

# WORD BECOMES FLESH

by Youth Speaks The Living Word Project



The Living Word Project is the resident theater company of Youth Speaks Inc, committed to producing literary performance & verse-based work that is spoken through the body, illustrated by visual and sonic scores, and in communication with the important social issues and movements of the immediate moment. **Word Becomes Flesh** is a commission to redevelop Bamuthi's first landmark work into a multi-player work of theater, with new writing and new direction. In a Re-Creation of **Word Becomes Flesh**, Youth Speaks Living Word Project gathers Daveed Diggs, Dahlak Brathwaite, Dion Decibels, Ben Turner, Mic Turner and B.Yung to present a series of performed letters to an unborn son. Using poetry, dance and live music, the collective documents nine months of pregnancy from a young, single father's perspective.

## Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Artistic Director

Joan Osato, Producing Director

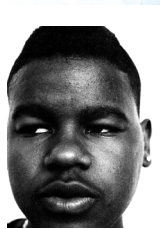
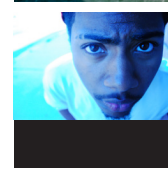
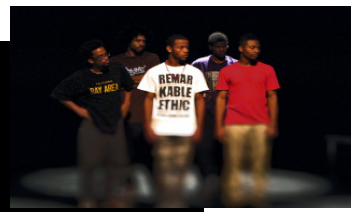
Written and Directed by Marc Bamuthi Joseph

Written and Performed by Dahlak Brathwaite, Daveed Diggs, Dion Decibels, Benjamin Turner, Michael Turner and B.Yung

Technical Director/Lighting Designer: Haldun Morgan

Production Manager/Stage Manager: Joan Osato

Photography by Bethanie Hines



**Word Becomes Flesh** is a National Performance Network (NPN) Re-Creation Fund Project sponsored by La Pena Cultural Center (Berkeley, CA) in partnership with Painted Bride (Philadelphia, PA), Dance Place (Washington, DC), Youth Speaks (San Francisco, CA) and NPN. This project has been made possible by the National Endowment for the Arts as part of American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius.

## ABOUT WORD BECOMES FLESH

Word Becomes Flesh is a fluid evening-length choreopoem written in the form of a narrative verse play. Presented as a series of performed letters to his unborn son, the piece uses poetry, dance and live music to document nine months of pregnancy from a young single father's perspective.

These performed letters incorporate elements of ritual, archetypes, and symbolic sites within the constructs of hip hop culture. Word Becomes Flesh evolves the realm of spoken word and realizes the form's theatrical potential as the poet/dancer cogently presents the complex contradictions involved in race, using the stage as an open page, and deftly writing the body as text.

While women continue to fight for their right to make choices about their bodies, the legacy of patriarchy and male privilege still allow a man the social right to choose domestic absenteeism and refrain from offering either emotional or financial support.

Word Becomes Flesh critically, lyrically, and choreographically examines this phenomenon. In the process we confront the intersection of the physical reality and mythology of the black male body from the cotton field to the athletic field and all spaces in between. The piece was performed in the original production and tour by Marc Bamuthi Joseph with live music composed and performed by Paris King, Sekou Gibson and Ajayi Jackson. Other collaborators included dancer/choreographer Adia Whittaker and dramaturg Roberta Uno.

We're proud to say that these artists have had a long relationship with Youth Speaks and The Living Word Project. Of the young artists who are re-envisioning this important piece, two started with Youth Speaks when they were 16, one was a big part of our partner program in NYC, 3 have collaborated in LWP repertory works and tours previously, and all 5 of the poets are veterans of Youth Speaks' Annual Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam Festival.

Word Becomes Flesh premiered in November 2003 at the Alice Arts Center (Oakland, CA) and subsequently toured through 2007 nationwide to venues including Bates Dance Festival (Lewiston, ME), ODC Theater and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco, CA), On the Boards (Seattle, WA), New World Theater (Amherst, MA), Dance Theater Workshop (New York, NY), Live Arts Festival (Philadelphia, PA), Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, IL), University Musical Society (Ann Arbor, MI), Miami Dade College (Miami, FL), and Dance Place (Washington, DC). Considered the seminal work of Marc Bamuthi Joseph and The Living Word Project, this piece was chosen by the National Performance Network for its 25th Anniversary Re-Creation Initiative supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

## ABOUT MARC BAMUTHI JOSEPH

Marc Bamuthi Joseph (Artistic Director) is one of America's leading voices in performance, arts education, and artistic curation. In the Fall of 2007, Bamuthi graced the cover of Smithsonian Magazine after being named one of America's Top Young Innovators in the Arts and Sciences.

He is the artistic director of the 7-part HBO documentary "Russell Simmons presents Brave New Voices" and an inaugural recipient of the United States Artists Rockefeller Fellowship, which annually recognizes 50 of the country's "greatest living artists". He has entered the world of literary performance after crossing the sands of "traditional" theater, most notably on Broadway in the Tony Award winning *The Tap Dance Kid* and *Stand-Up Tragedy*.

His evening-length works have been presented throughout the United States and Europe and include *Word Becomes Flesh*, *Scourge*, *De/Cipher* and *No Man's Land*. His most recent work, the *break/s*: a mix-tape for stage, was supported by a Joyce Foundation Award and completed during a prestigious Arts Institute Fellowship at University of Wisconsin, Madison. *the break/s* was seen in 88 performances in 16 U.S. cities from 2008-2010, winning wide acclaim.

His work has been enabled by several prestigious foundation awards including grants from the Ford Foundation, the Center for Cultural Innovation, Creative Capital, the National Performance Network Creation Fund, the Wallace A. Gerbode Foundation, the Creative Work Fund, the Rockefeller MAP Fund, the NEA, the Hewlett Foundation, and a Dance Advance award from the PEW Foundation. A gifted and nationally acclaimed educator and essayist, he has lectured at more than 200 colleges & universities, been a popular commentator on National Public Radio, and has carried adjunct professorships at Stanford University, Mills College, and the University of Wisconsin.

A resident at ODC Theater, YBCA, and Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco, Bamuthi's proudest work has been with Youth Speaks where he mentors 13-19 year old writers and curates the Living Word Festival for Literary Arts. Joseph's current project, *red black and green*: a blues performatively documents the eco-equity movement towards green collar jobs in Black neighborhoods. He proudly served as a featured artist for the NAACP's Centennial Anniversary Celebration during President Barack Obama's Inaugural Exercises.

### For Booking and More Information:

Joan Osato, Producing Director  
Youth Speaks, Inc. + The Living Word Project  
c) 415-710-7427  
josato@youthspeaks.org  
www.livingwordproject.org