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# /peh-LO-tah/

a fútbol framed freedom suite

By Marc Bamuthi Joseph/The Living Word Project

Directed by Michael John Garcés

Choreography by Stacey Printz

Composed by Tommy Shepherd

BAM Harvey Theater

Oct 18—21 at 7:30pm

Running time: approx. one hour & 20 minutes, no intermission

Set and video design by **David Szlasa**

Lighting design by **Tom Ontiveros**

Sound design by **Rob Kaplowitz**

Costume design by **Meghan Healey**

*Season Sponsor:*

**Bloomberg  
Philanthropies**

*Leadership support for dance at BAM provided by  
The Harkness Foundation for Dance.*

*Major support for dance at BAM provided by  
The SHS Foundation.*

*Additional support for /peh-lo-tah/ provided by New  
England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project.*

Performed by The Living Word Project:

**Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Amara Tabor-Smith, Tommy Shepherd, Traci Tolmaire, Yaw Agyeman**

Producing director **Joan Osato**

Production manager **Maximilian Urrezmendi**

Stage management **Michael Garcia**

Sound engineer **Zachary McKenna**

"No Looking Back," performed by the ensemble, was written and composed by Yaw Agyeman

"Known to do the Impossible," a prose piece, was written by Bassey Ikpi

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Commissioned by the Kennedy Center for the Arts and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Chicago.

Produced by MAPP International Productions

Worldwide Representation and Booking for Marc Bamuthi Joseph

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#### FUNDING CREDITS

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Marc Bamuthi Joseph wishes to thank the many individuals who contributed to the GoFundMe campaign to support this work. There are too many of you to list but you know who you are. Your support has meant more to me than you can know.



**MARC BAMUTHI JOSEPH**



**MICHAEL JOHN GARCÉS**



**YAW AGYEMAN**



**TOMMY SHEPHERD**



**AMARA TABOR-SMITH**



**TRACI TOLMAIRE**

In my first memory of the game, we are running barefoot, uphill on limestone. Baby Doc Duvalier is chillin' in a mansion in the distance, but here, every boy on my grandpa's block is chasing a tennis ball bandaged in loose socks, passing it with our feet. NYC kid visiting for the summer, USA kid in the hemisphere's poorest country, only time I fit in with the rest is inside of the game. My love of soccer is a heritage story...

From childhood through the recent past, I've been growing towards this new work...

Over time, as my questions have deepened and grown more emotionally charged, I've charted a path of inquiry that connects macro issues of economy to personal confrontations with my own body as a positioned figure in both the language of sport and art. This path is taking me to South Africa, Brazil, soccer capitals across Europe, local leagues across the US; moving forward on a hypothesis that links local and global economic hierarchies to behaviors, allegiances, and government investment in the infrastructure of the world's game. My plan is to draw concurrent narrative maps through this research leading to writing and dramaturgy of a new work.

*/peh-LO-tah/* explores the ecology of egalitarianism played out inside the world's game. It is a story of my body in its late summer years; the physics of a globally networked economy running in tandem with the fragile network of a dancer's anatomy. It is a bet that that sweat has currency to transition both narrative point of view and visual dimension. For my company of collaborators, it is a structural experiment: physically demanding, visually deft, viscerally reaching, and linguistically twisted in hip-hop and hope.

Ultimately, I'm intrigued by the elusive riddle of equality, and am fascinated by the curiosity that soccer is the only thing the entire planet can agree to do together. It is the official sport of this spinning ball. My inquiry involves the joy of the game against the complexity of the global south sites of the last two World Cups. It acknowledges that all conversations tied to ecology are ALSO tied to democracy and economy. The work is sprung from the bliss of a goal scorer's run; it shares what his countrymen do after the ball beats the goalie, the closest thing going to freedom...

—*Marc Bamuthi Joseph*



**MARC BAMUTHI JOSEPH** is a 2017 TED Global Fellow, an inaugural recipient of the United States Artists Rockefeller Fellowship, the winner of the 2011 Alpert Award in Theater, and an inaugural recipient of the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award. In addition, he has served as an advisor and panelist for the Rockefeller MAP Fund, PEW Charitable Trust, and Zellerbach Family Fund, among other national philanthropies. He is the founding program director of the exemplary non-profit Youth Speaks, and is a co-founder of Life Is Living, a national series of one day festivals designed to activate under-resourced parks through hip-hop arts and focused environmental action. The artistic response to these festivals, a dance-theater work called *red black and GREEN: a blues* was nominated for a Bessie Award; the filmed version is a part of the exhibition catalog of the Smithsonian Museum of African American History. Joseph recently premiered the Creative Time commission *Black Joy in the Hour of Chaos* in New York's Central Park, and recently completed a new work with Bill T. Jones for the Philadelphia Opera while serving as Chief of Program and Pedagogy at YBCA in San Francisco. His evening-length piece *peh-LO-tah!* was commissioned by the Kennedy Center and the Guggenheim Museum and premiered at YBCA in November of 2016; it will appear at other international venues in 2017.

**MICHAEL JOHN GARCÉS'** (director) previous work with the Living Word Project—in collaboration with Bamuthi, Stacey Printz, Tommy Shepherd, and many other collaborators—includes directing *red, black and GREEN (a blues)* and *the break/s*. He is the artistic director of Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles where recent directing projects include *Urban Rez* by Larissa FastHorse, *California: The Tempest* by Alison Carey, and *Plumas Negras* by Juliette Carrillo, as well as writing *Magic Fruit* and *Los Illegals*. Other recent directing credits include *Wrestling Jerusalem* by Aaron Davidman (various venues, including the Guthrie Theatre, Mosaic Theatre, and The Cleveland Public Theatre), *District Merchants* by Aaron Posner (Folger Theatre), and *The Box* by Sarah Shourd (Z Space). He is a company member at Woolly Mammoth Theater Company in Washington, DC, where projects he has helmed include *Lights Rise on Grace* by

Chad Bekim and *The Convert* by Danai Gurira. Other theater companies where he has worked include New York Theater Workshop, Second Stage, The Cherry Lane, INTAR, South Coast Repertory, The Humana Festival, and A Contemporary Theater. Garcés is the recipient of the Princess Grace Statue and the Alan Schneider Director Award.

**STACEY PRINTZ** (choreographer) is artistic director of Printz Dance Project. She is a Bay Area-based choreographer, dancer, and educator; she graduated cum laude from UC Irvine with degrees in sociology and dance. She teaches for A.C.T.'s MFA program, and at Alonzo King's LINES Dance Center where she has been on faculty for 15 years. She has taught her hybrid contemporary-jazz technique across the US and annually in Europe. Her company has performed in San Francisco for 15 years and has toured across the nation and internationally in Russia, Lithuania, Ireland, the Virgin Islands, and Mexico. Reviewers of *Hover Space* said, "With a talented cast, unique concept and inventive movement, *Hover Space* is a slam dunk." Printz also choreographed: Aaron Davidman's, *Wrestling Jerusalem*, Sarah Shourd's *The Box*, and Marc Bamuthi Joseph's internationally recognized works, *Scourge*, *The Break/s*, and *red black and GREEN: a blues*. [Printzdance.org](http://Printzdance.org)

**DAVID SZLASA** (scenic and video design) is a versatile video artist and designer spanning performance, installation, public art, and social practice. His work revolves around ideas of remix and re-appropriation, using popular imagery, ideas, and actions in unexpected ways to challenge structures of authority and question social standards. His project Studio 1 was dubbed a Living Innovation Zone by the City of San Francisco and he has taught design at Stanford, NYU, and St Mary's College. Collaborators include Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Sara Shelton Mann, Joanna Haigood, Dohee Lee, Yuri Zhukov, Hope Mohr, Bill Shannon, Rennie Harris, Deb Margolin, Myra Melford, and others.

**TOM ONTIVEROS'** (lighting design) recent citations include: Best Lighting Design (LADCC, *My Barking Dog*), nomination for Best Projection Design (Stage Raw, *Shiv*), and a nomination for

Best Lighting Design (Ovation!, *Completeness*). Credits include designs for La Jolla Playhouse, South Coast Repertory, Cornerstone, LA Opera, Hungarian National Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Culture Project, Park Avenue Armory, Danspace Project, MoCA (Chicago), San Diego Museum of Art, Ojai Music Festival, Phoenix Symphony, and the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music. Upcoming work includes *Vicuña* (CTG, Kirk Douglas Theatre) and *They Don't Talk Back*. Ontiveros is an assistant professor of lighting design at USC.

**ROBERT KAPLOWITZ** (sound design) has spent the last 24 years designing sound and composing, and has been honored with an OBIE for Sustained Excellence and a Tony for *Fela! A Philadelphian* since 2010, he has designed there for PlayPenn, Interact, Arden, Lucidity Suitcase, Pig Iron, Lantern, PTC and others; other regional credits include the Guthrie, Alley, Sundance, O'Neill, and National Theatre of England. Previous work with Garces includes *The Body of An American* and *Light, Raise the Roof*. In NYC, his work has been heard on Broadway, at Lincoln Center, The Public, MCC, Second Stage, the Vineyard, MTC, and innumerable 99-seat venues (Perseverance Theatre).

**MEGHAN HEALEY** (costume design) has recently designed costumes for *The Body of an American* (Wilma Theater), *WE ARE PROUD...* (Woolly Mammoth Theater), *URBAN REZ*, *Love On San Pedro*, and scenery for *Plumas Negras* (Cornerstone Theater). She has designed costumes and scenery for world premiere productions from playwrights such as Larissa Fasthorse, Octavio Solís, Eduardo Machado, Lars Noren, Jose Rivera, Andrea Thome, Clive Barker, Najla Said, Nilaja Sun, and Rob Handel, among others. She received her MFA in design from NYU's Tisch School, and is Chair of the Department of Drama, Theater, and Dance at Queens College CUNY.

**TOMMY SHEPHERD** (composer and performer) is an actor, playwright, composer, educator, rapper, drummer, and beatboxer. Shepherd is co-founder of the live hip-hop collective, Felonious, a resident company at Intersection for the

Arts. Shepherd created the original music and performed in their recent project *Babylon Is Burning*. Shepherd is a long-time member of performance group Campo Santo, Parents Choice Award-winning educational hip-hop group Alphabet Rockers, and Oakland's own Antique Naked Soul. Shepherd has performed and toured internationally with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, collaborating on *Scourge, the break/s, Spoken World*, and *red, black and GREEN: a blues*.

**AMARA TABOR-SMITH** (performer) is an Oakland-based performer/choreographer who has been in the works of choreographers such as Ed Mock, Joanna Haigood, Pearl Ubungen, Ronald K. Brown, Adia Tamar Whitaker, and Faustin Linyekula. She is a former associate artistic director and dancer with Urban Bush Women. She has performed in the works of theater artists such as Anna Deveare Smith, Aya de Leon, and Marc Bamuthi Joseph. Tabor-Smith is the artistic director of Deep Waters Dance Theater and co-artistic director of Headmistress, a collaboration with Sherwood Chen. She is on faculty in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies at UC Berkeley. Awards and residencies include: Creative Capital, Headlands Center for the Arts, CounterPULSE, ODC Theater (artist in residence), CHIME Mentorship Exchange, Creative Capital (grants), and Green Choreographers Exchange at Dance Exchange.

**TRACI TOLMAIRE** (performer) is an actor, dancer, singer, and choreographer from Chicago. Credits include *The High Priestess of Dark Alley* (Le Petit Théâtre); *Cherchez la Femme* (La MaMa ETC); *Dancing on Eggshells* (Billie Holiday Theatre); *Black Joy in the Hour of Chaos* (Creative Time); *The Circle Unbroken Is a Hard Bop* (651 Arts/MAPP International Productions); *red, black, & GREEN: a blues* (MAPP International Productions/Living Word Project); *Plenty of Time* (New Federal Theatre); *Mirrors in Every Corner* (Intersection for the Arts/Campo Santo); *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (Fulton Opera House); and *Trouble in Mind* (Actor's Express). Choreography credits include *Gee's Bend* (Hartford Stage); *Rejoice!, a holiday musical* (Lorraine Hansberry Theatre); and *Dancing on Eggshells*. [tracitolmaire.com](http://tracitolmaire.com).





**YAW AGYEMAN** (performer) has toured in *red, black & GREEN: a blues* (MAPP) and performed in the world premiere of the musical, *Mister Chickee's Funny Money* (Chicago Children's Theater) featuring music from the Motown great Lamont Dozier. He has been featured on VH1's *Soul Cities*, a show produced by Nelson George that showcases singers in cities all over the country, as well as on the Africa Channel's *Soundtracks at Red Kiva*, a program that focuses on artists of African descent. Currently, he is a member of the artistic collaboration Black Monks of Mississippi, headed by the dynamic and prolific artist Theaster Gates.

**MAXIMILIAN URRUZMENDI** (production manager), born in Atlanta, GA to Uruguayan immigrants, fell in love with performance at a young age. Since moving to the Bay Area, he has had the privilege of working along with an engaging community of artists, theaters, and professionals in creative and technical capacities, including production/stage management, lighting/audio design, and performance.

**MICHAEL GARCIA** (stage manager) has worked on stage management and production teams for organizations such as Cornerstone Theater Company, South Coast Repertory, Special Olympics World Games, and Boston Court Performing Arts Center, among others. He is passionate about using theater to activate community and is interested in the relationships between art and self-knowledge, and culture and change. Currently, he is also directing a workshop of a new play written around the experiences of veterans returning from combat at Rio Hondo College in Whittier, CA. He holds a BA from the University of California, Irvine.

**ZACK MCKENNA** (sound engineer) is a sound designer, engineer, and composer based in Philadelphia. Previous works include *ALIVE!* (2nd place KCACTF national award winner) with Arcadia University, *The Radicalization of Bradley Manning* (Barrymore Nominated) with Inis Nua Theatre, and *JIB!*, with the Windmill Collective and the Old Sound Room. The outdoors and sunshine make him happy; his friends, family and awesome collaborators make life amazing.

**MAPP INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTIONS** is a nonprofit producer of major performing arts projects that raise critical consciousness and spark social change. It supports all phases of an artist's creative process, from concept and production to premiere and touring, while also engaging audiences in the issues behind the art. Through this heightened focus, it supports an evolving and elite cadre of creators whose work ignites communities worldwide.

**THE LIVING WORD PROJECT** (LWP) was formerly the resident theater company of Youth Speaks, Inc. of San Francisco. Now operating independently, LWP is committed to producing literary performance in the verse of our time. Aesthetically urban, pedagogically Freirean, LWP derives personal performed narratives out of interdisciplinary collaboration. Though its methodology includes dance, music, and film, the company's emphasis is spoken storytelling. LWP creates 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. LWP is the theater's connection from Shakespeare's quill to Kool Herc's turntables; from Martha Graham's cupped hand to Nelson Mandela's clenched fist: a new voice for a new politic.

The company wishes to thank its ancestors, families, and professional colleagues for their inspiration and support. The author wishes to thank Christine Marie, Paul Turbiak, Catherine Adell, Brittney Leeanne Williams, Corrie Besse, and TaiRecka Glover for their work on the development on this project. Much love to Erik Mayo for your unbridled support and facilitation, and to Deborah Cullinan and the staff of YBCA for its understanding and permission.

This piece is dedicated to Diana Cohn, a beacon of belief on our path, without whom this work quite literally could not have been made.

**Susan Yung:** *Can you discuss the idea of soccer as a universal language?*

**Marc Bamuthi Joseph:** Soccer isn't just the world's most popular sport, it is the activity to which we globally assign the most value as an emblem of cultural aesthetics. It isn't just success on the pitch that communicates a nation's character, it's how the game is played, from Ghanaian grace to Brazilian flair to Spanish polyrhythm to German focus and consistency. That universality then is more pronounced against the stark contrast of political monocultures and repressive regimes. How do we register that universal joy in the shadow of South African apartheid? How do we reconcile with a country that meddles in the elections of other sovereign nations and also invites the planet to roam freely within its borders during the World Cup? In this case the sport reveals that joy is universal, as are the contradictions inherent among the men and women who passionately engage in it.

**SY:** *Did you and your collaborators develop the soccer-inflected movement just for this work, or is it something you've used in other pieces?*

**MBJ:** All the choreography for */peh-LO-tah/* was created by Stacey Printz in a series of residencies that we executed around the country from Dallas to San Francisco to Atlanta to Middletown, CT at Wesleyan University. Stacey is a relentless and prolific movement generator, and she transferred that ethic to the creative process in complement with the original music, text, and direction of the entire team. The choreography was made for these bodies, taking into account the folkloric vocabulary and mastery of Amara Tabor-Smith and the contemporary and lyrical elasticity of Traci Tolmaire. These women, as much as the athletic and geographic influences that undergird the entire piece, formed the inspirational backbone for our choreographic design.

**SY:** *Can you share some thoughts about black athletes taking a political stance?*

**MBJ:** Besides hip-hop itself, Black Lives Matter is the longest sustained grassroots movement of NOTE in my lifetime. Ironically, what sustains the

movement most is not necessarily the activists themselves as much as the fact that cops or vigilantes keep killing unarmed black people. Even if folks wanted to mute the campaign, they couldn't because Walter Scott is getting shot in the back, or Sam Ambrose is getting shot in his face, or nine people are being annihilated in the house they came to pray in. The movement is a place of mourning, and has also been a site of paramilitary opposition, so you can understand the edge, in the time of this drought; you can sense the extra parched thirst for wet justice to come rolling down.

So... What is the visual score for this stress? Consider the theater of grainy camera phones pointed at Oscar Grant, grainy audio picking up the distant sound of Trayvon Martin's final moments, and the alternative iconography comes from where? Rap?

Ask yourself what is your normalized view of black people as a mass. Not a few people in your workplace, I'd submit that in the American imagination black people don't tend to aggregate in places of success. See us imagined by America in mass and the landscape might be poverty, jail, and at best church. So the most worthy action ANY black person with a high visibility platform might do right now is place black joy among the white noise and make something beautiful and participatory so that we might consider black life in public space in a frame other than rage or grief. Whether it's LeBron James or Serena Williams or Colin Kaepernick, there is an ethic among black athletes that understand this reality, and are taking their lead from Muhammad Ali, or Wilma Rudolph, or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to activate their high-visibility perch in the name of political progress. These athletes understand the stakes and know there ain't no more time to play games.

**SY:** *Please talk about the educational component of */peh-LO-tah/*.*

**MBJ:** As part of my development process, and through a commission from the Guggenheim Museum, I developed a kinetic learning module that accesses */peh-LO-tah/*'s field of inquiry and



creates a sports-based political action for kids of color, particularly young immigrants, and their parents. This project is called “moving and passing” and it intersects curriculum development, site-specific performance, and the politics of joy while using soccer as metaphor for the urgent question of enfranchisement among youth of color. We combine play with poetry and visual iconography and connect moving on the field without the ball to moving through this country without “possession” of “center.”

“Moving and Passing Curricular Tactics” (M-PACT) is a five-week curriculum that I designed taking this process one step further.

Using text and media from */peh-LO-tah/* and other sources, M-PACT is a month-long writer’s workshop whose outcomes are poems, personal narratives, and media pieces correlating characteristics of the world’s game to characteristics of some of the world’s pathologies. Participants develop the poetic underpinnings of immigration-centered personal essays. Our goal is to have students emerge with written or digital pieces capturing their personal narrative at the crossroads of sport, race, economics, constitutional law, and dreams in defiance of the impossible.

*Susan Yung is senior editorial manager at BAM.*