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YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS SELECTS

Marc Bamuthi Joseph as Director of Performing Arts



Marc Bamuthi Joseph

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SAN FRANCISCO — (January 5, 2012) Yerba Buena Center for the Arts is extremely pleased to announce that, after an extensive nationwide search, leading Bay Area performing artist, activist and educator, **Marc Bamuthi Joseph**, has been selected as YBCA's director of performing arts. Since 1999, Joseph has been the founding program director and artistic director of Youth Speaks, Inc. in San Francisco, the leading nonprofit presenter of spoken-word education and youth development programs in the country. Joseph also developed the Living Word Project,

Youth Speaks' renowned resident theater program that centers on cutting-edge, verse-based work, and, in 2001, started the organization's Living World Festival, which takes place annually in the Bay Area and features new co-commissioned performance works, live music and outreach activities. In addition, he is the co-founder of Life is Living, a national series of one-day festivals designed to activate under-resourced parks and affirm peaceful urban life through hip-hop arts and focused environmental action. Participating cities have included Oakland, Calif., Chicago, Houston, New York and San Francisco.

A nationally acclaimed educator and essayist, Joseph has lectured at more than 200 colleges and universities and has held adjunct professorships at Stanford University, Lehigh University, Mills College and the University of Wisconsin. He has served as the artistic director of *Russell Simmons Presents Brave New Voices*, a seven-part documentary for HBO and is a popular speaker on National Public Radio. His numerous accolades include being named one of Smithsonian magazine's America's Top Young Innovators in the Arts, being the inaugural recipient of the United States Artists Rockefeller Fellowship, which annually recognizes 50 of the country's "greatest living artists", and receiving the 2011 Alpert Award in Theater.

"Marc has a particularly unique perspective on performing arts that will be very invigorating for us," said Kenneth Foster, YBCA's executive director. "YBCA has a huge commitment to diverse points of view, and Marc's outlook will create a vital and vibrant mix of thoughts, opinions and ideas about the artistic trajectory of the organization."

"Another one of Marc's strengths is his deep relationship with the community," continued Foster. "He's absolutely committed to the Bay Area and has developed his national and international reputation as a Bay Area artist. He is an extraordinary individual and we're thrilled to have him join us."

After appearing on Broadway as a young actor, Joseph developed several poetically based works for the stage that toured across the United States, Europe and Africa. These included *Word Becomes Flesh*, *Scourge*, and *the break/s*, which co-premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays and the Walker Art Center in the spring of 2008. Joseph's *Word Becomes Flesh* was re-mounted in December 2010 as part of the National Endowment for the Arts' *American Masterpieces* series, and will tour throughout North America and Hawaii through 2013. In addition, Joseph wrote the commissioned libretto, *Home in 7* for the Atlanta Ballet in 2011, and is directing Dennis Kim's *Tree City Legends* at Intersection for the Arts in 2012. His work has been described as everything from "electrifying" (*The Houston Chronicle*), to "ever-elegant" (*The Washington Post*) and compelled *The Seattle Times* to name him their "cutting-edge performer of the year" in 2003. In their recent review of *Word Becomes Flesh*, *The New York Times* declared his work to be "eloquent. . .seamless. . .and remarkable."

In October 2011, Joseph presented his original piece *red, black & GREEN: a blues*, at YBCA to rave reviews, selling out all performances. The production was highlighted in *The San Francisco Chronicle's* top 10 list of Bay Area theater productions for 2011, with theater critic Robert Hurwitz declaring, "A thing of great beauty, with a heart and mind to match, Marc Bamuthi Joseph's text, Tommy Shepherd's soulful blues and co-performers Traci Tolmaire and Theaster Gates create a work of shared, vital passion and provocative ideas at the rocky interface of environmental activism and inner-city needs."

"I couldn't be more excited to expand the risk-taking mandate and community-building mission of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts," said Joseph. "I believe deeply in the elegance and aesthetic capacity of the local arts ecology, and I'm dedicated to integrating the local arts

agenda within a global presenting sphere. I think by hiring me as the director of performing arts, YBCA is making a bold statement about the relationship between arts practice and arts curation, and I hope to re-mold my performance literacies in the shape of an inclusive, engaging and provocative creative ecosystem. After 12 years of working with the brilliant staff at Youth Speaks Inc., I'm also confident about my advocacy for youth, urban and socially marginalized voices, and I hope to institute an undercurrent of activism in our pedagogical voice here at YBCA.”

Joseph, who is currently performing with his production of *Word Becomes Flesh* at The Public Theater in New York, will start at YBCA in February. He replaces Angela Mattox, who recently joined the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA) as their artistic director.

About Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA), located in San Francisco's Yerba Buena cultural district, is one of the nation's leading multidisciplinary contemporary arts centers. With a belief that contemporary art is at the heart of community life, YBCA brings audiences and artists of all backgrounds together to express and experience creativity. The organization is known for nurturing emerging artists at the forefront of their fields and presenting works that blend art forms and explore the events and ideas of our time. As part of its commitment to the San Francisco Bay Area, YBCA supports the local arts community and reflects the region's diversity of people and thought through its arts and public programming.

YBCA programs around four Big Ideas to organize its wide-ranging programs and provide a context with which to engage the art. The Big Ideas are: ENCOUNTER: Engaging the social context; SOAR: The search for meaning; REFLECT: Considering the personal; and DARE: Innovations in art, action, audience. These ideas, which encompass art from all disciplines, are designed to focus an investigation of contemporary art and its relationship to the larger world. Using the Big Ideas as portals, YBCA has established a framework of thought that invites exploration and risk-taking, quiet reflection and active engagement.

Performing arts, visual arts and film/video programs are curated thematically around Big Ideas which illustrate the connections and associations between the works. Public programs and Big Idea Nights, YBCA's popular free open house series, are dedicated to establishing a deeper understanding and appreciation of contemporary art. YBCA presents programming year-round in the Forum, Screening Room, Galleries and Novellus Theater. For tickets and information, call 415.978.ARTS (2787) or visit www.ybca.org.

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