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**MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO PRESENTS
NO MORE WATER: THE GOSPEL OF JAMES BALDWIN**

Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at 7:30pm
Tryon Festival Theatre

PROGRAM

MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO PRESENTS
NO MORE WATER: THE GOSPEL OF JAMES BALDWIN

Part church service . . . and part exploration of the strife and succour built into Black identity, *No More Water* is no straightforward listen, but one that jolts and inspires in equal measure.

—Kitty Empire, *The Guardian*

This performance will be presented with no intermission.

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NO MORE WATER: THE GOSPEL OF JAMES BALDWIN

The prescience of **James Baldwin** is alive nearly forty years after his passing, a testament to his enduring impact. A prolific writer, his essays, novels, plays, and poetry have assessed and often reproached the human condition. As an activist, his oratory prowess in the 1960s was bar none, lending his outspoken views on Black oppression with profundity and eloquence. Born in New York City on August 2, 1924, this year marks the centennial of the eminent writer, a momentous occasion that is celebrated by the release of one of **Meshell Ndegeocello**'s most intrepid efforts to date: **No More Water: The Gospel Of James Baldwin**.

With *No More Water*, Ndegeocello embarks on a prophetic musical odyssey that transcends boundaries and genres, delving headfirst into race, sexuality, religion, and other recurring themes explored in the celebrated writer's canon. Following 2023's *The Omnichord Real Book*, her acclaimed debut for Blue Note Records which won the inaugural Grammy Award for Best Alternative Jazz Album, the multi-instrumentalist, singer, songwriter, and producer renders an immersive and palpable document that is as sagacious, unabashed, and introspective as Baldwin was in life.

Co-produced by Ndegeocello and guitarist **Chris Bruce**, *No More Water* features some of the bassist's frequent collaborators, including Bruce, vocalist **Justin Hicks**, saxophonist (and Omnichord producer) **Josh Johnson**, keyboardist **Jebin Bruni**, and drummer **Abe Rounds**. Also appearing on various songs are a stellar group that includes vocalist **Kenita-Miller Hicks**, keyboardists **Jake Sherman** and **Julius Rodriguez**, and Executive Director of the NYCPS Arts Office and trumpeter **Paul Thompson**. The

album also showcases spoken word by venerated poet **Staceyann Chin** and Pulitzer Prize-winning author and critic **Hilton Als**.

Nearly a decade in the making, the album's origins began in 2016 during a performance at The Harlem Stage Gatehouse as part of their annual showcase honoring Baldwin. Ndegeocello had delved into Baldwin's work the year before, including the seminal nonfiction work *The Fire Next Time*, which she considers "life-changing" and carries with her as a "spiritual text."

"It was just a revelation to me, and it softened my heart in so many ways," says Ndegeocello. "I got a really quick education when I met Greg Tate, but nothing affected me like *The Fire Next Time*. It's as if they're speaking about my family, especially the first chapter: I grew up around Black men who didn't want to be seen as soft, which is how he opens 'A Letter to My Nephew.'"

Ndegeocello credits Baldwin's essays with giving her a deeper understanding of the fraught history of race and class struggle in this country, specifically its lasting impact on her and her family. "As a Black American, you are devoid of any historical grounding other than what your parents give you. This allowed me to really see what my parents went through.

"He talks about how the military ruined people. I think that's the beginning of alcoholism with my father, the beginning of understanding that he would never rise above a certain rank. My mother was a domestic with a fourth-grade education. It just made me see them trying to raise a family, have a marriage, and be individuals in a society that's been hard-wired for racism, bigotry, and classism."

No More Water is a fitting title for the album. A double entendre, it is borrowed from *The Fire Next Time*, comprising two essays examining racism in America circa 1963: “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation” and “Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region of My Mind.” It is also a nod to Baldwin’s religious beginnings as the son of a Pentecostal preacher. You can also find the couplet in some versions of the spiritual “Mary Don’t You Weep” and a biblical quote in the book of Genesis: “God gave Noah the rainbow sign/No more water, the fire next time.”

Thematically, the album moves like a procession in a Black church—baptism, testimony, worship/praise, and ultimately, resurrection. For the album’s opening track, “Travel,” we are brought inside the mind of a man on the verge of killing himself. Suicide is a recurring motif in much of Baldwin’s oeuvre—notably Richard in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and Rufus in *Another Country*. It has also been a constant in his own life, from his near-suicidal attempts to the loss of his best friend in 1946. Setting a dystopian mood, Rodriguez’s organ and Chin’s echoing incantations help usher in Justin Hicks’ ominous vocals: “I’ll stay away with all the work to be done/I’ll be bleeding while you bake in the sun.”

“Raise The Roof” features Chin sans accompaniment as the intensity of her words captures the stark and harrowing reality of the pervasive racism we cannot seem to escape: “It must be in the fucking water being force-fed to the police, the prosecutor and the politicians who care nothing for Black bodies falling like leaves in late August . . . in Ferguson . . . in Cleveland . . . in Staten Island, only minutes away from where my own child sits, watching the Muppets take over Manhattan.”

Als, a leading authority on Baldwin’s life and work, lends his words to “On the Mountain,” inspired by Baldwin’s debut novel in which he recreates his childhood and tortured upbringing in the church through the lens of his precocious teen protagonist, John Grimes. Underscored with layers of West African-tinged, hypnotic percussion, Als engenders a spiritual realm for John (and for Baldwin) that embraces him wholly, sans bigotry and hatred: “Not a revolution of blood, but of the mind and hands that which builds not destroys.”

“The Price of a Ticket” is an homage to the protest songs of the 1960s in the vein of Dylan and Odetta. The song’s minimalist arrangement allows Bruce’s acoustic guitar and Ndegeocello’s searing vocals to reverberate even louder: “Don’t let them shoot me down, and I die.” A modern-day anthem of dissent, it is a sobering reminder that such songs are still relevant, even necessary today.

“The price of this ticket of being in this skin is real. Creatively, I don’t think you need a lot of production. Chris and I had the musical idea and wanted it to be something you could sing at a protest because you don’t need the instruments to sing it. I’ve been at the barrel of a gun — Hands up! You’ll find very few people talk about it because it’s just fucking unpleasant. I can’t imagine how so many people deal with that on a daily basis.”

“Pride I & II” is a groove-laden musical suite heavily steeped in West Africa. It places the rhythm section front and center, notably the thumping percussion and Ndegeocello’s signature dub base. It signals a spiritual awakening for Baldwin, perhaps one he never fully experienced in his lifetime, and for Ndegeocello as a queer, Black woman. For Ndegeocello,

“Pride” is a reclamation of Baldwin’s identity, as well as her own.

“Pride comes before the fall—that’s what I grew up learning. But I also realized that pride sometimes turns us against each other. It’s like a grand distraction. I no longer identify with the identity politics of all the letters and gay identity. I’m not going to let them label me. For some, that makes them uncomfortable. What I love about being accepted and brought up in that community is that it allows me to check myself and my hypocrisy, and I think we’re having that reckoning as a country.”

No More Water renders songs with candid introspection that envisages the consequences and what that reckoning could ultimately look like. With “Trouble,” Rounds has a steady militaristic hand on drums as Ndegeocello, Justin Hicks, and Kenita Miller-Hicks on vocals softly call out, forewarning us about the battle that lies ahead for those brave enough to take up the charge; “Thus Sayeth the Lorde,” “Tsunami Rising,” and “Raise the Roof” combine the words of Chin, Baldwin, and feminist poet and activist Audre Lorde, another underrated queer icon, and in effect, giving us three generations of rallying cries; “Love” and “Hatred,” as explained by Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time*, are essentially two sides to the same coin—while one removes “the mask,” daring to live in their truth, the other “clings” to it, because once it’s gone, they will have to deal with the pain that lies underneath.

“Baldwin Manifesto I & II” again places Chin at the helm. With text taken from Baldwin’s landmark speech “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity,” Chin is initially unaccompanied but later backed by Johnson on saxophone. Baldwin underscores the value of the artist and their role and responsibility to the world, especially at times of crisis; the soulful dirge “Down at

the Cross” rounds out the album with haunting guitar accompaniment from Bruce and vocals by Ndegeocello and Justin Hicks, returning to the notion of suicide raised since the start of the album. For countless Black men, notably including Baldwin, suicide seemed like the only choice versus living in persecution when your only “crime” was that you were born Black: “Once you leave, there’s no turning back/Will it be better?”

No More Water marks a significant moment of self-discovery for Ndegeocello. She adds that Baldwin entered her life at precisely the right time. “It came when I was ready to look in the mirror. I’ve had to play *Plantation Lullabies* at a few shows. Looking back, I had an interesting perspective, but the dialogue was limited. It was more like a cathartic experience for a young person of color, whereas now I’m going, ‘How can I get us all to love each other? How can I get us all to see this for what it is?’”

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Meshell Ndegeocello has survived the best and worst of what a career in music has to offer. She eschewed genre for originality, celebrity for longevity, and musical trends for musical truths. Fans have come to expect the unexpected and follow her

on sojourns into soul, R&B, jazz, hip-hop, rock, all bound by the search for love, justice, respect, and resolution. Those sonic investigations have defined and redefined the expectations for women, for queer artists, and for Black music for over 30 years, and she remains one of few women who write the music, sing the songs, and lead the band.

A bass player above all else, Meshell brings her warm, fat, and melodic groove to everything she does. She has earned a Grammy Award along with numerous nominations and has played alongside the Rolling Stones, Madonna, Alanis Morissette, James Blood Ulmer, The Blind Boys of Alabama, Tony Allen, John Medeski, Billy Preston, and Chaka Khan. As for her own bass-playing influences, she credits Sting, Jaco Pastorius, Family Man Barrett, and Stevie Wonder. Meshell is always grateful for the opportunity to share the stage and believes music is a fellowship. She looks to spread that gospel with every creation and collaboration.

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As a land-grant institution, the University of Illinois has a particular responsibility to acknowledge the peoples of these lands, as well as the histories of dispossession that have allowed for the growth of this institution. We are also obligated to reflect on and actively address these histories and the role that this university has played in shaping them.

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Krannert Center affirms the commitment by the university to move beyond these statements, toward building deeper relationships and taking actions that uphold and preserve Indigenous rights and cultural equity.

As we gather to experience this performance, we have an opportunity to reflect on the ways that systems of oppression have shaped our society. We can work together to create systems that support human dignity, establish equity, strengthen cross-cultural relationships, and draw upon the creative capacity of all people that make up this community, state, nation, and world.



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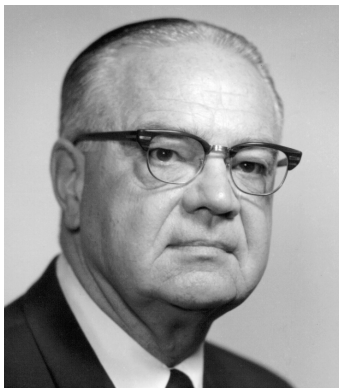
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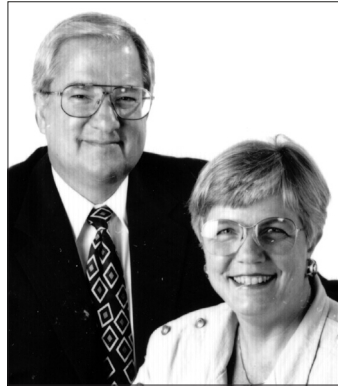
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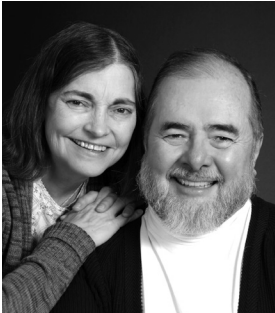
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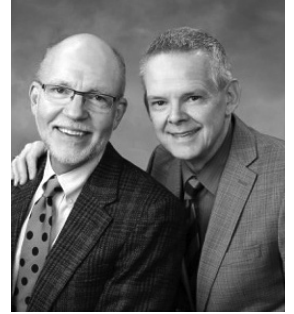
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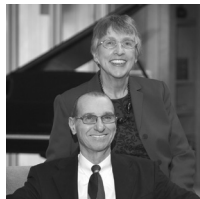
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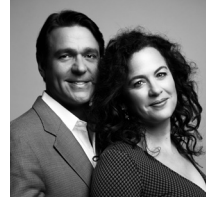
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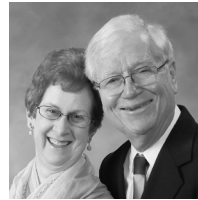
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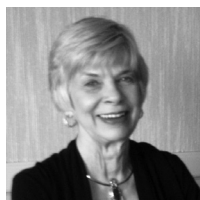
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Coordinator for Events
Bree Brock, Production Coordinator
for Events
Seth Wheeler, Technical Coordinator
for Events
Rachel Gladd, Performing Arts Events
Coordinator

PROGRAMMING AND ENGAGEMENT

Julianne Ehre, Assistant Director for
Programming and Engagement
Jason Finkelman, Artistic Director of
Global Arts Performance Initiatives
Emily Laugesen, Co-Director of
Engagement
Sam Smith, Director of Civic Engagement
and Social Practice

ADVANCEMENT

Cheryl Snyder, Director of Advancement
Bethany Whoric, Associate Director
of Advancement
David Drake, Advancement Team
Assistant
Frank Niemeyer, FAA Annual Giving
Officer

OPERATIONS

Director's Office

Zia Moon, Krannert Center Showcase
Director, Office and Communications
Support Specialist
Vanessa Lane, Office Manager

Building Operations

John O. Williams, Facility Manager
Tony Mapson, Assistant Facility Manager
Jozsef Butsch, Building Electrician

Jared Painter, Assistant Chief Building
Operations Engineer
Scott Butler, Eric Carr, Emmett Catlin,
Austin Dearth, Sara Dietrich, John
Ekstrom, Jessica Fancher, Bryan
Franzen, Mark Lashbrook, Jacob Lerch,
Chad Schwenk, Attendants
Glenda Dalton, Operations Office
Support Associate

MARKETING

Maureen V. Reagan, Associate Director
for Administration and Patron
Experience

Communications

Sean Kutzko, Assistant Communications
Director
Nicholas Mulvaney, Art Director
Jodee Stanley, Program and Web Editor

Public Services

Amy Thomas, Food Services Director
Elizabeth Henke, Stage 5 Bar Manager
Michael Bunting, Hospitality Supervisor
Whitney Havice, Ticketing and Patron
Services Director
Ann-Marie Dittmann, Patron Services
Assistant Director
Ty Mingo, Assistant Ticket Services
Director
Jon Proctor, Nick Wurl, Ticket Sales
Supervisors
Adrian Rochelle, Front of House
Performance Supervisor
Scott Leon, Community Service Officer

PRODUCTION

Terri Anne Ciofalo, Director
of Production
Maria Miguens, Production Manager

Audio Department

Rick Scholwin, Audio Director
Alec LaBau, Associate Audio Director/
Video Director
Tyler Knowles, Assistant Audio Director

Costume Shop

Andrea Bouck, Costume Director
Richard Gregg, Costume Rentals Director/
Wardrobe Adviser/Associate Costume
Director

Paige Stewart-Rankins, Hair & Makeup
Supervisor
Julianna Steitz, First Hand
April McKinnis, EB McTigue,
Cutters/Drapers
Kari Little-McKinney, Theatrical Stitcher

Lighting Department

Lisa Kidd, Lighting Director
David Krupla, Associate Lighting Director
Nick Jukes, Theatrical Lighting
Coordinator

Properties Department

Adriane Binky Donley, Properties Director
Kira Lyon, Assistant Properties Director

Scene Shop

Ryan Schultz, Technical Director
Tatsuya Ito, Associate Technical Director
Bill Kephart, Scene Shop Chief Clerk
Bobby Reynolds, Theatrical Scene Shop
Coordinator
Liam Romano, Kayley Woolums, Theatrical
Scene Shop Assistants

PERFORMING ARTS BUSINESS SERVICE CENTER

Macaulay Allen, Business Services
Specialist
Debbie Delaney, Accounting Staff

WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE AT THE CENTER

We work to create the best possible setting for the experiences you seek and find here.

NECESSARIES

Restrooms are located in the foyers of Foellinger Great Hall, Tryon Festival Theatre, and Colwell Playhouse; the east entrances on the Lobby level; and in each elevator lobby on Level 1 and Level 3. Lobby restrooms and one restroom in each elevator lobby are fully accessible and contain baby-changing stations.

Ushers will be happy to provide you cough drops courtesy of St. Joseph Apothecary, or disposable foam earplugs if the place starts rockin'.

If you or a companion needs medical assistance, contact an usher or other staff member.

Please take a moment before the performance to note the theatre exits nearest to you. If it becomes necessary to evacuate the theatre, please remain calm, follow the instructions of the house staff, and exit in an orderly fashion to the appropriate safe meeting location, which will be announced to you.

PHONES AND DEVICES

The use of cell phones, cameras, and recording devices during performances is prohibited unless otherwise announced from the stage.

LATE ARRIVALS

As a courtesy to performers and audience members, latecomers will be seated only at times selected in advance by the artist. Should you find that you've arrived late to a performance, our Patron Services staff will keep you informed about the earliest seating opportunity.

LOST ITEMS

If you are in need of Lost and Found, please visit the Patron Services counter. We will do our best to reunite object and owner!

TICKET RETURNS

If you find you can't attend a performance, please contact the Ticket Office in advance, preferably by 6pm the day before the performance (kran-tix@illinois.edu). We never charge a handling fee on ticket transactions.

ACCESSIBILITY

Krannert Center for the Performing Arts is committed to making experiences accessible for all patrons, and we are delighted to provide a number of services to assist you. Krannert Center is equipped with an assisted listening system, wheelchair-accessible and no-step/few-step seating, and large-print programs, Braille programs, and American Sign Language interpreters are available with three weeks' advance notice.

For assistance regarding your visit, please email:

Para ayuda en relación con su visita, favor de enviar un email a:

Pour vous aider dans votre visite, prière de nous envoyer un courriel à:

欢迎! 如若您对您的造访需要帮助, 请发送电子邮件至:

स्वागत हे! अगर आपको अपने रहने के लिए मदद चाहिए, ईमेल कीजिए:

환영합니다! 방문에 관해 도움이 필요하실 때에는 ...
에게 이메일로 문의하시기 바랍니다:

PATRONSERVICES@KRANNERTCENTER.ILLINOIS.EDU
217.333.9716

FR FEB 21 AT 7:30PM
SA FEB 22 AT 3PM

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP AND MUSIC ENSEMBLE



krannert center
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS AT ILLINOIS

TH FEB 27 AT 7:30PM



TERENCE BLANCHARD
FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES
EXCERPTS IN CONCERT



krannert center
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS AT ILLINOIS

STUDENT TICKETS FOR ONLY \$10

Students: being on a budget doesn't mean you have to miss the show! You can enjoy most of our world-class national and international music, dance, and theatre performances for only \$10.

Contact the Ticket Office
for details at
kran-tix@illinois.edu
or 217.333.6280

 University
of Illinois
Students



visit go.krannertcenter.com/students

