The World Premiere of â??Just Add Waterâ?•: Great Salt Lake Speaks

Description

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Plan-B Theatre Company â?¢ World Premiere by Matthew Ivan Bennett & Elaine Jarvik â?¢ Directed by Penelope Caywood â?¢ Studio Theatre @ The Rose, Oct 2â??19, 2025

Salt Lake City, UT â?? Great Salt Lake is done being a headline. Here, she takes the stage as a body: weak, scared, proud, yet very much alive. The opening image is plain and mythic at once: a figure in rag-blue rags, nudged by waves, pulling herself upright on a long, flat moan that the chorus answers.

> â??Who calls me?!â?• Great Salt Lake demands.
> A brine shrimp pops out of the surf: â??Hello, sorry, meâ?¦ Your Majesty.â?•

just add water
Photo (left to right): Latoya Cameron, Alec Kalled, and Amona Faatau in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | *Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company*

Co-written by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik and directed with buoyant clarity by Penelope Caywood, *Just Add Water* unfolds within a world elegantly designed by Janice Chan and lovingly constructed by David Knoell. The production is a whimsical cli-fi dramedy that keeps turning from joke to grief, from fable to fact, transforming our reflex to fix into an invitation to care.

As Les Roka observed in *The Utah Review*, â??Great Salt Lake is not just a place.â?• In this play, she becomes what Roka calls a â??majestic beauty, weak and scared but still proud.â?• That duality finds full expression in Latoya Cameronâ??s extraordinary performance. Her Great Salt Lake is alternately

divine and defiant, sarcastic and sorrowful, a body of water learning to grieve itself.

Caywoodâ??s direction keeps the production fluid and alive, blending humor and heartbreak in what Roka aptly described as â??a robust blend of wisely chosen bits of science, matched by plenty of entertainment in the style of a variety or vaudeville show.â?• The result is as funny as it is devastating, moving seamlessly from myth to protest, from hymn to handbook.

just add water 54816574514 o
Photo: Isabella Reeder in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | *Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company*

> *The moment reframes environmental collapse as sibling lossâ??a world forgetting itself.â?•*

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The Lake as Kin

Roka notes that *Just Add Water* springs from the idea of Great Salt Lake as our â??nonhuman kinfolk,â?• a phrase shared by Darren Parry, a Shoshone elder whose grandmother used those very words. That understanding of kinship gives the play its emotional core: itâ??s not just about saving a landscape but repairing a relationship.

Nowhere is this clearer than in *The Dead Arm.* Long separated by the railroad causeway, Great Salt Lake meets her estranged other half, the North Arm, pink and black, part ghoul and part crone, a reflection of what happens when a body of water is written off as already dead. They have been cut off so long that one has nearly forgotten the other.

What begins as sarcasm and mockery slowly bends toward heartbreak as the North Arm, resigned to her own death, insists on giving what little she has leftâ??hopeâ??to her sister. The hug that follows is wrenching. Itâ??s not sentimental but sacrificial: thunder shakes the stage as the North Arm collapses, drained by the act of transfer. Great Salt Lake mourns and straightens, carrying forward her sisterâ??s hope.

The moment reframes environmental collapse as sibling loss, a world forgetting itself. The Lake is not a â??resourceâ?• but a being in relationship with itself, split apart, one half forced into the role of ghost so the other might keep fighting. Within that realization, despair folds into tenderness: even the dying can offer lessons, and even collapse can carry a spark of resistance.

just add water 54816656915 o
Photo (left to right): Isabella Reeder, Alec Kalled, and Amona Faatau, and in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | *Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company*

The Curse of *Dominion*

In *the above scene called The Dead Arm*, we view the playâ??s heart, but in *Dominion* we view a fever dream, a vision of what severed that kinship in the first place. The theatre floods in red light, the color of dust, blood, and extinction. Three robed actors enter and begin to chant in a round:

â??O let us have dominionâ?¦ let us dom-dominateâ?¦ and them domesticate.â?•

Their voices overlap and echo until scripture and corporate rhetoric merge: â??over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and over cattle,â?• forming a theology of conquest that feels both ancient and alarmingly current.

just add water 54810831504 o
Photo (left to right): Alec Kalled, Latoya Cameron, Amona Faatau, and Isabella Reeder in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company

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Lighting Designer Emilio Casillas transforms the stage into a dying bodyâ??the Lake itself bleeding beneath the weight of belief. The chant grows hypnotic, familiar, almost comfortable, very reminiscent of Bible versesâ??thatâ??s what makes it so chilling. Dominion doesnâ??t accuse villains; it implicates the audience, asking us to hear how deeply the mandate to control, rather than coexist, has settled into our bones.

This is not just an ecological crisis but a spiritual one. The scene exposes how domination has been normalized as progress, how faith, law, and economy have conspired to justify it. In this crimson glow, the Lakeâ??s slow demise no longer feels distant or abstract. It feels inherited.

Set designer Janice Chan and Costume Designer Victoria Bird extend that symbolism through fabric. The Lakeâ??s rag-blue shimmer like evaporated sky, while the robed figures of *Dominion* move like shadows of doctrine. The palette blurs ritual and ruinâ??always beautiful, always endangered. Following *Dominionâ??s* vision of conquest, *Just Add Water* answers with creation: a vision of care through craft.

just add water 54810515251 o
Photo (left to right): Latoya Cameron and Isabella Reeder in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company

Theatre of Imagination

The production revels in the ethos of *Big Cheap Theater*, the 1990s movement coined by Erik Ehn to describe high-concept, low-cost performance. A white binder becomes a bird. White handkerchiefs ripple like fragile bodies. In one of the eveningâ??s most enchanting transformationsâ??created by Arika Schockmel and Sharah Meservy, under the direction of of Penelope Caywoodâ??a snow cone

cup slipped over the fingers becomes a swanâ??s beak, the long white glove its body, and the handkerchief its wings. The effect is tender and tactile: flight evoked not through spectacle but through care, while seagull calls and the hush of Cheryl Ann Cluffâ??s soundscape blur the edges between imagination and environment. The moment is both theatrical and ecologicalâ??a quiet reminder that imagination, not material, is the theaterâ??s most renewable resource.

just add water 54813286327 o
Photo (left to right): Alec Kalled and Amona Faatau in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | *Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company*

Actor Highlights

Latoya Cameron anchors the ensemble of actors as the personification of Great Salt Lake with immense emotional gravity. She captures what Les Roka called the Lakeâ??s â??majestic beauty, weak and scared but still proud,â?• infusing it with wit, rage, and aching humanity. Cameronâ??s voice carries the weight of centuries, when she whispers â??I feel a little more saved.â?• It takes a strong actor to embody all that Great Salt Lake signifies and Cameron met that challenge head on.

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Amona Faatau brings irresistible warmth and physical comedy to Brien, the ever-loyal brine shrimp who coaxes the Lake toward leaving her home. Faatauâ??s buoyancy keeps the playâ??s ecological grief from collapsing into despair. Their movement workâ??equal parts grace and gritâ??turns the shrimp into something between court jester and conscience. Faatau is both endearing and versatile in every role they inhabit: Brien, Announcer, Angry Slam Poet, Activist, Freddie, and Drought.

As the playâ??s shapeshifters, Alec Kalled and Isabella Reeder inhabit an astonishing range of characters, from farmer and legislator to journalist, activist, and apparition. Each transformation is crisp, embodied, and distinct.

Kalled moves fluidly between rolesâ??Driver, Tundra, Swan, Bar-Goer, Scientist, Farmer, Bob, Bulldozer, Mr. Representative, and Developmentâ??grounding even the most surreal moments in recognizable humanity. Kalledâ??s comic precision makes the absurd feel plausible and the political feel personal.

Reeder, meanwhile, gives the play its moral heartbeat. Whether as Swan, Journalist, North Arm, or Apathy, she is both a witness and a warning. Reederâ??s North Arm, in particular, is devastating: weary, wry, and full of quiet grace.

Under Caywoodâ??s direction, the ensemble functions like an ecosystemâ??each performer vital, responsive, and in relation. Together they sustain the playâ??s impossible balance of tragedy and laughter, myth and urgency, satire and sincerity.

just add water 54815414572 o
Photo: Isabella Reeder in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | *Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company*

Everyday Entanglements: Hamburgers, Lawns, and Leaf Blowers

From the mythic to the mundane, *Just Add Water* spares no illusions about what is draining the Lake. In one of the playâ??s sharpest scenes, an alfalfa farmer proudly explains that his fields feed cows raised only to be eaten, a moment that exposes Utahâ??s paradoxical water economy. The script reminds us, with quiet precision, that a single hamburger takes roughly 150 gallons of water to produce. It is not a condemnation of one farmer, one consumer, or one habit; it is an invitation to see how personal comfort and cultural norms flow together into ecological consequence.

Then come the lawns: a 1950s jingle exalting green grass in the desert, and the whine of leaf blowers, mentioned almost offhandedly yet resonating as a perfect metaphor for noise without progress. These are not villains but emblems of habit, of inherited ideals about beauty, productivity, and order. *Just Add Water* doesnâ??t ask us to assign blame; it asks us to recognize relationshipâ??between water and desire, convenience and consequence.

just add water 54816522743 o
Photo (left to right): Alec Kalled and Amona Faatau in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company

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Dramaturgy and Care

The dramaturgy by Heather May, in collaboration with Great Salt Lake Collaborative, gives *Just Add Water* its remarkable balance of fact and feeling. The playâ??s humor and heartbreak rest on rigorous research â?? the science of dust storms, the economics of alfalfa, the ethics of stewardship â?? but May ensures that none of this ever feels didactic. The facts move through the story like currents, shaping it from beneath.

That same spirit of inquiry and empathy flows through the rest of the production team. Scenic Designer Janice Chan creates an environment that feels both elemental and metaphoric â?? a landscape built from objects that could have washed ashore, evoking the Lakeâ??s memory of itself. Lighting Designer Emilio Casillas sculpts the space in pulses of color and shadow, turning red into warning, blue into breath. Sound Designer Cheryl Ann Cluff extends the dramaturgy through the ear: a subtle layering of cooing seagulls, distant highway hum, and the faint lap of water that blurs the line between theatre and world.

Costume Designer Victoria Bird threads the playâ??s research into texture and tone, from the rag-blue of the Lakeâ??s robes to the austere garments of â??Dominion.â?• Even the smallest choices â?? a swath of fabric, a shift in hue â?? seem to carry ecological meaning. The props, imagined by Arika Schockmel and Sharah Meservy, complete the dramaturgical circle by transforming the disposable into the sacred.

Together, these collaborators create what might be called embodied dramaturgy â?? research made material, ethics made aesthetic. Their collective care allows *Just Add Water* to extend beyond the stage, inviting the audience to breathe with the Lake and listen in a new way.

> Itâ??s not just about saving a landscape but repairing a relationship.

just add water 54815461882 o
Photo (left to right): Alec Kalled, Latoya Cameron, and Amona Faatau in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | *Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company*

â??A Little More Savedâ?•

The play ends not with triumph but with trembling grace. After all the satire, ritual, and reckoning, Great Salt Lake, embodied with luminous vulnerability by Cameron, stands at the waterâ??s edge and admits, â??Iâ?¦ feel seen. And I would say that I see more clearly.â?• When she extends her hand to the journalist, asking simply to feel a human hand before she returns to the waves, the gesture is both intimate and monumental. It is not a plea for pity or worship but for relationship.

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Cameronâ??s performance is the tide that carries *Just Add Water.* Her final words, â??I feel a little more saved,â?• are not naÃ¯ve. They are conditional, contingent, and painfully honest. The Lake may feel â??a little more saved,â?• but only if we take her hand.

In the end, *Just Add Water* does not ask for miracles, only for care: the kind that begins in imagination, flows through policy, and settles quietly into the choices we make every day.

> *Just Add Water* transforms fact into feeling and collapse into kinshipâ??where science becomes sorrow, and sorrow becomes care that stirs to action.

just add water 54810459066 o
Photo (left to right): Latoya Cameron and Amona Faatau in *Just Add Water* by Matthew Ivan Bennett and Elaine Jarvik, directed by Penelope Caywood.
Photo by Sharah Meservy | *Courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company*

Coda: From Abstraction to Embodiment

In an article for *The Rhetorical Review*, I wrote about how our most urgent environmental crises are often buried beneath dataâ??how numbers can numb us even as they reveal catastrophe. *Just Add Water* lifts those same facts out of abstraction and into breath. When Great Salt Lake herself becomes the one to speak, the statistics donâ??t just inform; they resonate. They ache.

What I tried to express through argument, *Just Add Water* renders through embodiment. It transforms fact into feeling, statistic into sound, collapse into kinship. In that alchemy, science becomes sorrowâ??and sorrow becomes a form of care.

Show Details

Plan-B Theatre Company presents
Just Add Water
A World Premiere by **Matthew Ivan Bennett & Elaine Jarvik**
Directed by **Penelope Caywood**
ð??• **Studio Theatre @ The Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center**
50 W 200 S, Salt Lake City, UT 84101

ð???ï¸• **October 2 â?? 19, 2025**
ð??? **Performance Schedule**

- **Thursdays @ 7 PM**
- **Fridays @ 7 PM**
- **Saturdays @ 4 PM**
- **Sundays @ 2 PM**

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ð?? **Accessibility Performances**

- **Sensory-Friendly Performance:** Saturday, **October 4, 2025 @ 4 PM**
- **ASL-Interpreted Performance:** Saturday, **October 11, 2025 @ 4 PM**

ð???ï¸• **Tickets**

- **General Admission:** $29 ($25 ticket + $4 fees)
- **Student Admission:** $19 ($15 ticket + $4 fees)
- **Runtime:** 90 minutesâ??|â??**No intermission**â??|â??**No late seating**
- **Recommended for ages 14+** (no infants or lap seating)

ð??? **Parking Tip:** Parking at the Rose Wagner can be tricky â?? arrive early and plan to pay for parking. Street spots fill quickly, and nearby garages may charge evening rates.

ð??? **Box Office:** ArtTix (801) 355-2787â??|â??ð??§ arttix@slco.org
ð??? **Tickets & Info:** ð??? Click here: planbtheatre.org/justaddwater

Cast & Creative

Playwrights â?? Matthew Ivan Bennett & Elaine Jarvik
Director â?? Penelope Caywood
Actors â?? Latoya Cameron, Amona Faatau, Alec Kalled, Isabella Reeder
Costume Designer â?? Victoria Bird
Dramaturg â?? Heather May + Great Salt Lake Collaborative
Scenic Designer â?? Janice Chan
Lighting Designer â?? Emilio Casillas
Sound Designer â?? Cheryl Ann Cluff
Props Designer â?? Arika Schockmel
Assistant Props Designer + Education Coordinator + Photographer â?? Sharah Meservy

Graphic Designer â?? Alisha Jones
Intimacy Director â?? Liz Whittaker
Great Salt Lake Consultants â?? Jaimi Butler (Biologist) & Darren Parry (Elder, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation)
Education Liaison â?? Aliyah Bacca
Scenic Builder + Electrician â?? David Knoell
Service Learning Intern â?? Ren Lasher
Stage Manager â?? Maisie Bunker Nelson

About the Playwrights

Matthew Ivan Bennett has been the Resident Playwright of Plan-B Theatre since 2007, where he has premiered numerous stage and radio plays. His work spans theatre, film, and poetryâ??marked by a distinctive blend of lyricism, humor, and social insight. A recent fellow at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation in Taos, New Mexico (Fall 2024), Bennett is currently training as a Certified Actor with the National Michael Chekhov Association.

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His adaptation of *Frankenstein* won the Best Feature Program award from the Utah Broadcasters Association, and his one-person play *Eric(a)* earned Best Drama at the United Solo Festival in New York. *A Version of Events* (Stage Rights) and *Different=Amazing* (Leicester Bay Theatricals) are published works that reflect his sharp eye for empathy and justice. His comedy *A Night with the Family* ran at the Omaha Community Playhouse, while his film *The Whole Lot* was an official selection at the Philadelphia and Kansas City Independent Film Festivals.

Bennettâ??s plays have been recognized by the Oâ??Neill National Playwrights Conference (*Let Down Your Hair*, Finalist; *Art & Class*, Semifinalist) and the Great Plains Theatre Commons (Holland New Voices Award, 2014). His short plays have been produced across North America, and his poetry has appeared in *Sugar House Review*, *Western Humanities*, *Utah Life*, and *unearthed*. An alum of Southern Utah University and Futurescapes, Bennett is a longtime member of the Dramatists Guild.

Elaine Jarvik is a Salt Lake Cityâ??based playwright and journalist whose work spans intimate family dramas, social satires, and youth-centered ecological plays. Before turning to theatre, she worked as a reporter and feature writer for *The Salt Lake Tribune*, where her storytelling often balanced rigor with compassionâ??qualities that infuse her playwriting.

Her longstanding relationship with Plan-B Theatre has produced a number of premieres, including *Two Stories* (an exploration of journalism and truth-telling), *Marry Christmas* (a holiday comedy with sharp social edges), *River.Swamp.Cave.Mountain.* (a childrenâ??s play created for Plan-Bâ??s FEST program), and *The Coming Ice Age*. With *River.Swamp.Cave.Mountain.* and the traveling school production about Great Salt Lake, *Eb & Flo*. Jarvik has contributed directly to FESTâ??s mission of creating new work for Utah elementary students, bringing professional theatre into schools across the state at no cost.

Across genres and audiences, Jarvik is known for blending humor with urgency, crafting stories that invite reflection on how personal lives intersect with broader cultural and ecological crises.

Together, Bennett and Jarvik bring craft and conscience to *Just Add Water*, uniting research, imagination, and care in a story that listens as much as it teaches.

Further Reading & Resources

About the Play & Production

- Plan-B Theatre Company: *Just Add Water* Official Page
- The Utah Review â?? â??A Great Salt Lake Playâ?• by Les Roka
- Wake the Great Salt Lake Project â?? Salt Lake City Arts Council
- Great Salt Lake Collaborative
- PBS Future of the Great Salt Lake Documentary

Environmental Context

- Utah Division of Water Resources â?? Great Salt Lake Hydrology & Updates
- Utah State University Water Check: Alfalfa, Agriculture, and Water Use
- National Geographic â?? â??Whatâ??s drying up the Great Salt Lake?â?•climate-change-global-warming-drought
- The Rhetorical Review â?? â??The Large-Scale Meat Problem in Americaâ?• by Keolanani Kinghorn

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Educational & Dramaturgical Materials

- Plan-B Theatre Study Guide for *Just Add Water* / Large Print Script for Accessibility â?? Plan-B Theatre /A Week With a Play: Plan-Bâ??s Education Program

Further Reading on Art, Kinship, and Ecology

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Milkweed Editions, 2013)
- â??Big Cheap Theatreâ?•

Category

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2. Premiere

Tags

1. Alec Kalled
2. Alisha Jones
3. Aliyah Bacca
4. Amona Faatau
5. arika schockmel
6. Cheryl Ann Cluff
7. Climate
8. Darren Parry
9. David Knoell
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27. Ren Lasher
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