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American Premiere of Norman Yeung’s THEORY Poses Provocative Questions About Limits of Free Speech on a Modern College Campus

Mosaic Theater Company of DC presents the second offering in its "Stages of Awakening" Season 5 with the American premiere of Theory by Norman Yeung, directed by Associate Artistic Director, Victoria Murray Baatin, making her Mosaic directorial debut. The play, Winner of Canada's Herman Voaden National Playwriting Competition and produced to acclaim at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre last fall, runs at the Atlas Performing Arts Center from October 23 through November 17, 2019. Opening press night takes place Monday, October 28 at 7:30 pm following 5 preview performances, including a full Pay-What-You-Can performance October 23, with additional Pay-What-You-Can tickets available throughout the preview period.

The 85 minute techno–thriller features Musa Gurnis (Mosaic's Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of a Native Son) as Isabelle, an idealistic young professor, and Andrea Harris Smith (Roundhouse theatre's Small Mouth Sounds) as Isabelle's tenured wife, Lee, along with Helen Hayes Award winner Josh Adams (Theater Alliance's The Events) as one of a diverse group of students challenging their professor's pedagogic, and then personal, well–being.

A hot button play for our digital moment, Isabelle is an idealistic tenure–track professor of film theory who encourages her students to liberate the canon, dismantle the patriarchy, and democratize the study of great films by posting their responses to an unmoderated discussion board. Lee, who knows from a lifetime's exposure to racialized hate speech, advises caution. But Isabelle advocates for her students' freedom to think and speak. Soon anonymous postings of questionably offensive comments and videos force Isabelle to decide whether to intervene or let the assignment play out. As the posts turn increasingly abusive, Isabelle and her unknown tormentors engage in a high–stakes game of cat–and–mouse that not only has Isabelle questioning her beliefs, but fearing for her life.

The Toronto–based playwright Norman Yeung will be in residence at Mosaic courtesy of support from the Embassy of Canada. In discussing the play's evolution, the playwright notes, "I wrote the first draft of Theory in 2009. Over the years, the play’s politics, along with Isabelle and Lee, grew in lockstep with our zeitgeist: Liberalism itself was being stretched further to the left to the point where political correctness could be unforgiving. Oppression
was getting recognized with more rigor and nuance. And so, as our interracial, female couple contended with their own complex, liberal values, *Theory’s* themes grew more intersectional. To write a play about progressiveness means including — or foregrounding — female characters, among other marginalized and under-represented people. I have been humbly and gratefully listening to women’s voices and stories, learning from people who experience pain and happiness from a perspective that I do not possess. From racial micro-aggressions to the antagonist’s abhorrent, abusive, and inexcusable behavior, this play has benefitted from people offering their personal insight and ideas. My process of writing *Theory*, especially recently, is reflected in another of this play’s themes: Empathy. If we learn that, we can progress and move forward."

Victoria Murray Baatin, now in her third season with Mosaic, was a fortunate recipient of a travel grant from the Embassy of Canada, where she experienced the first preview of the world-premiere of *Theory*, on the last night of her productive research trip. "With this play, I found a work that was so very arresting and in Norman, I found a kindred spirit. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to share this play with my Mosaic family because it deftly grapples with the “theories” inherent in intersectionality. Collectively, we get to unravel the interconnected nature of the human constructs of social categorization; individually, we can tackle our own points of privilege and bias. I love the key relationships at the center of this play, and each of the beautifully crafted personalities. It’s intriguing to watch them navigate power dynamics at home and within the classroom. I couldn’t imagine a piece more fitting to bring to the Mosaic stage as my initial directorial offering."

Ms. Murray Baatin's directing credits include the DC premiere of Stew's *Passing Strange* at Studio Theatre along with productions for the Lincoln Center Theatre Director’s Lab, Women's Project Producer’s Lab and residencies in Ashland, Oregon (Oregon Shakespeare Festival FAIR Fellow); Washington, DC (Allen Lee Hughes Fellow, Arena Stage); Italy (LaMaMa, ETC. International Symposium for Directors); Brazil (Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed); and London (British Academy of Dramatic Arts Shakespeare Program).

"This is a play and production with a youthful, hard-driving, rigorous, vigorous voice" notes Mosaic Founding Artistic Director Ari Roth. "It isn't patient with its argumentation. It's eager to tackle the problem or privilege and free speech. It's fitting that this grouping has two somewhat older characters voicing concern, largely destabilized by more aggressive voices, on multiple sides of the political spectrum, pushing the issues forward. The blackboard that Isabelle offers as a canvass for portraying her students ideas becomes a portrait of the dangerous fractiousness of our moment."

Rounding out the cast are Benaire Kane as Davinder (*Hand to God* at NCDA), Camilo Linares (*Picasso* at GALA Hispanic) as Jorge; Tony H. Nam (Mosaic's *Sooner/Later*) as Isabelle's Department Chair, Owen; and Tyasia Velines (Mosaic's *Milk Like Sugar*) as Safina. The design team includes Daniel Ettinger (sets), Brittany Shemuga (lights), Danielle Preston (costumes), David Lamont Wilson (sound), Dylan Uremovich (projections), and Willow Watson (props).
As always and in advancement of its mission, Mosaic will host a series of post-show discussions exploring resonant themes present in Theory, featuring a diverse set of panelists. These free post-show discussions, beginning immediately after the performance, will cover topics such as:

- Public vs Private Discourse: The Sh!t We Say at Home
- White Savior Complex
- Who Has the Power? Students & Teachers: Control, Dynamics, and Hierarchies
- Juggling Intersectional Privilege
- Teachable Moments: (Im)Possibility of Objectivity
- Unplugging: You Can't Turn the Internet Off . . . Can You?

A full list of discussion dates and discussant bios for Theory will be available on [http://www.mosaictheater.org/discussions](http://www.mosaictheater.org/discussions)

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Playwright's Bio:

Norman Yeung is a Canadian playwright, filmmaker, actor and visual artist. Yeung's play Theory won First Prize for the Herman Voaden National Playwriting Competition in 2015. It was presented at SummerWorks Theatre Festival in Toronto in 2010, where it received the National Theatre School of Canada/SummerWorks Award and received its world premiere production at The Tarragon Theatre in 2018. His play Deirdre Dear premiered at the Neil LaBute New Theatre Festival in 2015 in St. Louis, Missouri, presented alongside the premiere of LaBute's Kandahar. His first full-length play Pu-Erh, about how language unites and divides an immigrant family, premiered at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto. It was nominated for four Dora Mavor Moore Awards, including Outstanding New Play. His play Lichtenstein's an 8: A New Formula to Quantify Artistic Quality, about the intersections between art and science, was presented at Buddies in Bad Times' Rhubarb Festival. His post-apocalyptic opera Black Blood (Norman Yeung, librettist; Christiaan Venter, composer), about victims in a war over resources, premiered at Tapestry New Opera Showcase in Toronto.

Yeung has written and directed short films that include Anne Darling, Marnie Love, Hello Faye, and Light 01. His films have screened at international film festivals including Calgary International Film Festival, Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival, The Los Angeles International Short Film Festival, on Movieola Channel, Mini Movie International Channel (Europe), and on Air Canada. Yeung has exhibited his paintings and drawings in such venues as Art Gallery of Ontario, Art Gallery of Mississauga, Flying Rooster Contemporary Projects (Montreal), Milk Glass (Toronto), and curcioprojects (New York City). As an actor, Yeung played the role of Kim Yong in Resident Evil: Afterlife; the role of Eddie the Metal Dude in Todd
and the Book of Pure Evil; a conniving gang leader in Rookie Blue; a guilt-ridden drama student in King, and a VJ in The Tracey Fragments. For the stage, Yeung played the roles of Young Zhang Lin and Benny in Chimerica, a co-production between Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre and Canadian Stage, and played the role of Hassan in The Kite Runner, a co-production between Theatre Calgary and Citadel Theatre.

Additional Information about Theory:
Pay What You Can Preview: Wednesday, October 23 at 8 PM
Additional Pay What You Can Preview Tix Available 1 Hour before show October 24–27.
Opening/Press Night: Monday, October 28 at 7:30 PM
Closes: Sunday, November 17 at 7:30 PM
Ticket Prices: $20–$65
Performance Times: 8 PM Wednesday–Saturday; 3 PM Saturday & Sunday

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: https://www.mosaictheater.org/theory
VALET PARKING AVAILABLE AT 1360 H ST NE on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings, as well as Saturday and Sunday matinees.

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