

Screenwriters Have a New Way Into Hollywood, and 'The Weight of Silence' Is the Proof of Concept

Script consultant Shannan E. Johnson skipped the submission pile and put her screenplay before studio and production executives as an immersive staged reading.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Shannan E.

Johnson grew up watching her father ride in Houston's Black rodeos. On Sept. 20, his photograph hung behind Birgundi Baker of "The Chi" and Omar J. Dorsey of "Queen Sugar" as they performed the screenplay he inspired. Within days, producers were asking to read it.



WOS Live: Who Killed Calvin? brought Shannan E. Johnson's feature screenplay *The Weight of Silence* to life as an immersive staged reading in Los Angeles on September 20, 2026.

WOS Live: Who Killed Calvin? brought "The Weight of Silence," Johnson's crime thriller set among Houston's Black cowboys, to the stage for an invited industry audience. Baker stars as Kennedy alongside Zachariah Rogers ("P-Valley") and Jon Chaffin ("Diarra From Detroit"), with Dorsey as her father.

Before the first page was read, guests were immersed in the world of the film through Houston food, music and imagery.

"People always tell writers to tell the stories that are personal to them, but there was something surreal about watching that actually happen," Johnson said. "I had images of my Daddy on his horse hanging behind these incredible actors as they spoke words I wrote from a story inspired, in part, by my relationship with him. That hit me in a way I wasn't prepared for."

Executives from A Few Good Women Productions, Disney and Meynon Media attended, along with independent producers whose credits include projects with Netflix, Westbrook and Will

"The proof of concept is already doing what I hoped it would do," Johnson said. "Producers have requested 'The Weight of Silence' screenplay, and production companies have requested follow-up meetings to discuss the project."

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*Shannan E. Johnson, Writer
and Founder, The Professional
Pen*

"The Weight of Silence" follows Kennedy, a sharp, guarded butcher who returns home to bury her estranged father, a revered Black cowboy murdered in a string of serial decapitations, only to be pulled into an investigation that reopens a toxic love triangle and unearths a family secret she has spent her life running from.

Johnson, founder of The Professional Pen, borrowed the staged reading from theater and reimagined it for film so executives could see the feature on its feet before it reached their desks.

"I didn't want to simply send another screenplay into Hollywood and wait," Johnson said. "My background is in both theater and film, so I decided to bring those worlds together and create my own pathway."

"I created it to test whether an immersive staged reading could work as a proof of concept for a screenplay. But I walked away wondering if we also tested a new model for experiencing and developing new work," Johnson said. "Writers get to hear and see their stories performed by working actors. Audiences get to discover new work from the beginning, see actors they love in an intimate setting and become early champions of a story."

Johnson is now seeking sponsors to develop immersive staged readings as a recurring platform for new screenplays. Inquiries may be directed to the media contacts below.

WOS Live: Who Killed Calvin? was presented by The Professional Pen in association with LATex Media, directed by Jason Dirden ("Greenleaf," "Raising Kanan"), with creative direction by Artis J. Olds.

Cast

Birgundi Baker ("The Chi"), Omar J. Dorsey ("Queen Sugar," "Selma"), Zachariah Rogers ("P-Valley," "Genius: Aretha"), Jon Chaffin ("Diarra From Detroit"), Deborah Joy Winans ("Greenleaf"), Rolando Boyce Sr. ("The Chi"), Geffri Maya ("All American: Homecoming"), Jessica Frances Dukes ("Ozark") and Armani Greer ("Why Did I Get Married Again?"), with Cairo Spencer, LeShay T. Boyce, Amad Jackson, Jeff Prater, Reno Warmath, Jeremie Rivers, Shari "Ri" Bihms, Maria Pallas,

Misty Anderson, Paul Archer and Michael Monks.

Learn more about the film at theweightofsilencefilm.com. Event photography is available at [WOS LIVE Event Photos](#). Johnson and members of the cast and WOS Live team are available for interviews.

About The Professional Pen

The Professional Pen is the first Black-owned script consultancy in Los Angeles, California, founded by Shannan E. Johnson, a former Syfy development and programming executive whose series included "Haven," "Being Human" and "Warehouse 13." Operating at the intersection of writers and executives, its team of Story Experts, known for straight-shot, no-chaser feedback, develops screenwriters from idea to pitch to become more confident storytellers and consults with scripted development teams. Writers who came through The Professional Pen have gone on to write for allblk, Hulu and Nickelodeon. Learn more at theprofessionalpen.com.

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Armani Greer performs an emotional scene from *The Weight of Silence*, a Southern crime drama set inside Houston's Black rodeo culture, at WOS Live: Who Killed Calvin? in Los Angeles on September 20, 2026.



The cast of *The Weight of Silence* performs in the round beneath framed rodeo photography, bringing the film's world into the room at WOS Live: Who Killed Calvin? in Los Angeles on September 20, 2026.

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