Mosaic Theater Company Media Release
Ari Roth, Founding Artistic Director • Serge Seiden, Managing Director & Producer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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November 27, 2015
[Post-show events updated: December 11, 2015]

MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY OF DC TACKLES INNER-CITY VIOLENCE WITH MARCUS GARDLEY’S THE GOSPEL OF LOVINGKINDNESS UNDER DIRECTION OF RESIDENT DIRECTOR JENNIFER L. NELSON DECEMBER 9, 2015—JANUARY 3, 2015

Helen Hayes Award-Winner Deidra LaWan Starnes leads intimate ensemble in this Washington, DC premiere.

(Washington, DC) Fresh off the successful run of its inaugural production, Unexplored Interior (This is Rwanda: The Beginning and End of the Earth), Mosaic Theater Company of DC doubles-down its focus on posing the big questions of our community with Charles MacArthur Award-nominee Marcus Gardley’s lyrical The Gospel of Lovingkindness, a poetic chamber play that takes audience members to the streets of Chicago in a story both tragic and familiar. This intimate drama, making its DC premiere at Mosaic Theater, affirms the company’s commitment to telling diverse stories that ring most urgent in our communities and neighborhoods today.

The story follows two young African American men, Manny and Noel (both played by Manu H. Kumasi), each making their transition from adolescence to adulthood. While Manny’s life seems on a high, just back from a concert in Washington where he performed for President Obama, Noel’s life is racked by the competing challenges of work, school and early parenthood. After Manny is shot and killed for his Air Jordan sneakers, his distraught mother, Mary (Helen Hayes Award-winner Deidra LaWan Starnes) must re-trace his ill-fated trajectory, conjuring along the way the ghost of the 152 year-old civil rights legend Ida B. Wells (Erica Chamblee) in an attempt to put a stop to the cycle of violence that afflicts so many of our cities. Beloved DC veteran actor Doug Brown rounds out the ensemble in a number of key supporting roles.

The play is inspired by the story of Hadiya Pendleton, who in 2013 at the age of 15, performed for President Barack Obama at his second inauguration. She was shot and killed one week later, on January 29, one mile away from the President’s Chicago home. The First Lady attended Hadiya’s funeral, and her parents were guests at the President’s State of the Union address in February, 2013.

“This play hit very close to home when I first read it,” shares Founding Artistic Director Ari Roth. “I’m born on the South Side of Chicago and have roots there to this day. That many neighborhoods there remain unsafe, frequently under siege with violence sown from within, due to neglect and disregard from without, is a source of pain, embarrassment, and shame. But that same pain exists in Washington, DC today. And always has.”

Indeed, though far short of the violence experienced by many Chicagoleans, Washington, DC has suffered its own recent spike in crime with homicides in certain parts of the city nearly double what they were a year ago. And from Mosaic Theater’s new home at the heart of the rapidly transitioning H Street Corridor, the natural cycle of gains and

at the Atlas Performing Arts Center • 1333 H St NE Washington, DC 20002 • www.mosaictheater.org
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losses of a developing neighborhood is often in plain sight. For **Resident Director Jennifer L. Nelson**, whose African Continuum Theatre Company was one of the first tenants in the then newly-refurbished Atlas Performing Arts Center almost a decade ago, this growing divide between the rich and the poor is an urgent call for reckoning.

“The biggest challenge to the 21st Century may be the increasingly large material gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots,’” shares Nelson. “The resentment caused by that disparity no longer simply simmers beneath the surface to periodically burst through in acts of desperate rage...The American concept of fairness and equality makes it particularly difficult to stomach unremitting poverty living right in the hearts of our shiniest cities.”

As with *Unexplored Interior*, Mosaic Theater staff, board and advisors have put together an ambitious schedule of free community programming to complement the material presented in *The Gospel of Lovingkindness*, to further the work on stage through discussions, talkbacks, Peace Cafés, Community Conversations, happy hours and more. This production’s events, with titles such as *Investing in our Youth*, *An Artist’s Response to Gun Violence in our Cities* and *The Gospel According to Ida B. Wells*, have been curated to serve as an invitation to audience members of all backgrounds to take part in tough discussions on the issues most pressing in our neighborhoods. Confirmed panelists include playwright **Marcus Gardley**, Artistic Director of Baltimore’s Center Stage **Kwami Kwei Armah**, radio personality **Kymone Freeman**, *Washington Informer* editor **Denise Rolark-Barnes**, politician and activist **Eugene Puryear** and many others.

**Marcus Gardley** (*Playwright*) is a poet-playwright who was awarded the 2011 PEN/Laura Pels award for Mid-Career Playwright. His most recent play, *Every Tongue Confess*, premiered at Arena Stage starring Phylicia Rashad and directed by Kenny Leon. It was nominated for the Steinberg New Play Award, the Charles MacArthur Award and was a recipient of the Edgerton Foundation New Play Award. His musical, *On The Levee*, premiered last summer at LCT3/Lincoln Center Theater and was nominated for 11 Audelco Awards including outstanding playwright. Last spring, his play, *And Jesus Moonwalks the Mississippi*, was produced at The Cutting Ball Theater and received the SF Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award nomination for outstanding new play and was extended twice. He has had six plays produced including *dance of the holy ghost* at Yale Repertory Theatre (now under a Broadway option,) *(L)imitations of Life*, at the Empty Space in Seattle, and *like sun fallin’ in the mouth* at the National Black Theatre Festival. He is the recipient of a Helen Merrill Award, a Kesselring Honor, the Gerbode Emerging Playwright Award, the National Alliance for Musical Theatre Award, the Eugene O’Neill Memorial Scholarship, and the ASCAP Cole Porter Award. He holds an MFA in Playwriting from the Yale Drama School and is a member of New Dramatists, The Dramatists Guild, and The Lark Play Development Center. He is a professor of Playwriting at Brown University.

**Jennifer L. Nelson** (*Director*) is a Washington-based theater professional committed to principles that value human dignity, justice and compassion. She brings to Mosaic Theater more than 40 years of experience as an actor, playwright, administrator, professor, director and two-term president of the League of Washington Theatres. She is Senior Advisor for Programming at Ford’s Theatre, and previously served for 11 years as the Producing Artistic Director of the African Continuum Theatre Company, where she directed more than 20 full productions and readings. She is a 26-year veteran of Living Stage Theatre Company, the former community outreach program at Arena Stage. Nelson has directed productions at Ford’s Theatre, Round House, Woolly Mammoth, Theater of the First Amendment, Theater J and more. As a playwright, Nelson won the Helen Hayes/Charles MacArthur Award for Most Outstanding New Play for her play, *Torn From the Headlines*. She has taught at UCLA, George Washington University and American University, most recently teaching “Theatre for Social Change” as an adjunct lecturer at Georgetown University.

The creative team for *The Gospel of Lovingkindness* includes set designer **Ruthmarie Tenorio**, costume designer **Heather C. Jackson**, lighting designer **Dan Covey**, sound designer **Baye Harrell**, properties designer **Gina Grundman**, production manager **Erin Simpson** and stage manager **Hope Villanueva**.

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For full company bios and additional production information visit mosaictheater.org/gospel. The full cast list is included below.

*The Gospel of Lovingkindness* Special Events and Community Programming Schedule

(Additional discussions and panelists will be added in the coming days and weeks, and all are subject to change)

1. **WED. DEC 9** | Talkback with Creative Team
2. **FRI. DEC 11** | Talkback with Director Jennifer L. Nelson
3. **SAT. DEC 12** | Positive Connections: Denise Rolark-Barnes in conversation with Cynthia Dawkins, Nardyne Jefferies and Marion Gray Hopkins
   In Lab II following the 3:00 PM preview performance, featuring Denise Rolark-Barnes (Editor of the *Washington Informer*) and the parents of victims of gun violence
4. **WED. DEC 16** | Investing in our Youth: Solutions to Urban Violence
   In Lab II following the 8:00 PM performance, a discussion featuring Mazi Mutafa (Executive Director of Words, Beats & Life) Bomani Armah (independent performance artist, educator, and poet). Invited speaker: David J. Johns (Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans)
5. **THUR. DEC 17** | Men Cry Too: Sam Ford in conversation with Eugene Puryear and Stuart Anderson
   A conversation on role of masculinity in relation to violence. In Lab II following the 8:00 PM performance.
6. **FRI. DEC 18** | Mosaic Theater Happy Hour
7. **FRI. DEC 18** | Interrupting Conflict to Cure the Contagion of Violence
   A conversation with Impact Hub DC following the 8:00 PM performance, featuring Karen Volker (Director of Strategic & International Partnerships, Cure Violence) and Jalon Arthur (Director, Innovation & Development, Cure Violence). Moderated by Mosaic Theater Board Member Stephen Stern.
8. **SUN. DEC 20** | From Selma to Ferguson to Baltimore to DC: We Still Got Work to Do
   In Lab II following the 3:00 PM performance, featuring Mosaic Theater Board Member NJ Mitchell. Join us afterwards for a panel conversation titled Solutions Against Gun Violence.
9. **WED. DEC 23** | Community Conversation
   In Lab II following the 8:00 PM performance, featuring radio personality Kymone Freeman
10. **SUN. DEC 26** | Artist’s Response: *A Conversation with the Man who Killed my Son*
    Reflections with local artists including playwright Jacqueline D. Brown, author of *A Conversation with the Man who Killed my Son*, following the 3:00 PM performance
11. **SUN. DEC 27** | An Artist’s Response to Gun Violence in our Cities
    In Lab II following the 3:00 PM preview performance, featuring Baltimore Center Stage Artistic Director and playwright Kwame Kwei-Armah (frequent director of Marcus Gardley’s works).
    In Lab II following the 8:00 PM performance, featuring Michon Boston (cultural and creative consultant, and playwright)
13. **WED. DEC 30** | Cast Talkback
14. **FRI. JAN 1** | Mosaic Theater Happy Hour
15. **SAT. JAN 2** | Peace Café
    In Lab II following the 3:00 PM performance
16. **SUN. JAN 3** | DC Youth Slam
    Members of DC Youth Slam respond to the play following the 3:00 PM performance. Featuring Jonathan Tucker (Split This Rock)

*The Gospel of Lovingkindness* Opening Celebrations:

Sunday, December 13th at 2:00 PM and 7:30 PM, and Monday, December 14th at 7:30 PM

Mosaic Theater Company staff, board, and affiliated artists celebrate the opening of the second show of the inaugural season! For further information, or for tickets, contact Contessa Riggs at 202-399-7993 ext 157, or email contessa@mosaictheater.org.

Production Information

*The Gospel of Lovingkindness* —continued—
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By Marcus Gardley
Directed by Jennifer L. Nelson
December 9, 2015—January 3, 2016

**ABOUT:** A hymn-and-hip-hop-tinged elegy, set on the South Side of Chicago in a time of rising gun violence in a cosmopolitan, yet divided city, the play tells the story of Manny, a 17-year-old who sings for President Obama at the White House only to be held up weeks later for his Air Jordan sneakers. Manny's mother retraces the trajectory of her son's fateful encounter with Noel, a fellow teenager with heartbreaking setbacks of his own, as she conjures the ghost of Ida B. Wells, the Civil Rights activist now 153 years old, who offers a challenging perspective for the family and our community. Staged by Mosaic Theater Resident Director Jennifer L. Nelson (Founding Artistic Director, African Continuum Theatre Company).

**CAST:**
Joe, Coach, and others: Doug Brown
Ida B. Wells, Martha, and others: Erica Chambee
Manny, Noel, and Zach: Manu H. Kumasi
Mary: Deidra LaWan Starnes

**CREATIVE TEAM:**
Director: Jennifer L. Nelson
Set designer: Ruthmarie Tenorio
Costume designer: Heather C. Jackson
Lighting designer: Dan Covey
Sound designer: Baye Harrell
Properties designer: Gina Grundman
Production manager: Erin Simpson
Stage manager: Hope Villanueva

**Plan Your Visit:**
**TICKETS:** Tickets for *The Gospel of Lovingkindness* are $15-$50, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as student discounts, neighborhood nights, community nights, military and first responder discounts, and others, visit mosaictheater.org/tickets. Tickets may be purchased online at mosaictheater.org, or by phone at 202-399-7993, or at the Atlas Performing Arts Center Box Office at 1333 H Street NE, Washington DC 20002.

Atlas Performing Arts Center Box Office: 202-399-7993 ext. 2

**PRICING TIERS:**
**General:** $25-50
**Senior:** 10% discount
**Military and first responder:** 10% discount
**Under 30 and student:** $15 tickets

**Neighborhood Night:** $15 tickets on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sunday nights for Mosaic Theater neighbors in Northeast or Southeast.

**Community Conversation:** $10 tickets once a month for Mosaic Theater neighbors in Northeast or Southeast.

**PERFORMANCE DATES:**
Preview performances at 8:00 PM on Wednesday, 12/9, Thursday 12/10, Friday 12/11, and Saturday 12/12
Opening celebrations Sunday 12/13 at 2:00 PM and 7:30 PM, and Monday 12/14 at 7:30 PM
Sundays at 3:00 PM and 7:30 PM
Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8:00 PM

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Saturday matinees at 3:00 PM on 12/26 and 1/2

Weekday matinee at 11:00 AM on Thursday 12/17
Closing performance at 7:30 PM on Sunday 1/3
No performances on 12/15, 12/24, 12/25, or 12/31

Full calendar: mosaictheater.org/gospel

**METRO:** Mosaic Theater Company is in residence at the Atlas Performing Arts Center, which is a twenty-minute walk from the Union Station Metro Station (Red Line). When exiting the station, follow signs to the bus parking garage. Exit the back of the garage and turn right onto H Street.

If coming by the Metro Center or Chinatown Metro Stations, patrons can catch the X2 or X9 busses, getting off at H St & 14th St NE.

Additional directions: mosaictheater.org/plan-your-trip.

**PARKING:** Mosaic Theater Company has partnered with the Atlas and H Street Parking to provide valet parking throughout the season for nearly every performance. Patrons can pre-purchase valet parking for $20, which can either be used at the nearby valet drop-off, or as a self-parking voucher at the lot at 1008 H Street NE.

For more information, or to purchase valet parking: mosaictheater.org/parking.

**Mosaic 8** packages are now on sale and may be purchased by calling the Atlas Performing Arts Center box office at 202-399-7993 ext 2, or by visiting mosaictheater.org.

*Mosaic Theater Company of DC* is committed to making powerful, transformational, socially-relevant art, producing plays by authors on the front lines of conflict zones and providing audiences with a dynamic new venue for the dramatizing and debating of ideas including an annual intercultural festival, like our acclaimed *Voices From a Changing Middle East* series.

With an emphasis on the playwright's vibrant voice, muscular structures and a powerful collaborative fusion with directors of vision and story-telling integrity, Mosaic plays marry a love of ideas, character, conflict, immediacy, and personal and public resonance, working with the finest actors in our city to create thrilling performances that matter. Our plays speak truth to power and to the private parts of our soul prompting reflection, discussion and uplift, while creating lasting impression; in short, we make art with a purpose and strive for impact.

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Meet Mosaic:
MosaicTheater.org
Facebook: facebook.com/MosaicTheater
Twitter: twitter.com/Mosaic_Theater
Blog: mosaictheater.org/Blog

**Opening Nights for Mosaic Theater Company of DC’s inaugural 2015-16 season:**
*Unexplored Interior*: Monday, November 2nd at 7:30 PM
*The Gospel of Lovingkindness*: Sunday, December 13th at 2:00 PM and 7:30 PM, and Monday, December 14th at 7:30 PM
*Wrestling Jerusalem*: Thursday, January 7th at 8:00 PM
*I Shall Not Hate*: Monday, January 25th at 7:30 PM
*The Promised Land*: Thursday, February 18th at 8:00 PM (at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company)
*After the War*: Monday, March 28th at 7:30 PM
*Hkeelee (Talk to Me)*: Saturday, April 30th at 8:00 PM (at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater)
*When January Feels Like Summer*: Monday, May 23rd at 7:30 PM