Works

Graves praised Davis' sense of structure and his "ear for contemporary dialect," noting that Davis is the first Gen Z playwright he's worked with.

"Its approach to contemporary masculinity is extremely fresh, even unique," Graves said of the script.

In the play, Nolan (Matthew Kropschot) and Clark (Andre Amarotico) are childhood friends who have reconnected over a shared sense of being unmoored from adulthood. "But Nolan has a plan," Graves explained. "His plan is, if you can perfect the exterior, you'll be fine."

As the two start lifting and endorphin-chasing together, they get strangely intimate — until Nolan's grand plan stops working.

Davis described the appeal of strength training as a coping mechanism in terms of its numeric objectivity.

"It can be measured — like, 'I lifted 100 pounds last month, and now I'm lifting 125.' ... A lot of things in life aren't that way. Writing is not that way," he noted. What's more, he continued, "You have

control over it. You are the one who decides if you show up and do it.”



Matthew Kropschot in Central Works' "Push/Pull."

Robbie Sweeny/Central Works

With just two actors, one set and a 90-minute runtime, the script is very producible, except for one hitch: The actor playing Nolan has to lift massive weights onstage, do countless pull-ups and squats and strike Atlas-like poses showing off boulder-like muscles.

“How are you going to find a theater actor who’s a bodybuilder?” Graves said. “It’s just an oxymoron.”

Fellow actors Brian Herndon and Michael Ray Wisely tipped him off about Kropschot, who used to live in the Bay Area but now resides in Vancouver, Wash.

Kropschot said he was in plausible bodybuilding shape before he was cast but stepped things up

thereafter, visiting the gym and the sauna more days per week and upping his calorie intake. When he was tired, he'd tell himself, "Nolan would have gone to the gym. He would have worked out after a 16-hour day, so I gotta do it too."

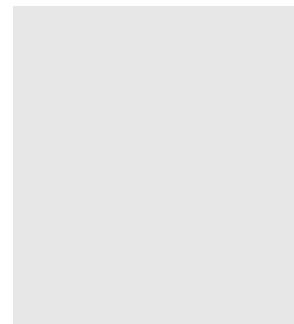
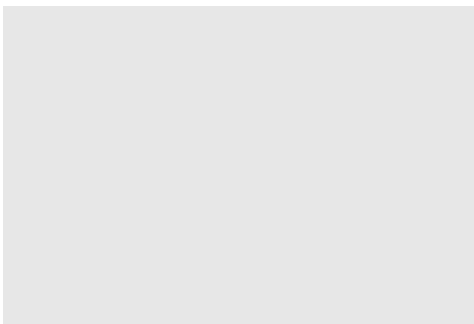
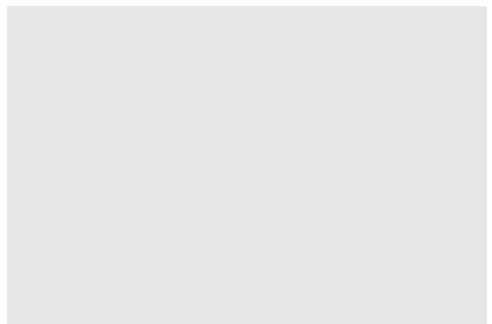
He continued, "The strongest thing about the script is the light that it shines on young men." It shows how, in contrast to their predecessors, "Men are getting more vulnerable — being able to talk to each other about their feelings and what's going on with them more intimately," he said.



Harry Davis' "Push/Pull," with Matthew Kropschot, at Central Works now runs through April 6.
Robbie Sweeny/Central Works

At one moment in the script, Clark confides to Nolan, "I want to feel male." Nolan doesn't make fun of that line; instead, he matter-of-factly supports his friend.

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Future Davis projects include a commission with San Francisco Playhouse.

The Will Glickman Award is named after the screenwriter, playwright and Tony Award nominee who retired in Sausalito. The honor comes with a \$4,000 purse, which Davis will receive at the April 17 [annual gala](#) hosted by award administrator Theatre Bay Area.

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