

Press Release



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LYRICS FROM LOCKDOWN

A Sankofa.org Production
Presented by The Actors' Gang
Written and Performed by Bryonn Bain
Directed by Gina Belafonte
6 Performances Only: February 4 – 13, 2016

Culver City, CA, January 7, 2016 – Arts and activism will come together when **Harry Belafonte's** Sankofa.org and **Tim Robbins' The Actors' Gang** present a **special limited engagement of Bryonn Bain's *Lyrics From Lockdown***.

Written and performed by Brooklyn activist, educator and performing artist Bryonn Bain and directed by Gina Belafonte, *Lyrics From Lockdown*, weaves the voices of over 40 characters into an extraordinary, internationally acclaimed tour de force. This groundbreaking multimedia production uses a live band and video DJ, fusing hip hop, theater, spoken word, rhythm and blues, calypso and classical music, to tell the true story that followed an unbelievable case of racial profiling, mistaken identity and wrongful incarceration.

"Shortly after producing the film Beat Street, in the years that followed, I grew frustrated with Hip Hop. I was disillusioned by how many artists have turned their backs on social responsibility. The world needs to see how Bryonn Bain's Lyrics From Lockdown carries the tradition of joining art and activism as an instrument for justice - at a time when the prison system has our communities in crisis."

-Harry Belafonte

Lyrics From Lockdown speaks to issues that are in the headlines today. Bryonn Bain takes an injustice we are becoming all too familiar with and turns it into a powerful evening of theater. With live musicians, Bryonn creates a visceral experience full of poetry that is quite moving and important. It is a fitting opening to our 2016 Season of Justice.

-Tim Robbins

Bain created *Lyrics From Lockdown* after he was unjustly stopped and frisked outside of a NYC nightclub and thrown into jail during his second year at Harvard Law School. Once released, Bain recalls writing poetry, rhymes, and what later became a cover story for the Village Voice. His story, "Walking While Black," received the largest response in the history of the nation's most widely-read

progressive newspaper. Soon after, Bain's law school professor Lani Guinier suggested that he create a "hip hop opera." From there *Lyrics from Lockdown* was born.

Lyrics also introduces the audience to Nanon Williams, a young man who was sentenced to death at age 17 for a crime he didn't commit. Nanon wrote Bain from Death Row after reading his story nearly a decade ago. "His letters changed my life," Bain said. "He asked me to share his story and I was so moved by it that I weaved his letters into *Lyrics* so you see how this young poet — unjustly robbed of his youth — is inspiring a global movement to free himself and others unjustly thrown into prison."

"Art and culture are creative tools to educate organize and mobilize a movement. The criminal justice system has hit pandemic proportions and our level of engagement as a community is vital to bring solution and alternatives to this crisis," *Lyrics* Director Gina Belafonte said. "Bryonn Bain's *Lyrics From Lockdown* is an exemplary offering of the engagement of arts in activism and a vision of an equitable and transformative world."

***Lyrics from Lockdown* will run February 4 through February 13, 2016 (Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 8pm) at The Ivy Substation (9070 Venice Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232).**

Tickets for *Lyrics From Lockdown* are \$30 General Admission and \$25 for Students and Seniors. Thursday performances at The Actors' Gang are always Pay-What-You-Can. Discounts are available for groups 10 or more. Tickets can be purchased online at www.theactorsgang.com or by calling the box office at 310.838.4264.

For more information about *Lyrics From Lockdown*, including interviews and videos, visit www.LyricsfromLockdown.com.

Bryonn Bain (Playwright/Performer) is Brooklyn's own prison activist, actor, hip hop theater innovator and spoken word poetry champion. Described by Cornel West as an artist who "...speaks his truth with a power we desperately need to hear," Bain's work as a BET host won awards for the critically acclaimed talk show "My Two Cents." Bain's second book, *THE UGLY SIDE OF BEAUTIFUL: Rethinking Race and Prisons in America* will be published this fall by Third World Press with a foreword by Mumia Abu Jamal and introduction by Lani Guinier. Currently teaching in the Dramatic Arts at Harvard, Bain has taught courses on hip hop, spoken word and the prison crisis at Boys Town Detention Center, Rikers Island prison, NYU, LIU, Columbia University and The New School. *Lyrics From Lockdown* has sold out on three continents worldwide. Bryonn joined the Board of Directors at the Correctional Association in June of 2012.

Gina Belafonte (Director) Born and raised in New York City, Gina Belafonte has spent her life in the arenas of entertainment and activism where her professional work thrives today. As the youngest child of Julie and Harry Belafonte, whose impact in these fields is among the most influential and progressive in the world, Gina's passions come as no surprise. Gina was the lead producer on the internationally acclaimed documentary film, *SING YOUR SONG*, exploring the extraordinary life and legacy of her father, Harry Belafonte that was selected as the opening film for the Sundance Film Festival in 2011. Gina currently sits on the boards of 2nd Call and The Actor's Gang and is now the Co-Director of Sankofa.org a social justice organization that enlists the support of today's most celebrated artists and influential individuals in collaboration with grassroots partners to elevate the voices of the disenfranchised and promote peace and equality.

Sankofa.org (Producer) is a social justice organization founded by Harry Belafonte that enlists the support of today's most celebrated artists and influential individuals in collaboration with grassroots partners to elevate the voices of the disenfranchised, and to promote peace and equality. Sankofa.org focuses on issues of injustice that disproportionately affect the disenfranchised, the oppressed, and the underserved, which left unaddressed will continue to impact the lives of too many individuals and remain a scar on our nation's moral character. Some of the key issues we are currently addressing include: the systemic violence that has poisoned our society and is being reinforced by legislation such as Stand Your Ground, rampant over-incarceration rates including the cradle-to-prison pipeline and an unequal justice system; income disparity, where wealth is concentrated at the top and the earnings gap between has only grown more pronounced since the 1960's.

The Actors' Gang (Presenter) For 35 years, The Actors' Gang has received international acclaim for presenting over 150 new, unconventional and uncompromising plays and dynamic reinterpretations of the classics in Los Angeles, throughout the United States, and on five continents. Guided by Founding Artistic Director, Tim Robbins, and Co-Artistic Director, Cynthia Ettinger, the company was founded in 1981 by a group of like minded artists looking to create theater relevant to the society we live in and restore the ancient sense of the stage as a shared sacred space. In 2000, the company launched its free Education and Outreach Program, and in 2006 launched the Prison Project.

Lyrics From Lockdown

Written and Performed by Bryonn Bain

Directed by Gina Belafonte

A Sankofa.org Production

Presented by The Actors' Gang

February 4 – 13, 2016

Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays at 8pm

Running Time: 80 Minutes, No Intermission

The Ivy Substation

9070 Venice Blvd.

Culver City, CA 90232

Parking: Metered street parking available on Culver Blvd., Venice Blvd., and surrounding streets. Two hour free parking available in the Ince Lot (above Trader Joe's) - \$1/hour thereafter.

Tickets

\$30 General Admission

\$25 Students and Seniors

Thursdays are Pay-What-You-Can

Discounts for groups 10 or more.

Box Office/Information: (310) 838-4264 | www.theactorsgang.com | boxoffice@theactorsgang.com

Special Benefit Night

February 12, 2016

Tickets: \$100

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