

DAHLAK BRATHWAITE TRY/STEP/TRIP

Program Notes
Fri, Aug 16

Edlis Neeson
Theater



MUSEUM OF
CONTEMPORARY ART
CHICAGO

SUMMER 2019

Celebrate
black
creativity
with music
and
dance that
transform
expecta-
tions.

Cover, clockwise from left: Rennie Harris, *LIFTED*. Photo: Nikki Carrara; Dahlak Brathwaite, *Try/Step/Trip*. Photo: Joan Osato; still from video of Ben Lamar Gay at Trans Musicales de Rennes 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

FROM THE CURATOR

In our initial meetings, Dahlak Brathwaite expressed two desires that really stuck with me. First, he wanted his time in Chicago to extend beyond our theater, into spaces where people are already discussing why the criminal justice system has become a rite of passage for young black men. Second, that this work-in-progress falls on a longer trajectory in his creative practice, as he transforms his poetic writing into a script for the first time. During his residency, Dahlak connected with MCA Community Partner Free Write Arts & Literacy and the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice Youth Centers. He's made strides with lighting and staging details that demand a larger theater—and now, an audience—to push *Try/Step/Trip* to the next phase. Dahlak sees all of this work, in and outside the theater, as part of the piece he is building, and I, for one, can't wait to see how it all comes together.

Try/Step/Trip is the first of three performances that speak to and about Chicago, transform familiar music and dance into something new, and alter our expectations of the experiences black performance can create. Chicago audiences can see four artists' works along different stages of development—some sharing ideas for the first time, like Dahlak, some well-seasoned after touring the country. It's vital we support work that conscientiously engages with this city's artists, histories, and ideas; the breadth of how black artists make performance is integral to that goal.

Tara Aisha Willis
Associate Curator, Performance & Public Practice

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SUPPORT FOR NEW
WORKS INITIATIVE

Lead support for the
MCA New Works
Initiative is provided by
Elizabeth A. Liebman.

SUPPORT FOR THIS
MCA STAGE PROJECT

Deep gratitude to
Yolanda Cesta Cursach
for her early support of
this New Works
Initiative project and
her curatorial work to
bring it to fruition.

Many thanks to Michael
Byrd of the Illinois
Youth Center Chicago
and Heidi Mueller of
the Illinois Department
of Juvenile Justice, as
well as to Roger
Bonair-Agard and the
staff at Free Write Arts
& Literacy and The
Baldwin Project for
additional
programming.

Dahlak Brathwaite
Try/Step/Trip (Work-in-Progress)

Running time for *Try/Step/Trip* is 60 minutes with
no intermission. This performance includes some strong
language.

ASL-INTERPRETED PERFORMANCE WITH
AUDIO DESCRIPTION
Fri, Aug 16, 7:30 pm

Concept/Writer	Dahlak Brathwaite
Director	Roberta Uno
Choreographer	Toran X. Moore
Musical composers	Dahlak Brathwaite and Teak Underdue
Performers	Morgan Camper, Derek Jackson, Frederick Ramsey, Dante Rossi, Benjamin Turner, and Max Udell
Stage manager	Ceton Tate
Producer	Youth Speaks



Dahlak Brathwaite, *Try/Step/Trip*. Photo: Joan Osato.



ABOUT THE WORK

Try/Step/Trip emerges from Brathwaite's *Spiritrials*, a solo play narrated in spoken word by the artist with a soundtrack he released as a hip-hop album in 2012. For this expanded version, Brathwaite steps offstage to collaborate with director Roberta Uno, choreographer Toran X. Moore, and five actors. The finished piece premieres this fall at Youth Speaks, which produces youth poetry slams, festivals, and reading series in San Francisco, Brathwaite's hometown. Tonight's in-progress performance culminates a weeklong residency at the MCA in which Brathwaite and his collaborators refined the work using the museum's technical staff and equipment; experimented with scenic elements for the full script; and deepened their practice of addressing the theme of criminal justice beyond the theater by working with previously and currently incarcerated Chicagoland youth.

This residency is supported, in part, by the MCA's New Works Initiative, which provides performing artists with commissioning and development support to be used toward the creation of new performance projects. Since 2014, this initiative has expanded the MCA's ongoing commitment to supporting artists and bringing important new performances to our audiences. Lead support for the New Works Initiative is generously provided by Elizabeth A. Liebman.

We hope you enjoy this rare opportunity to be among the first audiences to experience this new work.

SUPPORT FOR THE ARTISTS

Critical support for the work has been supported through residencies at the Center for New Performance at CalArts. *Try/Step/Trip* is a National Performance Network/Visual Artists Network (NPN/VAN) Creation & Development Fund Project co-commissioned by Youth Speaks, Inc. in partnership with Ictus, a fiscally sponsored project of Intersection for the Arts, CalArts Center for New Performance, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Miami Light Project, and NPN/VAN. For more information, visit NPNweb.org. *Try/Step/Trip* was made possible with funding by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Theatre Project, with lead funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and additional support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Additional support for the work has been contributed by residencies at Hi-Arts, Harlem, NY; Ko Festival, Amherst, MA; Montalvo Art Center, Saratoga, CA; Meadows School of the Arts - Southern Methodist University, Dallas; and ACT Artshare, San Francisco. The company wishes to thank Victory Gardens Theater, Chay Yew, and Skyler Grey.

ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

Select MCA Stage performances include open-captioning, sign-interpretation, listening devices, or are relaxed sensory.

Please call 312-397-4010 in advance to reserve seats and inclusive services.

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BUY TICKETS

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BY PHONE
312-397-4010

AT THE MCA
BOX OFFICE

220 E Chicago Ave
Chicago, IL 60611

Single performance tickets starting at \$30; \$10 for students, limited availability.

Groups of ten or more save 20% on full-price tickets; call 312-397-4010.

FREE MUSEUM ADMISSION WITH TICKET

Present your MCA Stage ticket stub to receive FREE ADMISSION* and 10% off your purchase at the MCA Store.** Or become an MCA Member and save 15%.

Ticket stub is valid during regular hours up to seven days after the performance date.

* Not accepted for special ticketed exhibitions.

** Regular price, in-stock merchandise only; no other discounts apply.

RELATED PROGRAMS

POST-SHOW TALK

Immediately following the performance, Roger Bonair-Agard, poet and program director of Free Arts & Literacy, will guide a conversation with Brathwaite and the artists. This discussion will last roughly forty-five minutes and will follow the format of The Baldwin Protocols, an arts-based series of conversations examining the psychic and emotional debt of incarceration on the American people.

WORKSHOP WITH ILLINOIS YOUTH CENTERS This Is How We Adapt

As a part of his weeklong MCA residency, Brathwaite collaborated with Free Write Arts & Literacy to teach a writing workshop for youth incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. Using the text from *Try/Step/Trip* as a model, participants were encouraged to reimagine their personal trauma using fictional characters and self-directed humor. The goal of the workshop was to give participants tools to deal with the shame and confusion that result from trauma—without being necessarily bound to the “facts.” Participants were able to use their imagination to find context for their situations.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

DAHLAK BRATHWAITE (concept/writer) is a multifaceted hip-hop artist that maximizes his abilities as a musician, actor, poet, and educator within the transformational space of the theater. Since appearing on the last two seasons of HBO's *Russell Simmons presents Def Poetry*, Brathwaite has showcased his seamless blend of hip-hop, theater, and spoken word at more than two hundred universities throughout the United States and Europe. Brathwaite has also worked closely with Broadway veteran and Rockefeller Fellow Marc Bamuthi Joseph, having written and performed in several of Joseph's critically acclaimed plays, including *Word Becomes Flesh*, which was presented at The Public Theater and Lincoln Center. From 2007 to 2012, Brathwaite released five musical projects including the album *Spiritrials*, which served as a soundtrack to his solo play. Brathwaite was selected as a musician for a US State Department International Exchange Fellowship called 1Beat in 2014 and was nominated for the 2019 United States Artists Fellowship.

ROBERTA UNO (director) is a theater director and dramaturg. She was the founding artistic director of the New WORLD Theater 1979–2002, a theater dedicated to the work of artists of color in Amherst, Massachusetts. A Stage Directors and Choreographers Society member, her credits span over three decades, working with artists including James Baldwin, Alice Childress, Chitra Divakaruni, Mark Bamuthi Joseph, Thúy Lê, Pearl Primus, Dawn Saito, Sekou Sundiata, Keo Woolford, and William Yellow Robe Jr. She was inducted into the College of American Theater Fellows at the Kennedy Center in 2014 and is the director of ArtChangeUS at the California Institute of the Arts. Uno is also the artistic director of 'Ōlino Arts for the Queen Lili'uokalani Trust, Hawai'i.

TORAN XAVIER MOORE (choreographer) is a multidisciplinary artist from Montgomery, Alabama. As a southerner based in Los Angeles, Moore operates at the intersection of theater, arts management, and movement. He credits the Eclectic Dance Company of Alabama State University as his professional entry point into dance and choreography. Trained in tap, modern, and hip-hop dance forms, Moore explores movement through percussive forms of step to honor the histories of black Greek letter organizations, hip-hop pioneers, and ancestral rituals. Moore is a professional stage manager and producer who has worked at theaters across the United States including the Los Angeles Theatre Center, The Balzer Theatre of Atlanta, the Walt Disney Modular Theater, and many others.

TEAK UNDERDUE (composer) founded Hallway Productionz, a three-time Grammy-nominated, Dove Award-winning music production duo, with his brother Dee in Stockton, California. Hallway Productionz is most notably featured on Ice Cube, WC, T-Bone, Angie Stone, Dave Hollister, Mindless Behavior, and Blackalicious records.

Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, YOUTH SPEAKS (producer) has long championed a local, national, and increasingly global movement of young people picking up pens and stepping proudly onto stages, declaring themselves present. One of the world's leading presenters of spoken word performance, education, and youth development programs, Youth Speaks produces local and national youth poetry slams, festivals, and reading series, alongside a comprehensive slate of arts-in-education programs during the school day, in the after-school hours, and on weekends. In addition, the organization creates internationally recognized theater and digital programming and has helped launch a national network of over seventy programs that believe in the power of young people. Youth Speaks believes that literacy is a need, not a want.

Dinner and a Show



Asparagus with chilled mussel vinaigrette and tarragon raita. Photo: Neil Burger.

Transform your performance experience into an evening out. Marisol offers a \$45 seasonally inspired prix fixe menu exclusively for MCA event ticket holders.*

Book your table at marisolchicago.com or call 312-799-3599.

*Menu does not include tax or gratuity. Please allow at least 75 minutes before show time.

MARISOL

Restaurant and Bar
at the MCA

marisolchicago.org

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

Fri, Aug 23, 2019, 7:30 pm

Sat, Aug 24, 2019, 2 pm

Rennie Harris

LIFTED

Getting into the world of house music and dance is often referred to as “going to church”—a phrase that legendary hip-hop dance artist Rennie Harris takes literally in a performance featuring Chicago-based dancers and a church choir.



Rennie Harris, *LIFTED*. Photo: Nikki Carrara.

Fri, Aug 30, 7:30 pm

Thurman Barker and Ben LaMar Gay
South Side Suite and Hecky Naww! Angles!

Two generations of Chicago-born composers share an evening honoring the history and future of music experimentation—and the city itself.

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Program notes
compiled by Laura
Paige Kyber

SUPPORT FOR MCA STAGE

Lead support for the 2019-20 season of MCA Stage is provided by Elizabeth A. Liebman.

Generous support is provided by Lois and Steve Eisen and The Eisen Family Foundation, Ginger Farley and Bob Shapiro, the Martha Struthers Farley and Donald C. Farley Jr. Family Foundation, Susan Manning and Doug Doetsch, Ock Ju Noh, Sharon* and Lee Oberlander, Carol Prins and John Hart/The Jessica Fund.

Additional support for MCA Stage is provided by Ms. Shawn M. Donnelley and Dr. Christopher M. Kelly, Nicholas and Nancy Giampietro, Anne L. Kaplan, and D. Elizabeth Price and Lou Yecies.

The MCA is a proud member of Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District.

*Enact Chair
As of March 2019

MUSEUM OF
CONTEMPORARY ART
CHICAGO

ABOUT ENACT

MCA Stage is supported by Enact, a group of MCA donors dedicated to supporting the museum's renowned Stage programs.

Join today for opportunities to meet artists and gain behind-the-scenes access alongside MCA curators—all while providing vital support.

Circle Donor membership is required to join Enact. Enact donations begin at \$1,000 annually. For more information on benefits or to join, contact us at enact@mcachicago.org or 312-397-4044.

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ABOUT MCA PERFORMANCES

As an internationally renowned institution devoted to contemporary culture, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is committed to presenting the most thought-provoking visual and performing arts of our time. The MCA commissions and presents theater, dance, and music by leading artists from Chicago and around the world, holding performances in spaces throughout the museum, including the three-hundred seat Edlis Neeson Theater.

The MCA's groundbreaking performances are an integral part of the museum's cutting edge, multidisciplinary programming. Along with exhibitions and public programs, MCA performances welcome visitors to experience the work and ideas of living artists and find their own civic voices.

PARKING

Validate your ticket at the coat check for \$12 parking in the MCA garage (220 E Chicago Ave) and the Bernardin garage (747 North Wabash). The \$12 parking is limited to six hours on the date of performance.

LOST AND FOUND

To inquire about a lost item, call the museum at 312-280-2660. Unclaimed articles are held for thirty days.

SEATING

Please switch off all noisemaking devices while you are in the theater.

Patrons are seated at the management's discretion. Food and open beverage containers are not allowed in the seating area.

REPRODUCTION

Unauthorized recording and reproduction of a performance are prohibited.

GENERAL INFORMATION

312-280-2660

BOX OFFICE

312-397-4010

VOLUNTEER FOR PERFORMANCES

312-397-4072

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