

# DAILY BRUIN

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Courtesy of Jolie Oliver  
Jolie Oliver, executive assistant for UCLA football and an alumna of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, will be starring in a Pico Playhouse production of "The Old Settler."

## TFT alum Jolie Oliver juggles theater, football careers

By KellyAnne Tang

She made her debut in the spotlight as Queen Isabella in her elementary school's Columbus Day pageant.

Ever since, Jolie Oliver, an alumna of the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television and the executive assistant for UCLA football, has been addicted to the rush of live performance.

From 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Oliver tends to the needs of coach Jim Mora and the rest of the UCLA football community, but her evenings and weekends are devoted to her passion for theater.

Later this month, Oliver will be starring in a Pico Playhouse production of "The Old Settler," a story of the relationship between two black sisters living in Harlem during the 1940s.

"As a young person, I was always a class clown so I loved the attention (I got from performing)," Oliver said. "As I

got older though, it became more about being able to inhabit another character and make people believe in you."

After graduating from UCLA in 1979, Oliver was eager to start her career as a full-time actress. She soon realized, however, that she would have to find other jobs to make a living while pursuing her acting.

"When we got out of the theater program, we all had our egos and thought we were all going to be stars," Oliver said. "I got out there and a rude awakening hit."

In order to support herself, she first started working at the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, but then took the job with UCLA football when it opened up in 1983.

Although she has found a place for herself in UCLA Athletics, she continues to study at professional acting schools and stays involved in theater and film projects.

She is one of seven founding members of a production company called Synergy Seven Films and has also been a part of a stand-up comedy ensemble with five other comics, which has performed around Southern California for five years.

It was while studying at the Beverly Hills Playhouse in 2009 that Oliver received the opportunity to develop a new production of "The Old Settler" under the direction of William Stanford Davis, an actor and director in Los Angeles.

After the success of “The Old Settler” workshop, Davis said he and the actors wanted to do a larger production of the show because they had become attached to the characters and the story.

He said it was Oliver, however, who took the initiative to raise money, manage publicity and organize a team in order to turn the show into a reality, all while working full-time at UCLA.

Oliver said she raised \$37,000 through a Kickstarter campaign, auctions and nonprofit organizations. She said it took a couple years to make it to opening day.

Oliver said her hard work was motivated by her passion for the story told by the play, which revolves around her character Quilly and her sister Elizabeth. The story follows their relationship and how it changes with the arrival of a young man named Husband, who rents a room in their Harlem apartment. Underneath the core story of love and the importance of family, the show also touches on the struggles of being black in the 1940s.

John Roderick Davidson, who plays Husband in the show, said the time in which the play takes place is an important period in the history of the black community.

Davidson said his character, who moves to Harlem from South Carolina, is representative of many African Americans who moved from the South to the North to find new opportunities but were confronted with discrimination instead.

Oliver’s devotion to her work as an actress and to her character, Quilly, stood out to Davis, her director. Davis said he was especially impressed when Oliver took a trip to North Carolina this summer to learn more about living in the South. There, she was introduced to a woman named Miss Betty Adams, who reminded her of Quilly.

“I spent many hours with her, just soaking in the way she talked, the things she knew, the way she walked through the church and the way she was so often on the phone,” Oliver said.

Oliver said she uses what she learned from her time with Adams in her portrayal of Quilly, particularly in her mannerisms and attitude.

“To me, that’s a sign of a fine artist, of someone who really takes their work seriously, someone who wants to be as thorough in (her) work as an actress as possible,” Davis said.

While playing a key role in UCLA Football by day, Oliver continues to hold on to the passion and aspirations she’s had since she was a little girl portraying a queen.

“Never be discouraged,” Oliver said. “What we learn in this business is that you’re going to get more no’s than anything else but that’s not a reflection on you. Continue with your own journey. If you have the talent to bring out who you are when you walk into a room, you’re 90 percent there.”