

Portland Center Stage at

**THE ARMORY**

**UNTIL THE FLOOD**

Written and performed by

Dael Orlandersmith

Directed by Neel Keller

**March 16 – April 21, 2019**

**In the Ellyn Bye Studio**

Artistic Director | Marissa Wolf

Managing Director | Cynthia Fuhrman

# **UNTIL THE FLOOD**

Written and performed by

**Dael Orlandersmith**

Directed by Neel Keller

Scenic Designer

**Takeshi Kata**

Costume Designer

**Kaye Voyce**

Lightning Designer

**Mary Louise Geiger**

Video Designer

**Nicholas Hussong**

Stage Manager

**Kristen Mun**

Production Assistant

**Molly Shevaun Reed**

Performed without intermission.

*Until The Flood* was originally commissioned and produced by The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis (Steven Woolf, Artistic Director; Mark Bernstein, Managing Director). *Until The Flood* received its New York Off-Broadway premiere at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater.

*Until The Flood* is produced by special arrangement with The Gersh Agency, 41 Madison Avenue, 33rd Floor, New York, NY, 10010.

Videotaping or other photo or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.

If you photograph the set before or after the performance, please credit the designers if you share the image.

The Actor and Stage Manager employed in this production are members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

## **FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MARISSA WOLF**

This spring brings us two powerful new plays that wrestle with some of the most urgent questions of our time. *Until The Flood* and *Crossing Mnisose* offer compelling visions and interpretations of major moments in our country's contemporary history.

*Until The Flood* is a theatrical tour de force by writer and performer Dael Orlandersmith. Having interviewed dozens of people affected by the murder of Michael Brown and the heated protests that followed, Orlandersmith weaves together a resonant, nuanced portrait of a community's history and present-day life. Having presented her play *Forever* at The Armory in recent years, we're honored to welcome Orlandersmith and director Neel Keller back to the boards with this searing, magnetic production.

*Crossing Mnisose* by playwright Mary Kathryn Nagle hails from our Northwest Stories Commissioning Program. Nagle reframes the

westward bound explorations of Lewis and Clark from the perspective of Sacajawea and her descendants. Drawing a direct line from past to present, *Crossing Mnisose* traces the unfolding drama along the same river one hundred years later, as an oil company threatening to cut through it is countered by the bold, outspoken voices of those who rally to protect the sacred land. Working with collaborator Molly Smith, the acclaimed artistic director of Arena Stage in D.C., we're thrilled to launch this arresting world premiere.

*The New York Times* recently named Nagle one of eight Native American women who "helped to make 2018 the Year of the Woman." What better way to capture such an impactful year, than to champion these two playwrights as a vibrant part of our What She Said Series. Here at Portland Center Stage at The Armory, we celebrate a season lineup that achieves gender parity, with eight out of 12 plays in our 2018-2019 season written by women, hailing women's voices and experiences.

Welcome to The Armory!

All my best,

Marissa Wolf

## **FROM THE DIRECTOR: NEEL KELLER**

*Until The Flood* is an ongoing, ever-branching, necessarily roiling conversation.

The play was born out of an urgent discussion that the staff of The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis had in the wake of the shooting of Michael Brown. Feeling a profound need to respond to the social upheaval engulfing their region, they asked each other, “How can we make theater that is part of this difficult conversation?”

The play that ultimately grew from that discussion was made out of many different conversations. Dael went to St. Louis and listened at length to numerous people, allowing them to speak intimately about how the shooting and its aftermath had affected them, about what felt solid and what had been grievously shaken. Dael collected those swirling thoughts and emotions and created the composite characters you will meet in the play.

Heard together, their words underscore a great irony of our social, religious, political, and historical discourse. The talking is ubiquitous. It is inescapably present in every home, in every community, and across all social platforms. But, there is not nearly enough conversation flowing between people of different backgrounds, between different neighborhoods, between people whose experience of American life is foreign to one another. All of the people Dael interviewed for this play live within a few miles of each other and from the site of Michael Brown’s death. How is it that they see things so differently? Hopefully the play and

that question will be the starting point for many new conversations. Thank you for being here.

## **NAVIGATING THE WATERS: A CONVERSATION WITH UNTIL THE FLOOD PLAYWRIGHT DAEL ORLANDERSMITH**

In *Until The Flood*, Dael Orlandersmith explores the social unrest in Ferguson, Missouri following the shooting of teenager Michael Brown. Drawing from her extensive interviews with Missouri residents, Orlandersmith crafts an extraordinary theatrical experience in which she embodies eight residents as they try to come to terms with the complex events that shook the nation. Below, Orlandersmith recalls her artistic process for bringing the voices of Ferguson to life on stage.

### **Why did you want to write this play?**

Well, actually, the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis first came to me [about writing the piece]. I said yes because I think it's important. I want to tell a story. I want to go beyond what's right, who's right, who's wrong. How does this shooting affect people? In terms of race, how far have we come? Those are the questions that have come to mind. What does it invoke, provoke in you? What kind of thought?

### **What sort of preparation did you do?**

[Repertory Theatre of St. Louis Associate Artistic Director] Seth Gordon and I met with Michael Brown, Sr. and a few other people, a lot of political activists and people who are just generally in town.

I wanted to look at that because, you know, race is obviously a very ... it's high voltage. It's a high voltage situation. I wanted to see exactly how far we've come, which is interesting to me, in terms of, say, from the 1940s on. And also, what does it mean to the individual? What does race mean to an individual? How does it affect individuals, and how far has St. Louis come? What does it mean to be a part of this? And then again, for me as a New Yorker. I find that a lot of people in St. Louis feel this is nothing new to them. A lot of them just want to put this down. And a lot of other people have said it's just an everyday occurrence. So it's about showing those perspectives.

**The people we meet in the play — are these people you met?**

They are composite figures. Because I made it very clear to everyone I spoke with — I don't have a right to invade your life that way. I have a right as a playwright to tell a story. But I don't have a right to dig into someone's life like that. Because that's no longer about theater; that's perverse voyeurism. A word that I use heavily is "boundary." The role of certain types of theater, we are supposed to be mental and emotional travelers, but having said that, if I write about someone's life directly, that makes me responsible for them in certain ways that I don't feel comfortable with. And given where that person is within their life, it can invoke and provoke a lot of stuff that they just won't be able to deal with. I'm not a therapist. And I actually said that to everyone I spoke with.

**You've written in many formats — poetry, plays, solo works — what made you choose the solo play for this piece?**

It's an interesting format. I want to look at how one person, not just myself — if the play goes on, I want other people to do it — how one person can embody a kind of humanity. Aspects of humanity. I think that's interesting, because it does start with one person. How does one person take in the world? We always see the collective, but the collective starts with the individual. Individuals form a collective, right? So how does one individual take in the world?

**You're the writer and performer of this play, but you are also working with a director. Tell us how that works. As you're the one who's created the play, what does the director give to you?**

Neel Keller is a great director. He can tell me what is overwritten, what we can cut, what we can emphasize. It's a third eye. I find that very few people can direct themselves. What sound bites do we need? How does a character need to be fleshed out more? Both on the page and on the stage. In terms of technique — how to bring it alive on the stage. And then we combine these ideas. And as an actor, I can overact, so he's there to yank me in. We don't want to beat the audience over the head with this, and I can tend to do that as an actor.

**When you've finished a performance and the lights go down, is there anything in particular that you're hoping the audience takes away?**

Did I give them permission to feel both comfortable and uncomfortable? That's what interests me, because I don't speak for people, I speak to people. Because when you start speaking for people, you get on a political tirade and I know this situation goes beyond the political. It extends itself into personal stories and the



emotional and how we live on a day-to-day basis. What are our personal narratives? And how do we feel about this, knowing this could have happened with these young men?

Interview by Sarah Brandt, Associate Director of Education for The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. This article was originally published for the 2016 world premiere of *Until The Flood* in St. Louis.

## **MEET THE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM**

### **Dael Orlandersmith, *Writer & Performer***

Dael Orlandersmith is a playwright, poet, actor, teacher, and Pulitzer Prize nominee. In the fall of 2016, Orlandersmith wrote and performed *Until The Flood* (commissioned by The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis), followed by a run at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Goodman Theatre, and ACT (Seattle). In 2014-2015, she wrote and performed her solo memoir play *Forever*, which debuted at the Kirk Douglas Theatre (Center Theatre Group commission), followed by a run at The Long Wharf, New York Theatre Workshop, Portland Center Stage at The Armory, and Abbey Theatre (Dublin). Orlandersmith's plays include *Black n Blue Boys/Broken Men* (co-produced by Berkeley Repertory Theatre and Goodman Theatre); *Horsedreams* (developed at New Dramatists and New York Stage and Film Company; Off-Broadway premiere at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater); *Bones* (commissioned and produced by Mark Taper Forum); *Suicide Girlz* (commissioned by Atlantic Theater Company); *Stoop Stories* (developed at The Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival and Apollo Theater's

Salon Series; premiered at the Studio Theatre in Washington, D.C.); *The Blue Album* (a collaboration with David Cale; premiered at Long Wharf Theatre); *Yellowman* (commissioned and co-produced by The Wilma Theater and Long Wharf Theatre; premiered at McCarter Theatre; Off-Broadway premiere at Manhattan Theatre Club); *The Gimmick* (commissioned by McCarter Theatre and premiered on its Second Stage, Off-Broadway premiere at New York Theatre Workshop); *Beauty's Daughter* (Off-Broadway premiere at American Place Theatre); and *Monster* (originally at New York Theatre Workshop). *Yellowman* and a collection of her earlier works have been published by Vintage Books and Dramatists Play Service. Orlandersmith was nominated for the 2015 Off-Broadway Alliance Award for Best Solo Performance in *Forever*. With *Yellowman*, she received a Pulitzer Prize nomination, Drama Desk Award nominations for Outstanding Play and Outstanding Actress in a Play, and a Susan Smith Blackburn Award. For *Beauty's Daughter*, she received an Obie Award and was a Susan Smith Blackburn Award finalist. She is the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Grant, the Helen Merrill Award for Emerging Playwrights, a Guggenheim, a PEN/Laura Pels Foundation Award, a Lucille Lortel Foundation Playwrights Fellowship, and a Whiting Award. She has toured extensively with the Nuyorican Poets Café (Real Live Poetry) throughout the United States, Europe, and Australia. As a teacher, she has worked at Princeton University (artist in residence, 2009), Yale University, and Sarah Lawrence College, among others. Orlandersmith is currently working on two commissions and a book of autofiction.

**Neel Keller, *Director***

Portland Center Stage at The Armory credits: *Forever*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, and the holiday double feature *The Santaland Diaries* with *A Christmas Memory* (2002-2004). Neel has enjoyed a long and happy collaboration with Dael Orlandersmith. They met almost 30 years ago, on a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Over the last several years they have worked closely on creating and producing Orlandersmith's acclaimed plays *Until The Flood* and *Forever*. Neel's other recent productions include the world premieres of Julia Cho's *Office Hour*, Eliza Clark's *Quack*, Jennifer Haley's *The Nether*, Kimber Lee's *different words for the same thing*, and Lucy Alibar's *Throw Me On The Burnpile and Light Me Up*. Neel's productions have been mounted at many theaters, including The Public Theater, New York Theatre Workshop, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Mark Taper Forum, Kirk Douglas Theater, Goodman Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Long Wharf Theatre, ACT Seattle, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, and Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Neel is an associate artistic director at Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles, and a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Directors Guild of America.

**Takeshi Kata, *Scenic Designer***

Recent New York City credits include *Until The Flood* (Rattlestick Playwrights Theater), *Office Hour* (The Public Theater), *Man From Nebraska* (Second Stage), *The Profane* (Playwrights Horizons), *Derren Brown: Secret* (Atlantic Theater Company), and *Forever* (New York Theatre Workshop). Regionally, Kata has designed for American Players Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Dallas

Theater Center, Ford's Theatre, Geffen Playhouse, Goodman Theatre, Hartford Stage, Kirk Douglas Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Long Wharf Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, Nashville Opera, The Old Globe, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, and Yale Repertory Theatre. Kata has won an Obie award and has been nominated for Drama Desk, Barrymore, Connecticut Critics Circle, San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle, TBA, and Ovation awards. He is an associate professor at the University of Southern California School of Dramatic Arts.

**Kaye Voyce, *Costume Designer***

Kaye's Broadway credits include *Significant Other*, *The Real Thing*, *The Realistic Joneses*, and *Shining City*. Recent Off-Broadway work includes *Harry Clarke* (Vineyard Theatre and Minetta Lane Theatre), *Office Hour*, *Hamlet* (The Public Theater), *Measure for Measure* (Elevator Repair Service/The Public Theater), *Queens*, *After the Blast* (Lincoln Center Theater), *The Antipodes*, *Signature Plays*, *The Wayside Motor Inn* (Signature Theatre), *Detroit* (Playwrights Horizons), and *4000 Miles* (Lincoln Center Theater). Opera credits include *War Stories* (Opera Philadelphia), *The Summer King* (Pittsburgh Opera, world premiere), *Il Turco in Italia* (Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Dijon Opera, Teatro Regio Torino, and Teatr Wielki), Other credits include Trisha Brown's final two dances, "Rogues" and "Toss," and many collaborations with Richard Maxwell and New York City Players, including "Open Rehearsal" for the Whitney Biennial. Kaye was born in Milwaukee.

**Mary Louise Geiger, *Lighting Designer***

Portland Center Stage at The Armory credits: *Forever*, *The Cripple of*

*Inishmaan, Red, From the Mississippi Delta, Absurd Person Singular, and for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf.* Broadway: *The Constant Wife* (American Airlines Theatre). Off-Broadway: *Until The Flood, Draw the Circle* (Rattlestick Playwrights Theater); *X: Or, Betty Shabazz v. The Nation* (The Acting Company); *Nat Turner in Jerusalem, Forever, Oedipus at Palm Springs* (New York Theatre Workshop); *Three Wise Guys, Natural Affection*, (TACT). Other recent credits: *This Bitter Earth, Les Carillons* (New York City Ballet); *Good Television, The New York Idea* (Atlantic Theater Company); *Kindness, Blue Door*, (Playwrights Horizons); *DollHouse, Red Beads* (Mabou Mines). Awards: Helen Hayes, IRNE, NYSCA. Training: Yale. Faculty: NYU. [mlgeiger.com](http://mlgeiger.com)

**Justin Ellington, *Sound Designer & Original Music***

Portland Center Stage at The Armory debut. New York City credits include: *Other Desert Cities, Pass Over, Pipeline* (Lincoln Center Theater); *The House That Will Not Stand, Fetch Clay, Make Man, The Seven* (New York Theatre Workshop); *He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box, The Winter's Tale* (Theatre for a New Audience). Regional credits include: *Life of Galileo* (PlayMakers Repertory Company); *Kill Move Paradise* (Wilma Theater); *Until The Flood, Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3), How to Catch Creation* (Goodman Theatre); *Familiar* (Steppenwolf Theatre); *ink* (Kennedy Center); *The Comedy of Errors* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival). International credits include: *The American Clock* (The Old Vic, London). Ellington is the recipient of a Grammy, American Society of Composers and Publishers, and Obie awards.

### **Nicholas Hussong, *Video Designer***

Off-Broadway credits include: *Until The Flood* (Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, Goodman Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, ACT Seattle); *These Paper Bullets!* (Atlantic Theater Company, Drama Desk nomination; Geffen Playhouse, Yale Repertory Theatre); *White Guy on the Bus* (59E59 Theaters, Delaware Theatre Company); *Skeleton Crew* (Atlantic Theater Company), and *Chix 6* (La Mama). Regional credits include: *Kleptocracy* (Arena Stage); *Grounded* (Alley Theatre); *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre); *Two Trains Running* (Arden Theatre Company), *The Mountaintop* (PlayMakers Repertory Company), *Ella: First Lady of Song* (Delaware Theatre Company), and many others. Nicholas was an artistic associate at Triad Stage in Greensboro, North Carolina, where he continues to design new works based on Appalachian life written by Preston Lane. [Nickhussong.com](http://Nickhussong.com)

### **Kristen Mun, *Stage Manager***

Kristen is originally from the island of Oahu and holds a B.F.A. from Southern Oregon University. She is excited to return for her sixth season at Portland Center Stage at The Armory. Previous credits at The Armory include stage manager for *Sense and Sensibility*, *Constellations*, and *Major Barbara*; assistant stage manager for *The Color Purple*, *Fun Home*, and *Astoria: Part Two*; and production assistant on many others. Kristen is also a freelance fight choreographer and teacher. Thank you to Adam and her family for always having her back.

## **Molly Shevaun Reed, *Production Assistant***

Molly is thrilled to join Portland Center Stage at The Armory this season as a stage management apprentice. Recent credits at The Armory include *Sense and Sensibility*, *Twist Your Dickens*, *The Color Purple*, and *A Life*. Originally from Denton, Texas, Molly has worked in stage management, props design, and has developed new work as a director in Dallas and Portland. Local credits include stage manager for *Spectravagasm X*, director/designer/producer for the one-woman original play *Endless Oceans*, and assistant director/production assistant for *The Few* at CoHo Productions. Dallas credits include stage manager for *Dry Land* at Upstart Theater and director/designer for the world premiere of *Nomad Americana* at WaterTower Theatre's Out of the Loop Fringe Festival (formerly titled *Rooting* at Nouveau 47 Theatre). Love and thanks to Cam, Fam, Lyss, and Bear.

## **THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS OF UNTIL THE FLOOD**

### **DIANA GERDING**

Hearing these stories may take us further along in the journey of critically examining our country's tragic legacy with the hope that we do not continue to make the same mistakes. I am grateful and honored to be one of the sponsors of this production.

### **DAVIS WRIGHT TREMAINE LLP**

We believe everyone deserves a voice and representation, and that we have an obligation to assist those who otherwise would not have access to the justice system. By sponsoring the arts, including

plays such as *Until The Flood*, we strive to elevate voices and stories that may otherwise go unheard, and encourage everyone to deeply engage with experiences that may not be their own. As a strong supporter of diversity and inclusion efforts both in our firm and our broader community, we support and celebrate these conversations that bring us together.

**CHRYS A. MARTIN & JACK PESSIA**

We are proud to sponsor this groundbreaking work, adding to our longstanding history of supporting diversity and inclusion efforts in our community and in the legal profession. We have championed diversifying our workplaces, the legal industry, and charities we work with, and recognize the pivotal role artistic endeavors, such as *Until The Flood*, play in uplifting conversations about equity in our community. We hope this play will further discussions about how we can all communicate better on the complex and emotional issues facing our society today.

**MARCY & RICHARD SCHWARTZ**

In *Until The Flood*, we are reminded of the political and cultural backdrop of racism and division that inhabits our society, but also of the importance of finding the common humanity that connects us to each other across racial and cultural lines. We are pleased to support challenging and thought-provoking theater.