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Mosaic Theater Company of DC Announces New Season Four Replacement production, *Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of A Native Son*

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Mosaic Theater Company of DC announces an update to our Season Four lineup. The world premiere production of Aaron Davidman’s *The Shooting Gallery*, which was scheduled to run in repertory with the regional premiere of *Native Son*, has recently undergone exciting creative changes. No longer a solo performance piece, it has expanded to feature two additional actors alongside its author. Additional workshop and rehearsal time, in coordination with director Michael John Garces’ busy schedule this spring, will push the production into a future Mosaic season. Mosaic will present a workshop reading of the revamped project on February 11 and 12, 2019.

Playwright/performer Aaron Davidman, creator of the critically acclaimed, *Wrestling Jerusalem*, notes: “As I started writing the play this summer, it quickly became clear that the scope of the material was too large for one person to carry on stage. I was stuck as a writer and the piece was feeling laborious. Once I gave myself the permission to have 3 performers on stage, I suddenly had more freedom to explore the material in different ways. It opened up theatrical possibilities and I found the tone I was looking for and I became very excited about what could be created.”

In its place, Mosaic will be producing the World Premiere of *Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of A Native Son* by Helen Hayes award-winning director and playwright, Psalmayene 24. Set in the legendary Parisian café Les Deux Magots in 1953, the work is a contemporary reimagining of the actual meeting between *Native Son* author Richard Wright and essayist/activist James Baldwin. On his inspiration for this new work, Psalmayene 24 says: “While researching *Native Son,* I read James Baldwin’s seminal book, *Notes of a Native Son.* After reading Baldwin’s criticism in the second essay of the book ("Everybody’s Protest Novel"), I felt as though a thunderbolt had struck me on the head and blown the shoes off my feet. Baldwin had articulated a feeling that was trapped inside me and was somehow released after reading his words.”

“In creating *Les Deux Noirs* and thinking about the conflict between Baldwin and Wright, I’m grappling with these questions: What is the primary responsibility of the black artist?
What is the black artist’s responsibility to the black community and to the general public with which the artist shares their work? What defines an authentic black voice?”

*Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of A Native Son* will run for 16 performances in repertory with *Native Son*, directed by Psalmayene 24, from April 7 to April 27, 2019 with a Press Night on April 15, 2019.

*Native Son*, adapted by Nambi E. Kelley from Richard Wright's novel, begins previews March 28 and will run through April 28, 2019 with a Press Night on March 31, 2019.

Artistic Director, Ari Roth, reflects: “In a way, this is the programming that we wanted around *Native Son* from the beginning. It’s such a provocative piece of literature and originally commissioning Psalm to write a smaller workshop response piece to be in dialogue with the play was something we thought would be incredibly dynamic. But we were equally committed to *The Shooting Gallery*, a timely play about gun violence in one of the same neighborhoods where *Native Son* is set. Now with Aaron Davidman’s play needing additional development and accommodating director, Michael John Garces’ schedule, we’re fast-tracking Psalm’s play toward full production with a renewed sense of urgency.

“I love that Psalm came to this plot by reading a 2001 article in the New Yorker by Hilton Als ([https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/02/16/the-enemy-within-hilton-als](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/02/16/the-enemy-within-hilton-als)), which off-handedly referred to this incredibly cheeky meeting between Baldwin and Wright in a Paris cafe where Baldwin asked Wright for money, having just authored an excoriating takedown of Wright’s masterpiece. Psalm recognized a great play in the making! I trust that both *Native Son* and *Les Deux Noirs* will be enriched by one another and Psalm’s involvement in both.”

*Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of A Native Son* explores the tension between James Baldwin's searing critiques of *Native Son* (published in “Notes of a Native Son”) and Richard Wright's unbridled indignation at Baldwin's criticism, *Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of A Native Son* reimagines a confrontation between these two mighty African–American artists with echoes of a present day rap battle.

**About Psalmayene 24**

Psalmayene 24 (a.k.a. Gregory Morrison) is an award–winning director, playwright, and actor. Recent directing credits include WORD BECOMES FLESH (recipient of five 2017 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Direction of a Play) by Marc Bamuthi Joseph at Theater Alliance; his play, THE FRESHEST SNOW WHYTE, at Imagination Stage, and THE SHIPMENT by Young Jean Lee at Forum Theater.

With the premiere of CINDERELLA: THE REMIX at Imagination Stage, Psalm (as his colleagues call him) completed his critically acclaimed Hip–Hop Children’s Trilogy that explores the past, present, and future of hip–hop culture. Also having premiered at
Imagination Stage, the other two plays of the trilogy are ZOMO THE RABBIT: A HIP-HOP CREATION MYTH and P.NOKIO: A HIP-HOP MUSICAL. Among other awards, the plays of the trilogy have earned two $25,000 development grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Walt Disney Corporation grant, and two Helen Hayes Award nominations for Outstanding Production, Theatre for Young Audiences.

Psalm has received commissions from the African Continuum Theater Company, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, The Kennedy Center, and Solas Nua. His one man play, FREE JUJUBE BROWN!, is recognized as a seminal work in Hip-Hop Theater and is published in the anthology, Plays from the Boom-Box Galaxy: Theater from the Hip-Hop Generation (TCG).

Psalm directed The Welders’ world premiere production of NOT ENUF LIFETIMES by Caleen Sinnette Jennings and the Mead Theatre Lab production of READ: WHITE AND BLUE by The Hueman Prophets. He has also directed theater ensembles in India as part of Arena Stage’s Voices of Now program and was the assistant director of The Living Stage Theatre Company.

Psalm is the recipient of the Imagination Award from Imagination Stage (past recipients include Christopher Reeve, Dr. Jane Goodall, and Dennis Haysbert). He has also received grants from the Maryland State Arts Council, DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, and the Boomerang Fund for Artists Inc.

As an actor, Psalm has appeared on HBO’s critically acclaimed series The Wire, been nominated for a Helen Hayes Award (1999, Outstanding Lead Actor in a Musical), and is a member of Actor’s Equity Association. He had the pleasure of playing Fortune in Arena Stage’s Helen Hayes award-winning production of RUINED. He is currently featured in Destination DC’s film segment highlighting theatre in Washington, DC. Psalm is a proud member of the Stage Director’s and Choreographers Society.

About Mosaic Theater Company of DC
Independent, intercultural, entertaining, and uncensored, Mosaic Theater Company of DC is committed to making transformational, socially-relevant art, producing plays by authors on the front lines of conflict zones, and building a fusion community to address some of the most pressing issues of our times. Dedicated to making our theater a model of diversity and inclusion at every strata, on stage and off, Mosaic invests in the new as we keep abreast of our changing and challenging times to ensure that our theater is a responsive gathering space, all the while nurturing and producing art of the highest order. Visit us at mosaictheater.org