

**Theater of War Productions Presents *The Drum Major Instinct*
At Brooklyn Public Library to Mark 50th Anniversary
Of the Historic Sermon and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Death**

*Designed to drive a community discussion on racism and social justice,
the dramatic reenactment of King's final sermon to be performed by
Samira Wiley with a live gospel choir*

New York, NY – January 17, 2018 - Brooklyn Public Library and Theater of War Productions will present a dramatic reading and reenactment of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s final sermon, *The Drum Major Instinct* on February 4, 2018, 50 years to the day that King originally delivered the speech, just two months before his assassination. The free performance, staged at the Central Library, will feature actor Samira Wiley reading King's sermon, with a live gospel choir singing original and arranged music composed for the production. The dramatic staging will provide a starting point for a guided community discussion exploring themes of social justice and racial inequality.

In line with its mission to provide opportunities to engender civic engagement, Brooklyn Public Library has partnered with Theater of War Productions to co-produce this performance, designed to inspire a thoughtful community conversation on racism, social justice, economic disparity, and other issues addressed by King's teachings and enduring legacy. DeAndrea Blaylock-Johnson, a choir member and a licensed social worker working in Ferguson, MO will facilitate this discussion alongside Artistic Director Bryan Doerries. Together they will encourage audience members to imagine a way forward by sharing their personal reflections on the sermon and how King's words resonate with their own lives, particularly in light of the current national and global political climate.

"In *The Drum Major Instinct*, Dr. King prophetically imagined his own death and challenged his congregation, Americans, and the world to harness an inborn human desire 'to be first' and use it to promote justice, righteousness, and peace by channeling it into acts of service and love. Fifty years later, on this historic anniversary, Dr. King's words resonate with new depth and meaning, empowering us to celebrate his vision, alongside the hard-won victories of the Civil Rights Movement, while interrogating the structures and systems still in place that have inhibited progress and sustained the oppression of countless communities," said **Bryan Doerries, artistic director of Theater of War Productions**.

"We are proud to present Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of a truly democratic society achieved through humility, love, and service to others—ideals at the heart of the Library's mission," said **Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO of Brooklyn Public Library**. "Decades later, Dr. King's words are uncannily relevant and urgently needed."

The historic performance will feature The Phil Woodmore Singers, a gospel choir that was initially assembled for Theater of War Productions' *Antigone in Ferguson*, a project conceived in response to the 2014 murder of Michael Brown. Notable choir members include Michael Brown's former teacher, Duane Foster, and Lt. Latricia Allen, commander of the Community Engagement Unit of the St Louis Metropolitan Police Department, a unit created to improve

police and community relations in the aftermath of Brown's death. Other choir members include educators, activists, police officers, and musicians from St. Louis, Missouri and Brooklyn.

Designed to instigate community conversations on issues that affect New Yorkers, this event is one of over 60 events Bryan Doerries and Theater of War Productions will stage in all five boroughs of New York City as part of Bryan's appointment as a NYC Public Artist in Residence (PAIR) with the NYC Department of Veterans' Services and Department of Cultural Affairs. The PAIR events are co-produced by Brooklyn Public Library and made possible by a generous grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

The Drum Major Instinct

Sunday, February 4, 2018

2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Brooklyn Public Library - Central Library

10 Grand Army Plaza

Brooklyn, NY 11238

Admission is free but seating is limited. To register, visit www.bklynlibrary.org/bpl-presents

ABOUT THE DRUM MAJOR INSTINCT

Co-commissioned by BRIC, Theater of War Productions' *The Drum Major Instinct*, premiered in Brooklyn in 2017. Drawing from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech, which he delivered on February 4, 1968 at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, GA, the production combines a dramatic reading of the sermon with original live music performed by a gospel choir. In the premiere event, which featured Samira Wiley and NYC City Council Member Jumaane Williams, the performance culminated with a dynamic community conversation that addressed racism, gentrification, violence, and social justice.

King's original sermon was an adaption of the 1952 homily "Drum-Major Instincts" by J. Wallace Hamilton, and excerpts were played at King's funeral service on April 9, 1968, five days after he was assassinated. In the conclusion to his sermon, King imagined his own funeral, and he implored his congregation not to remember him for his achievements, but for his service to humanity: "*Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice: say that I was drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the shallow things will not matter.*" A full transcript of the sermon is available online at The King Center website at www.thekingcenter.org

ABOUT THEATER OF WAR PRODUCTIONS

Theater of War Productions is a social-impact company that uses a combination of theater and guided public dialogue to help communities address pressing public health and social issues such as combat-related psychological injury, suicide, end-of-life care, police/community relations, prison reform, gun violence, political violence, natural and manmade disaster, domestic violence, substance abuse, and addiction. Theater of War Productions was co-founded in 2009 by Bryan Doerries and Phyllis Kaufman, who served as producing director from 2009 to 2016. Doerries currently serves as the company's artistic director. For more information, please visit: www.theaterofwar.com

ABOUT BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) is an independent library system for the 2.6 million residents of Brooklyn. It is the fifth largest library system in the United States with 60 neighborhood libraries located throughout the borough. BPL offers free programs and services for all ages and stages of life, including a large selection of books in more than 30 languages, author talks, literacy programs, and public computers. BPL's eResources, such as eBooks and eVideos, catalog information and free homework help, are available to customers of all ages 24 hours a day at: www.bklynlibrary.org

ABOUT PUBLIC ARTIST IN RESIDENCE (PAIR)

Public Artist in Residence (PAIR) is a municipal residency program that embeds artists in city government to propose and implement creative solutions to pressing civic challenges. Launched by the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs in 2015, PAIR takes its inspiration and name from the pioneering work of artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, the first official artist-in-residence with the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY), 1977–present.

PAIR is based on the premise that artists are creative problem-solvers. Moving beyond politics and public relations, artists are able to create long-term and lasting impact by working collaboratively in open-ended processes to build community bonds, open new channels for dialogue, and reimagine realities for those who experience and participate in the work. PAIR artists engage both agency staff and the constituency the agency seeks to serve.

This is the second PAIR collaboration between the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Veterans' Services. Other current PAIR partnerships include Tania Bruguera at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Mary Miss at the Department of Design and Construction, and The Lost NYC at the Administration for Children's Services.

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