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Artword Theatre presents Langston Hughes vs Joe McCarthy in 2017 Fringe

Artword Theatre is pleased to announce its participation in the 2017 Hamilton Fringe Festival with a timely and sensitive piece of documentary theatre, ***Langston Hughes vs. Joe McCarthy***, written and directed by **Ronald Weihs** and produced by **Judith Sandiford**.

Is poetry subversive? U.S. Senator Joe McCarthy thought so. On March 24, 1953, Langston Hughes, renowned poet of the Harlem Renaissance, was summoned before the Senate Committee on Investigations. Did his poems contain communist ideas? In reply, Langston Hughes tells about his personal encounters with racism in America. The script is based on the actual transcript of his testimony, interwoven with the controversial poems, and incorporating dance, music and powerful images of the era.

Learie Mc Nicolls, a dancer and choreographer as well as an actor, plays the role of Langston Hughes. Confronted with aggressive questioning, the poet maintains his dignity, insisting that the Senate Committee cannot understand his answers unless he provides the proper background. Calmly, he describes his encounters with racism starting when he was five years old.

The “jazz poetry” of Langston Hughes breaks the calm flow of the Committee hearing. Jazz music of the era is heard, and Mc Nicolls moves and dances as he speaks the powerful lines.

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?

Howard Jerome, one of Canada’s foremost character actors, carries out the aggressive interrogation, incorporating questions from two historical figures, Republican Senator Everett Dirksen and the Senate Committee’s notorious Chief Counsel, Roy Cohn.

In addition to music, striking projected images behind the actors evoke the exciting cultural explosion known as the Harlem Renaissance, when Black artists, musicians, poets and playwrights found new forms of expression. The images also remind us of the stark reality of segregation and Jim Crow.

The testimony of Langston Hughes shows how ignorance and bigotry can be challenged by the courage and integrity of the artist. Today, his words resonate as strongly as ever:

From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath-
America will be!

The poems by Langston Hughes are used by permission granted by Harold Ober Associates Incorporated, as agents for the Estate of Langston Hughes.

Background Information

Artword Artbar is a Bring-Your-Own-Venue in the 2017 Hamilton Fringe. Two other Fringe productions are also being mounted at Artword Artbar: *The Lost Years* by Peter Gruner, and *Cherie* by Sky Gilbert.

Venue: Artword Artbar, 15 Colbourne Street, Hamilton.

Show Dates and Times: Nine performances of *Langston Hughes vs Joe McCarthy*: Thu July 20: 6:30pm, Fri July 21: 9:00pm, Sat July 22: 9:00pm, Sun July 23: 8:30pm, Tue July 25: 9:00pm, Wed July 26: 9:00pm, Thu July 27: 9:00pm, Fri July 28: 8:30pm, Sat July 29: 8:30pm.

Running time: 60 minutes

Reservations: Advance tickets available through The Hamilton Fringe website <http://hamiltonfringe.ca/tickets/>

For more information, contact Judith Sandiford, artword@artword.net, 905-543-8512, cell: 905-912-9083

Biographies

Learie Mc Nicolls is a dancer, choreographer, actor and spoken word artist. A key figure in the contemporary dance scene in Toronto since the 1980s, he has danced with Toronto Dance Theatre, Desrosiers Dance Theatre, Dancemakers, the National Ballet of Cuba, and his own company, Mythmakers. As a solo dancer, he has been exploring the combination of dance with spoken word, to create a powerful new form of theatrical presentation. His production *Armour* took two Dora awards (Outstanding Choreography, Outstanding Performance). Now in Hamilton, he is helping build the contemporary dance scene here.

Since 2015, Learie has been Artword Theatre's Choreographer in Residence. He choreographed the Artword productions of *James Street* and *MacBush The Musical*, and wrote and performed *Transformation*, directed by Ronald Weihs and designed by Judith Sandiford, in the 2015 Hamilton Fringe. Learie's recent productions at Artword include *Once I Lived in the Box* (2016) and *Night Journey* (2017). In June 2017 at Artword there is a remount of his solo dance work *Night Journey* and a new work *Seven Meditations on a Duet* with dancer Tanis Macarthur, both with designer Judith Sandiford. In 2015, he received the City of Hamilton Arts Award for Performance.

Howard Jerome is an actor, singer, writer, teacher, director, producer, activist, futurist and humorist, with a distinguished career on stage, film and television. He recently relocated from Toronto to Hamilton. His television credits include *Street Legal*, *Diamonds*, *T and T*, *Adderly*, *Hangin In*, *Bizarre*, *For the Record*, *ENG*, *Night Heat*, *The Martin Short Special*, *ABC World Series Shorts*, *Street Justice*, *Marriage Bed*, *Burning Love*, and *Ghost of a Chance*. He created the role of Zelig Piekas, synagogue president and car salesman, in the film *The Outside Chance of Maximillian Glick*, and played that character in the TV series *Max Glick*. Films include *Naked Lunch*, *Looking for Miracles*, *Sam and Me*, *Sing*, *Mind Fields* and *Baby John Doe*. In theatre, he played Harold Ballard in *Of Ice and Men*, Aranow in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and acted in the Canadian Stage production of *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, R.H. Thompson's production of *Skin Deep* at Theatre Plus, and Marion Andre's production of *The Government Inspector* at Theatre Plus. His work in musical theatre includes *Duddy!* (based on *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*), *Oliver*, *Kiss Me Kate*, and the 25th anniversary production of *The Fantastics*. His company Portable Theatre has played all over Canada, spreading awareness of what must be done to preserve our planet.