

TRY STEP TRIP

**DAHLAK
BRATHWAITE**

A VISIONS AND VOICES SIGNATURE EVENT

Thursday, November 3, 2022, at 7 p.m.
Bovard Auditorium
University of Southern California



USC Visions and Voices acknowledges that the University of Southern California was built on the sacred and unceded land of the Tongva, Chumash, and Kizh people.

USC Visions & Voices

USC Kaufman
Glorya Kaufman School of Dance

USC School
of Dramatic Arts

USC Dornsife
Department of American Studies
and Ethnicity



Written and Composed by
DAHLAK BRATHWAITE

Directed and Dramaturged by
ROBERTA UNO

Choreography by
TORAN X. MOORE

Composition by
DAHLAK BRATHWAITE
TEAK UNDERDUE

Lighting Design by
BRIANA PATTILLO

Costume Design by
DANA REBECCA WOODS

Assistant Choreographer
FREDDY RAMSEY, JR.

Additional Choreography
DELINA PATRICE BROOKS

Additional Dramaturgy
SKYLER GRAY

Vocal Coach
JASMINE T.R. GATEWOOD

Stage Manager/Scenic
BRITTANY WHITE

Performed by
DAHLAK BRATHWAITE
JASMINE T.R. GATEWOOD
DEREK JACKSON
FREDDY RAMSEY, JR.
DANTE ROSSI
MAX UDELL

The performance will be approximately 80 minutes and will be followed immediately by a conversation with the artists and USC Roy P. Crocker Professor of Law Jody Armour.

For Booking and Touring:
The Living Word Project
Joan Osato, Producing Director
joan.osato@gmail.com
415-710-7427

Photo: Daniel Alcazar
Title Logo Design: Elizabeth Webb

TRY/STEP/TRIP is a spoken word, multi-character musical performed in the body through the language of step dance. The story follows the journey of an anonymous narrator as he re-imagines his experience in a court-ordered drug rehabilitation program. Inspired by Brathwaite's own history, *Try/Step/Trip* layers characters, poetic verse, and dialogue over music to create a theatrical piece that blurs the lines between hip-hop and dramatic performance. *Try/Step/Trip* emerges from the belief that the subjugation of Black people is an American ritual; that the criminal justice system now functions as a normalized rite of passage for too many young Black males. *Try/Step/Trip* offers an alternative ritual; a rite of passage orchestrated to save one of the justice system's newest inductees from the ultimate plight of criminalization: to be remade in the image of its judgment. Worldviews are delivered within musical numbers, ancestors are conjured through step, and archetypes are sampled from pop culture and folklore, all to guide a familiar young Black man in his unique search for redemption and self-definition.

Originally developed, commissioned, and made possible by CalArts Center for New Performance California Institute for the Arts. Critical support for the work has been supported through residencies at CalArts Center for New Performance. *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 The Living Word Project, 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: www.npnweb.org. *Try/Step/Trip* was made possible with funding by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Theater Project, with lead funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and additional support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and had its Bay Area premiere at Dance Mission Theater in February of 2020. 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 at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX; Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, Los Angeles, CA; WACO Theater Center, Los Angeles, CA; Victory Gardens Theater, Chicago, IL; and ACT Artshare, San Francisco, CA. The company wishes to thank Travis Preston, Artistic Director of the CalArts Center for New Performance and Dean of the CalArts School of Theater and the great champions of this work over the years including Alison De La Cruz and Gilberto "Mago" Morales, Chay Yew and Skyler Grey, Shay Wafer, Yolanda Cesta Cursach, Tara Willis, Candace Feldman, Clyde Valentin, Raymond Codrington, Aaron L. McKinney, Sabrina Hamilton, Len Berkman, and Beth Boone.

Our gratitude goes to former cast and crew members: Preston Butler, TaiReikca Glover, Venice Yang, Ceton Tate, and Morgan Camper; the ArtChangeUS team: Elizabeth Webb, Genevieve Fowler, Kassandra Khalil, Daniela Alvarez, Michele Kumi Baer, and Kapena Alapai; and our gracious hosts at USC Visions and Voices.

DAHLAK BRATHWAITE is an award-winning playwright, composer, and performer. His work has been presented at the Smithsonian, Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, REDCAT, MCA Chicago, Ars Nova, The Public Theater, SXSW, by Creative Time, and on HBO's last two seasons of *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*. Dahlak's trilogy of works—*Spiritrials* (solo play), *Try/Step/Trip* (musical), *Adapting History* (documentary film)—take a personal look into the criminal justice system and the relationship between Black American music and Black American subjugation. Development of the work has been supported by CalArts, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Victory Gardens, and Montalvo Arts Center. Dahlak has received awards and support from NEFA, the Doris Duke Foundation, the U.S. State Department, NYU Tisch, and MAP Fund. He is a graduate of NYU's Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program, where he was awarded the Dean's full-tuition fellowship and currently serves as the assistant director for the national tour of the Tony-winning revival of *Oklahoma!*

ROBERTA UNO is a theater director and dramaturg. She founded and was artistic director of the New WORLD Theater in Amherst, MA, from 1979–2002. Her numerous directing credits include *The Dance and the Railroad* by David Henry Hwang, *Clothes* by Chitra Divakaruni, *Unmerciful Good Fortune* by Edwin Sanchez, *Flyin' West* by Pearl Cleage, *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son, *Sneaky* by William Yellow Robe, *Sheila's Day* by Duma Ndlovu, *I Land* by Keo Woolford, *the bodies between us* by thuy le, and the musical theater concert *Bone Hill*, co-written with and composed by Martha Redbone and Aaron Whitby. She was the last theater director to work directly with James Baldwin, directing *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, and as a dramaturg she has spanned generations working with Pearl Primus, Alice Childress, Sekou Sundiata, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Crystal Truscott, Dionna Daniel, and others. She directed a large-scale devised theatre work, *We the Peoples Before*, at the Kennedy Center in July 2022 as part of a multi-year commission celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the First Peoples Fund. Much gratitude for this creative journey with Dahlak Bathwaite, Toran X. Moore, and the talented cast and crew of *Try/Step/Trip*.



TORAN XAVIER MOORE is a creative professional hailing from Montgomery, AL, currently residing in Los Angeles. Depending on the moment, he can be found as an arts administrator, stage manager, producer, and excitedly here tonight as lead choreographer for *Try/Step/Trip*. As a dance artist, Moore has had the opportunity to perform with the Eclectic Dance Company of Alabama State University, share his step tradition with youth in Oahu at the Queen Lili'uokalani Trust's 'Ōlino Arts Program, and step in brotherhood with his beloved fraternity of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. As producer and creative manager, Moore has worked in and with theaters across the country including the Joyce Theater, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, CalArts Center for New Performance, the Kennedy Center, and many others he's grateful to have shared space in. Moore's most recent honor was serving as production manager for the premiere of *We The Peoples Before*. When not making art, Toran is a devoted fiancé to Aliyah Davis and dog dad to Bella Rose. Moore holds degrees from California Institute of the Arts (MFA) and Alabama State University (BA).

TEAK UNDERDUE-Hallway Productionz is a three-time Grammy-nominated, Dove Award-winning music production duo made up of producer/mixer/engineer/multi-instrumentalists Teak and Dee Underdue. The pair reside in Stockton, CA. Teak and Dee's production is most notably featured on Ice Cube, WC, T-Bone, Angie Stone, Dave Hollister, Mindless Behavior, and Blackalicious records.

JASMINE T.R. GATEWOOD graduated with her BA in Theatre Arts-Performance from Alabama State University, Montgomery, AL, and her Master's in Acting from California Institute of the Arts School of Theatre, Santa Clarita, CA. Jasmine's voiceover work and singing is featured on seven seasons of Dreamworks' *Madagascar: A Little Wild*. Her credits also include Nickelodeon's *Cousins for Life*, TNT's *Animal Kingdom*, and the *Fallout* video game franchise. She loves what she does living true to Philippians 4: 13: "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." "I get an overjoyed sensation that races through my veins when I am able to break down and build up self to create new characters," she says. "It is so amazing to me to witness the power of storytelling when it manifests itself throughout an audience because someone can always relate, and even if only one person is touched, my job is done."

DEREK DUBRAE JACKSON is a Los Angeles-based actor, director, and teaching artist, and the proud recipient of the Best Male Lead, NAACP Theater Award, for his work in *Gunshot Medley*. Derek received a degree in acting from the California Institute of the Arts. Derek has performed at some of the most beloved and important theatrical spaces, both nationally and internationally. Derek believes in the transformative, healing power of art, and feels a great sense of responsibility in telling stories that matter and push communities and narratives forward. His work has also been featured on Netflix, Prime Video, and other streaming platforms. Currently, as a director, Derek is developing Zola Dee's *Rain, Rive, Ocean*, an exploration into Black Americana and mysticism. As an actor, He is currently workshopping the retelling of Henry "Box" Brown's story in *Black Box* written and directed by hip-hop theater pioneer, Rickerby Hinds. Derek feels extremely grateful to be returning to his leading role in *Try/Step/Trip* and feels the immense privilege and honor of portraying Dahlak Brathwaite, while in the room. DDJ: "Trust your journey...what you want out of life wants you right back, and in all of the ways, God is for you." www.DerekDJackson.com

FREDDY RAMSEY JR. is an American actor, writer, and director. He can be seen on hit shows such as *This Is Us* (NBC), *Family Reunion* (Netflix), and *A La Carte* (AllBLK). As a recent MFA grad and former collegiate athlete, Freddy brings his persistence and dedication in practice to the craft of acting. Freddy received his MFA from the California Institute of the Arts and is originally from Baltimore, MD. His favorite quote is "Every person has a purpose and every purpose has a process. The question is, Will you persevere?"

MAX UDELL grew up in Highland Park, IL, before moving to California in 2014 to attend the California Institute of the Arts. While there, he was fortunate enough to be cast in *Try/Step/Trip* and has enjoyed the privilege of getting to perform with it ever since. He has received numerous rave reviews throughout his lifetime, such as "He's a really good kid" (his mother) and "You just wanna squeeze that little punum for days" (his grandmother). He is beyond excited to be back with the show and can't wait to perform live theater after the last few years. He deeply appreciates you all coming, and hopes you enjoy the show!

DANTE ROSSI is extremely excited to return to the role of Pastor in *Try/Step/Trip*. He was recently Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival. Dante received his BFA at the California Institute of the Arts. He is grateful to be working with such a talented and loving cast!

BRIANA PATTILLO is an international theatre artist and maker, working primarily as a lighting designer for themed entertainment and performance. Bri designed *Fatwa! The Musical*, starring Lin-Manuel Miranda for HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. She has designed for Padua Playwrights, Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, Prospect House Entertainment, and more. Bri has assisted award-winning lighting designers Anne Militello, James F. Ingalls, and Ken Booth. For the past five years she has been an associate lighting designer for Six Flags Magic Mountain's Fright Fest and Holiday in the Park events. She currently teaches theatre at Los Angeles Mission College.

DANA REBECCA WOODS is happy to be collaborating with Roberta Uno; Dahlak Brathwaite, and the wonderful cast and production team assembled for *Try/Step/Trip*. Her design work includes *Pipeline* at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival; *The Color Purple* directed by Jeffrey Polk at the Greenway Court Theater; Sheldon Epps' *Blues in the Night* at San Francisco's Post Street Theater, the Laguna Playhouse, and the Lovelace Studio Theater at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts; *In the Red and Brown Water* at UC Santa Barbara; *Shout Sister Shout*, *Stop Kiss*, *Above the Fold*, *Fences*, and others for the Pasadena Playhouse; and *Jitney* and *Fences* at the South Coast Repertory. Her film and television designs include *Go for Sisters*, written and directed by John Sayles, and *Watch Over Me*, a telenovela aired on My Network TV. Dana was an assistant professor at the University of Central Florida and is a member of USA Local 829, Costume Designers Guild Local 892, and Motion Picture Costumers Local 705. She is a labor organizer for the Costume Designers Guild and an IATSE Delegate to the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. When not designing productions or involved with labor activities, Dana creates teaching artist curriculum for after-school programs.

DELINA PATRICE BROOKS has toured the U.S. and Western Europe as a performer with The Living Word Project and choreographed/danced for Nas, Damian Marley, Kanye West's Sunday Service at Coachella, and Chance the Rapper on *Saturday Night Live!*, among others. As a member of several Bay Area theater and dance companies, Delina was the movement director for *Casa de Spirits*, a play written and directed by veteran actor Roger Guenveur Smith. In 2018, Delina transitioned into the TV/film industry and has been a director's assistant and showrunner's assistant for shows on HBO, Fox, Hulu, Disney/Freeform, ABC, and NBC.

BRITTANY WHITE stays behind the scenes, mainly as a prop artisan, with a technical theater background, but will cover most roles. The member of the San Francisco-based theater group Campo Santo, she is happy to be alive and doing theater nationally and internationally for 10+ years. Yee!

THE LIVING WORD PROJECT is a theater commissioning, developing, and producing company, whose work crosses disciplines integrating photography, film, visual arts and new media into its creations. As a collective of designers, performers, directors and technicians, our work endeavors to break open new modes of narrative, employing emerging aesthetics and techniques that push the possibilities of storytelling and theatre. We commission, develop, premiere and tour our Repertory works such as *The Break/s*, *Word Becomes Flesh*, *Scourge*, *red, black and GREEN*; *a blues*, *Nogales*, */peh-LO-tah/*, *Moving & Passing*, *Chasing Mehserle* and *Translating Selena* by Richard Montoya. Upcoming work includes *Rashomon* by Sean San Jose, directed by Mina Morita; *Last Days a Pu'unene Mill* with Tanya Orellana; and *Prieto* by Yosimar Reyes, Kat Evasco and Jose Antonio-Vargas.



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- *Try/Step/Trip* is a spoken word and step dance musical written and composed by Dahlak Brathwaite.
- The show was directed by Roberta Uno; choreographed by Toran X. Moore; composed by Dahlak Brathwaite with Teak Underdue; and produced by The Living Word Project.
- The performance will be followed by a conversation with the artists facilitated by Jody Armour, Roy P. Crocker Professor of Law at the USC Gould School of Law.

DAHLAK BRATHWAITE

Dahlak Brathwaite has performed on *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam* and at venues across the United States and Europe, including SXSW, Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Smithsonian, Ars Nova, and Theatre Row. He has collaborated as a writer and performer with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, performed alongside Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garza, and toured his own plays *Spiritrials* and *Try/Step/Trip*.

TRY/STEP/TRIP

Try/Step/Trip was created by Dahlak Brathwaite in collaboration with director Roberta Uno. The show premiered at Dance Mission in San Francisco in February 2020.

THE UNITED STATES AND MASS INCARCERATION

- The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. There are around 2.2 million people incarcerated in the United States today.
- Spending on jails and prisons in the United States increased by 1000% from 1975 to 2015.
- More people were arrested for drug possession than any other type of crime in 2019, and 1 in 5 people incarcerated in the United States are incarcerated for a drug-related offense. Only 1 in 13 people who were arrested and had a drug dependency received treatment while in jail or prison, Pew reported in early 2022.

- Mass incarceration disproportionately targets and impacts BIPOC and immigrant communities and people experiencing poverty. In 2015, more than half of people imprisoned in U.S. federal or state prisons were Black or Latino. Thirty percent of people in L.A. County jails are Black, although Black people are only 9 percent of the L.A. County population.

Sources: Equal Justice Initiative, Justice L.A., Pew, Prison Policy Initiative, Southern Poverty Law Center, Vera Institute of Justice

VOCABULARY CORNER

interdisciplinary—involving more than one artistic, academic, or scientific discipline

In the arts, the terms **interdisciplinary**, **hybrid**, **multi-genre**, and **genre-crossing** are all used to describe works that combine artistic genres, or blur the boundaries between genres.

THE LIVING WORD PROJECT

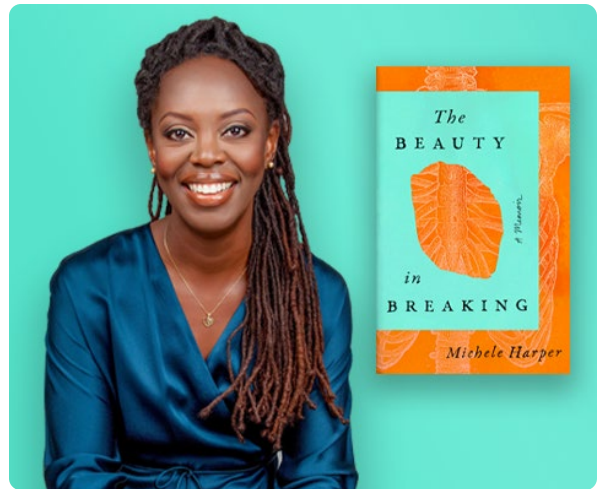
The Living Word Project is the resident theater company of the San Francisco spoken word organization Youth Speaks. The Living Word Project creates verse-based work that combines spoken storytelling with dance, music, and film.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Do you or anyone you know have experience with the U.S. carceral system? With drug dependency or addiction? What stories from your life came up in watching this show?
- How does Brathwaite use spoken word, dance, and theater art to craft an artistic rendering of lived experiences?
- Are there stories you want to tell? What medium or mediums do you feel drawn to work in to tell those stories?
- What other approaches to addressing drug dependency and addiction could be considered as alternatives to the criminal-justice system?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Upcoming Visions and Voices events:
 - 11/9/22** Michele Harper—[Radical Truths: The Power of Storytelling to Dismantle Racism in Medicine](#)
 - 11/13/22** [August Wilson's Radio Golf](#) (Experience L.A., open to USC students only)
 - 1/20/23** [Gibney Company](#)
 - 1/23/23** [John Singleton: A Celebration—Baby Boy](#)
 - 1/27–1/28/23** [Losing Ground @ 40](#)
 - 2/1/23** [SOUL 2023: Producing to Power in the 21st Century](#)
 - 2/15/23** [A.I.M by Kyle Abraham: An Untitled Love](#)



Michele Harper—*Radical Truths: The Power of Storytelling to Dismantle Racism in Medicine*



Experience L.A. Event: August Wilson's *Radio Golf*

Photo: Craig Schwartz



SOUL 2023: Producing to Power in the 21st Century



@USCVandV

VISIONSANDVOICES.USC.EDU

- 🕒 Dahlak Brathwaite online thisisdahlak.com
- 🕒 Youth Speaks youthspeaks.org
- 🕒 Classes and performances at the USC Glorja Kaufman School of Dance and USC School of Dramatic Arts kaufman.usc.edu dramaticarts.usc.edu
- 🕒 Classes in the USC Department of American Studies and Ethnicity dornsife.usc.edu/ase
- 🕒 Justice LA justicelanow.org

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

JAVIER GARIBAY of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this Dahlak Brathwaite, step dancing, and *Try/Step/Trip*. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

- 🕒 [*The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Ethnicity*](#) (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016).
- 🕒 Michelle Alexander, [*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*](#) (La Vergne: The New Press, 2020).
- 🕒 Elizabeth Fine, [*Soulstepping: African American Step Shows*](#) (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003).

DATABASES

- 🕒 [*Dance Heritage Video Archive*](#): A collection of digitized videos of dance performances, rehearsals, and interviews that preserve culturally significant global and U.S. dance traditions.
- 🕒 [*Dance Online: Dance in Video*](#): Contains more than a thousand dance productions and documentaries by the most influential performers and companies of the twentieth century.

JOURNALS

- 🕒 [*Dance Research Journal*](#)
- 🕒 [*The Journal of African American History*](#)

