

Mosaic Theater Company of DC Press Release
Ari Roth, Founding Artistic Director • Serge Seiden, Managing Director



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Press@mosaictheater.org

**MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY ANNOUNCES PSALMAYENE 24
AS RECIPIENT OF ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION
NATIONAL PLAYWRIGHT RESIDENCY PROGRAM GRANT**

Mosaic is excited to welcome Helen Hayes Award Winner Psalmayene 24 as Senior Artistic Staff for the next three years as Playwright in Residence

WASHINGTON, DC – (Friday, April 10 2020)

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, in collaboration with HowlRound Theatre Commons at Emerson College, created The National Playwright Residency Program to provide three years of salary, benefits, and a flexible research and development fund for a diverse group of American playwrights at selected theaters around the country. More than a standard residency, this initiative is a way of reimagining what theatrical institutions might look like with a full time working artist deeply embedded in key areas of institutional management and advancement. Veteran DC playwright and director, Psalmayene 24, nominated for a 2020 Charles MacArthur/Helen Hayes Outstanding New Play Award for his play, *Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of a Native Son*, which premiered at Mosaic, has been awarded a 3-year residency and will begin his work on staff with Mosaic July 1, 2020.

Founding Artistic Director Ari Roth states, “If a theater is strong, it's imbued with a soul that pulsates with character and conscience. And at the heart of that soulful theater company, there exist artists of rare character and conscience who radiate that theater's light and give voice to its finest articulation. Psalmayene 24 is such an artist, bringing his own achievements and community of collaborators into our space to help Mosaic create work that will resound with the deepest parts of our mission. The ideas he's brought to our meetings in formulating this National Playwrights Residency Proposal reflect a writer aware of what our increasingly diverse DC audience is excited about, and how that community might be pushed in enriching ways. Psalm will be given a home at Mosaic like no other he's encountered in his impressive artistic career. Psalm will be a fully expressed playwright, sharing the bounty of his imagination with his new artistic family. A fully expressed artist is a fully empowered one too, and Psalm will have no door closed to him as a member of Mosaic's senior artistic staff. He will receive support for workshops and research, be a major voice within our administration, and have respect from staff, board, and artists alike. His impact will be a game-changer for our theater.”

The scope of the residency is ambitious, with a focus on the playwright's creative output through commissioned projects. Mosaic is excited to help develop a new project already in the drafting stage, written and to be performed by the author himself, entitled *Dear Mapel*, based on the Psalmayene 24's letters (actual and imagined) to the deceased father he hardly knew, sharing a coming-of-age story within a coming-to-terms hole in his heart. Additional projects include a hip-hop theatrical portrait of DC's controversial "**Mayor For Life,**" **Marion Barry**. Just as provocative and dynamic is *The H Street Corridor Initiative*, a showcasing of proud DC voices culled from interviews of residents along H Street where Mosaic performs, focusing on two public transport vessels bringing residents up and down the corridor; the infamous X-2 bus and the newer, suspiciously regarded play-toy of gentrification, the **DC Streetcar**.

Another proposed work, *Freedom Strike*, tells the story of a Black performance artist who cuts off the head of Abraham Lincoln from the Emancipation Statue—a controversial DC statue of a freed Black man and Abraham Lincoln. The play will investigate the cost of freedom on the Black body. Additionally, Psalmayene 24 will return to the work that initiated his literary relationship with Mosaic, *Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of a Native Son*, a reimagining of the meeting between author Richard Wright and essayist James Baldwin, originally commissioned as a response piece to **Nambi Kelley's** adaptation of *Native Son*, which Psalm directed as part of Mosaic's "*Native Son Rep.*" Entertaining and vital, a streamlined text and staging of *Les Deux Noirs* will be fashioned to make the production more wieldy for touring through our "Mosaic on the Move" initiative, and for future productions to come.

An experienced teaching artist, Psalmayene 24 will become an integral member of Mosaic's **Outreach and Education programs**. He will join Mosaic's **Public Programming Committee**, becoming a collaborator on topics for post-show discussions (which he'll periodically facilitate), and lead brainstorming for deeper outreach into DC neighborhoods. In this sphere, Psalmayene 24 and Artistic Director Ari Roth will work closely to further Mosaic's mission to make the theater an inclusive gathering space. Psalmayene 24 will spearhead the creation of a Directors/Playwrights Cohort, which may lead to the creation of devised or co-authored work like the *H Street Corridor Initiative*.

Psalmayene 24 comments, "In many respects, I am a native son of the community that Mosaic Theater serves. Having grown up in Brooklyn, New York, and now having lived in the Washington, DC area for more than half of my life—over 25 years—I proudly call DC my home. I came of age, as a man and an artist, in DC. I wrote my first play in DC. I met my wife in DC. So, as my adopted hometown, **I feel a strong connection to many of the theaters in the DC area—especially Mosaic. True to its name, Mosaic is a theater with a wonderfully diverse audience.** As someone who grew up in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn during a time when it was a beacon of multiculturalism, I feel most at home in communities where diversity reigns supreme. (And when I say diversity, I mean diversity of all types: race, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) As an artist who sees myself as

an integral member of the community that Mosaic serves, it is my belief that I am well qualified to represent authentic creative impulses that reflect the spirit of this community. **My intention is to impact this community through the National Playwright Residency Program by creating plays that act as a reflective prism meant to reveal and illuminate the soul of the community.** There is a validation that occurs when people see a play that speaks to their particular experience. Plays have the ability to feed parts of the human spirit that we didn't know were malnourished. When plays voice the humanity of a specific community, these plays have the potential to sing in harmony with universal yearnings that connect us all."

PSALMAYENE 24 BIO

Psalmayene 24 is an award-winning playwright, director, and actor. Psalm—as his colleagues call him—is currently the Andrew W. Mellon Playwright-in-Residence at Mosaic Theater and the Artist-in-Residence at Studio Theatre. His play, *Les Deux Noirs* (2020 Charles MacArthur Award Nomination for Outstanding Original New Play or Musical), is a reimaging of a legendary 1953 confrontation between famed writers Richard Wright and James Baldwin in a Paris cafe. His play, *The Frederick Douglass Project*—inspired by Frederick Douglass' 1845 trip to Ireland and co-written with Irish playwright Deirdre Kinahan—was the first play to be produced on a pier at The Yards Marina in Washington, DC and was the recipient of six 2019 Helen Hayes Award nominations. Psalm has received commissions from the African Continuum Theater Company, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, The Kennedy Center, Theater Alliance, Solas Nua, and Mosaic Theater Company. His one man play, *Free Jujube Brown!*, is recognized as a seminal work in hip-hop theatre and is published in the anthology, *Plays from the Boom-Box Galaxy: Theater from the Hip-Hop Generation* (TCG).

His directing credits include *Pass Over* by Antoinette Nwandu at Studio Theatre, *Native Son* by Nambi E. Kelley at Mosaic Theater Company, *Word Becomes Flesh* (recipient of five 2017 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Direction of a Play) by Marc Bamuthi Joseph at Theater Alliance, *Not Enuf Lifetimes* by Caleen Sinnette Jennings at The Welders, and *The Shipment* by Young Jean Lee at Forum Theater. Psalm is the recipient of the Imagination Award from Imagination Stage (past recipients include Christopher Reeve, Dr. Jane Goodall, and Dennis Haysbert). He has also received grants from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Maryland State Arts Council, DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, and the Boomerang Fund for Artists Inc. As an actor, Psalm has appeared on HBO's critically acclaimed series *The Wire* and been nominated for a Helen Hayes Award. Additionally, he has devised theatre with young artists locally and abroad in India, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with Arena Stage's *Voices of Now* program. Psalm is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association, the Dramatists Guild of America, and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

ABOUT THE MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY OF DC

Independent, intercultural, entertaining, and uncensored, Mosaic Theater Company of DC is committed to making transformational, socially-relevant art, producing plays by

authors on the front lines of conflict zones, and building a fusion community to address some of the most pressing issues of our times. Dedicated to making our theater a model of diversity and inclusion at every strata, on stage and off, Mosaic invests in the new as we keep abreast of our changing and challenging times to ensure that our theater is a responsive gathering space, all the while nurturing and producing art of the highest order. We complement our productions with comprehensive engagement through free pre- and post-show programming, an annual intercultural festival, like our “Voices From a Changing Middle East” series, and educational initiatives, including our touring “Mosaic on the Move.” We strive to foster a culture of listening and welcoming, embracing complexity and a multi-focal perspective. Our plays speak truth to power and to the private spaces of our soul. www.mosaictheater.org

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation seeks to strengthen, promote, and defend the centrality of the humanities and the arts to human flourishing and to the well-being of diverse, fair, and democratic societies. To this end, our core programs support exemplary and inspiring institutions of higher education and culture. The Foundation makes grants in four core program areas: Higher Education and Scholarship in the Humanities; Arts and Cultural Heritage; Scholarly Communications; and International Higher Education and Strategic Projects. For more information visit <https://mellon.org>

HOWLROUND

In 2009, Theater Development Fund released *Outrageous Fortune: The Life and Times of the New American Play*, a six-year study into how plays were written and produced in the United States at that time. The results were both comprehensive and disturbing. As the study’s lead author, Todd London, put it at the time, “On one hand, we have a playwriting profession that is larger, better trained and more vital than at any time in our history. On the other hand, we have a profound rift between our most accomplished playwrights and the theatres who would produce them, an increasingly corporate theatre culture, dire economics for not-for-profits, dwindling audiences for non-musical work and perhaps most troubling of all, a system of compensation that makes it nearly impossible for playwrights to earn anything resembling a living.” The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation responded immediately, supporting broad-based discussions of how the field might address issues identified in the study, including playwrights’ ability to earn a living making plays, relationships between playwrights and producing theatres, and the relevance of theatres to their communities. Informed by these conversations, in 2012 the Mellon Foundation launched the National Playwright Residency Program as an effort to catalyze a field-wide shift by embedding playwrights in theatres. For more information visit www.howlround.com