

APOLLO

The World Premiere of

Ta-Nehisi Coates's ***Between the World and Me***

Onstage at the Apollo Theater

A Pivotal Theatrical Staged Reading Produced by the Apollo

With New Music by **Jason Moran** Will Activate One of America's Seminal
Pieces of Literature

Two Shows with Special Guest Performances by a Variety of Esteemed
Actors and Artists Including:

**Angela Bassett, Common,
Joe Morton, Michelle Wilson and Marc Bamuthi Joseph,
On April 2**

&

**Susan Kelechi Watson, Pauletta Washington,
Joe Morton and Marc Bamuthi Joseph
On April 3**

Harlem, NY – March 27, 2018 – The Apollo Theater will produce the world premiere theatrical staged reading of Ta-Nehisi Coates's award-winning book, ***Between the World and Me***, on its iconic Harlem stage. The reading will be conceived and directed by Apollo Executive Producer **Kamilah Forbes** in her first full season at the Apollo, and MacArthur "Genius" **Jason Moran**, who also composed new music for the production. ***Between the World and Me* will have an exclusive two-night run at the Apollo on April 2 and April 3, 2018**, culminating in a final one-night only performance at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on April 7th in Washington D.C. The reading will feature live excerpts of the book performed by **Angela Bassett** (*Black Panther, 9-1-1*), **Common** (*John Wick 2, Selma*), **Susan Kelechi Watson** (*This Is Us*), **Joe Morton** (*Scandal*), **Michelle Wilson** (*Sweat, A Raisin in the Sun*), **Pauletta Washington** and **Marc Bamuthi Joseph**. **Common, Angela Bassett and Michelle Wilson will appear on the first night of the two-day run on April 2 with Susan Kelechi Watson and Pauletta Washington making special appearances for the April 3 show.**

Between the World and Me concludes the nonprofit theater's season of expanded programming and enforces its commitment to celebrating African American arts and culture, supporting emerging and established artists, and serving as a cultural and civic resource for students, families, and the larger Harlem community.

Between the World and Me, which won a National Book Award in 2015 and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, will take its stage form as a series of excerpted monologues, performances, design projections, and musical interludes orchestrated by the Apollo's creative team. The book explores issues of racism and violence in America, as well as the perception of what black male identity looked like during Coates's young adult life and how it is perceived today.

"What initially inspired me to bring *Between the World and Me* to the Apollo stage was the concept of what literature looks like when performed," said **Kamilah Forbes, the Apollo Theater's Executive Producer**. "Reading *Between the World and Me* was a very raw, personal experience; Ta-Nehisi creates an undeniably bold conversation about the black body, and the Apollo, as a champion of its community, has opened its doors for generations to discussions like this. I wanted to take the feelings that the book inspires from the solitary act of reading and transform them into a collective experience, both for the audience and the performers."

Between the World and Me, for which Coates initially drew inspiration from James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, is written as a first-person letter from Coates to his teenage son. The author draws on his youth in Baltimore to bring his son into a critical conversation about America's wrenching history and relationship with racism and violence against black people. The urgency of communicating these topics was initially sparked by a 2013 meeting with President Obama, during which Coates debated the level to which the President's policies sufficiently addressed racial disparities. Like Coates's letter, the production will be divided into three parts: Coates's experiences as a young man in Baltimore, including his pivotal five years attending Howard University; his life after the birth of his son; and a meeting with Mable Jones, the mother of late Prince Jones Jr., who was the fatal victim of a police shooting in 2000.

"The Apollo has a historic tradition of providing the community, specifically the black community, with a powerful platform to share conversations of struggle, and pride through arts and culture," said **Ta-Nehisi Coates**. "Watching *Between the World and Me* come alive on this iconic stage is incredibly exciting and gratifying."

Forbes and Moran will encourage the actors and artists taking part in the production to interpret Coates's powerful narrative voice, knitting together individual reactions and personal connections to reimagine *Between the World and Me* as a theatrical piece. The stage interpretation of the book is meant to act as a raw dialogue, similar to the one Coates has with his son in the text. These performances will be set against deliberately designed projections, a visual representation of Coates's writing, and will be accompanied by Moran's captivating score.

"I feel honored to be able to interpret what is one of the most important pieces of contemporary literature on the Apollo stage," said **Jason Moran, Kennedy Center Artistic Director of Jazz**. "Ta-Nehisi explores critical black American musical influences, including 90s hip-hop legends such as Nas, Black Thought, and the Wu-Tang Clan, as a part of the larger black male identity in *Between the World and Me*, and it was very important for me to be able to represent and translate them as part of this narrative while also remaining true to the overall voice of the book."

Like Moran, Forbes was deeply affected by *Between the World and Me*, and her connection to the story is exceptionally personal. She and Coates were both students at Howard University, where they met.

About Ta-Nehisi Coates

Ta-Nehisi Coates is a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*. His book *Between the World and Me* won the National Book Award in 2015. Ta-Nehisi is a recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship. He lives in New York with his wife and son.

About Jason Moran

Since his formidable emergence on the music scene in the late 90s, jazz pianist Jason Moran has proven more than his brilliance as a performer. The Blue Note Records recording artist has established himself as a risk-taker and innovator of new directions for jazz as a whole.

In almost every category that matters—improvisation, composition, group concept, repertoire, technique and experimentation—Moran, and his group The Bandwagon—with bassist Tarus Mateen and drummer Nasheet Waits—have challenged the status quo and earned the reputation as “the future of jazz.”

Moran lives in New York City with his wife, mezzo soprano Alicia Hall Moran, and their twin toddlers.

About Kamilah Forbes

Co-founder and artistic director of Hi-ARTS, Kamilah Forbes, is an award-winning director and producer. In her diverse body of work, Forbes is noted for having a strong commitment to the development of creative works by, for, and about the Hip-Hop Generation. Her talent in the range of aforementioned endeavors has been said to “cast a vivid and evocative spell on both the national and international stage.”

Forbes first came to prominence as the writer/director of Hip-Hop Theatre Junction’s premier work *Rhyme Deferred*. Forbes has produced several works for both television and theater, most notably the seven-season Peabody Award-winning series *Russell Simmons presents Def Poetry* on HBO. She was also a co-executive producer on the *Brave New Voices* documentary series on HBO, in addition to executive-producing the most recent PBS special *The Women’s List*.

Forbes has received numerous accolades for her work in the arts, including a Josephine Abady Award, AUDELCO Award nomination, NAACP Image Award, numerous Helen Hayes Award nominations, DC Commission Distinguished Artist Award, Tony Award, and The Mayor’s Arts Award for Emerging Theatre Artist.

PRODUCTION

Between the World and Me is produced by the Apollo Theater in collaboration with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and co-commissioned by the Apollo Theater and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

TICKETS

Tickets for *Between the World and Me* are available at the Apollo Theater Box Office: (212) 531-5305, 253 West 125th Street, and Ticketmaster at 1-800-745-3000 or www.ticketmaster.com. Tickets are on sale now.

SUPPORT

The Lead sponsor for Between the World and Me is Spotify

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About the Apollo Theater

The legendary Apollo Theater—the soul of American culture—plays a vital role in cultivating emerging artists and launching legends. Since its founding, the Apollo has served as a center of innovation and a creative catalyst for Harlem, the city of New York, and the world.

With music at its core, the Apollo's programming extends to dance, theater, spoken word, and more. This includes special programs such as the blockbuster concert *Bruno Mars Live at the Apollo, 100: The Apollo Celebrates Ella*, the annual Africa Now! Festival, and the recent New York premiere of the opera *We Shall Not Be Moved*. The Apollo is a performing arts presenting organization that also produces festivals and large-scale dance and music works organized around a set of core initiatives that celebrate and extend the Apollo's legacy through a contemporary lens; global festivals including the Women of the World (WOW) Festival and *Breakin' Convention*; international and U.S.-based artist presentations focused on a specific theme; and Special Projects, multidisciplinary collaborations with partner organizations.

Since introducing the first *Amateur Night* contests in 1934, the Apollo Theater has served as a testing ground for new artists working across a variety of art forms and has ushered in the emergence of many new musical genres—including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop. Among the countless legendary performers who launched their careers at the Apollo are D'Angelo, Lauryn Hill, Machine Gun Kelly, Miri Ben Ari, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, James Brown, Michael Jackson, Gladys Knight, Luther Vandross, and Stevie Wonder; and the Apollo's forward-looking artistic vision continues to build on this legacy.

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