



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Is our American society desensitized to the recurrent killing of Black youth? Do we accept this as a cost of law enforcement? What ideologies enable such killings? What forms can healing take?

CHICAGO (January 18, 2022) – GRAY, Congo Square Theatre Company, and Theaster Gates's Rebuild Foundation are proud to jointly present the Chicago premiere of *What to Send Up When It Goes Down*, the critically acclaimed play by award-winning playwright, **Aleshea B. Harris**. The performance will be presented at **GRAY Chicago (2044 West Carroll Ave)** from **March 31 through April 16, 2022** and Rebuild Foundation's **Stony Island Arts Bank** from **April 21 through May 1, 2022**.

Described as a play-pageant-ritual-homegoing celebration, *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* responds to the gratuitous loss of Black lives and interrupts discourses that enable the ubiquity of racialized violence in our society.

What to Send Up When It Goes Down is a participatory, shapeshifting experience intent on creating space for collective catharsis, cleansing and healing. The performance unfolds as a series of vignettes which employ a variety of forms including parody, song, movement, and facilitated dialogue. Breaking the fourth wall, cast members enact the script differently in each performance as members of the audience are invited not only to behold the piece as spectators, but to become part of the current that holds the story together. The play intends to create a space for as many Black-identifying audience members as possible and was created for a Black audience, but all are welcome.

The 90-minute work is co-directed by Congo Square Artistic Director Ericka Ratcliff and Ensemble member Daniel Bryant. Cast members include Ronald L. Conner and Anthony Irons (Congo Square) along with Jos N Banks, McKenzie Chinn, Victor Missoni, Alexandria Moorman, and Penelope Walker. Creative team members include Charlique C. Rolle, Sarah Grace Goldman, Estrellita Edwell, Sydney Lynne Thomas, Alexis Chaney, and Levert "Levi" Wilkins.

Congo Square Executive Director Charlique C. Rolle stated: "For over 20 years, Congo Square Theatre has committed to telling stories that unapologetically share the complexities of the Black experience. We strongly believe that Aleshea Harris's profound play, *What To Send Up When It Goes Down*, is the perfect piece to simultaneously address the physical and spiritual deaths of Black people as a result of racialized violence, while also providing a space to heal together in community."

"Rather than merely recapitulating the condition of living in the wake of gratuitous death, *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* provides opportunities for corporeal catharsis and accords deep respect for rage," said GRAY Principal, Paul Gray. "Its participatory nature makes unheard truths about inclusion and exclusion palpable. It is a shared experience, full of nuance. Aleshea Harris's portrayal of a community moving through the wake of death — both jarring and deeply moving — is a work of art in the best sense."

"As artists, harnessing our creative sensibilities as an impetus for protest and healing is one of the highest and best uses of our artistic intelligence," added Theaster Gates, artist and Founder of Rebuild Foundation. "The role that Black artists and Black cultural institutions in Chicago play in shining a light on injustice is paramount to dismantling systems that perpetuate racialized violence against Black bodies. We are humbled and honored to partner with Congo Square

Theatre Company and GRAY to bring Aleshea B. Harris's poignant production to the Arts Bank and South Side community."

EVENT INFO

The play occurs as five performances each week, March 31-May 8, 2022: Thursday and Friday evenings at 7:30 PM; Saturdays at 2:30 PM and 7:30 PM; and Sundays at 2:30 PM. To maintain the integrity of the production and intimacy of the venue, only 50 guests will be accommodated at each performance. For more information, visit Congo Square Theatre's ticketing website.

ABOUT ALESHEA B. HARRIS

Aleshea B. Harris is a playwright based in New York. Her play *Is God Is* (directed by Taibi Magar at Soho Rep) won the 2016 Relentless Award, an OBIE Award for playwriting in 2017, the Helen Merrill Playwriting Award in 2019 and was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* (directed by Whitney White, produced by The Movement Theatre Company), a play-pageant-ritual response to anti-blackness, had its critically-acclaimed NYC premiere in 2018, was featured in the April 2019 issue of *American Theatre Magazine* and received a rare special commendation from the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. Harris was awarded a Windham-Campbell Literary Prize and the Mimi Steinberg Playwriting Award in 2020 and the Hermitage Greenfield Prize in 2021. She has performed her own work at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Orlando Fringe Festival, REDCAT, as part of *La Fête du Livre* at La Comédie de Saint-Étienne and at the Skirball Center in Los Angeles. Harris is a two-time MacDowell Fellow and has enjoyed residencies at Hedgebrook and Djerassi.

ABOUT GRAY

Inspired by the creativity of artists and the passion of collectors, GRAY is a globally recognized team of art professionals devoted to fostering the development of historically important artist careers and to building outstanding art collections. Founded in 1963, GRAY has built its reputation as a resource for Modern, Post-War, and Contemporary art with prominent private and institutional clients worldwide. Known for producing critically acclaimed exhibitions and programming from its galleries in Chicago and New York, GRAY represents a roster of internationally recognized artists such as McArthur Binion, Jim Dine, Torkwase Dyson, Theaster Gates, David Hockney, Rashid Johnson, Alex Katz, Jaume Plensa, Susan Rothenberg, and Evelyn Statsinger. For more information, visit www.richardgraygallery.com.

ABOUT REBUILD FOUNDATION

Rebuild Foundation is a platform for art, cultural development, and neighborhood transformation. Its Stony Island Arts Bank is a hybrid gallery, media archive, library, community center and home for the Foundation's archives and collections. Spearheaded by artist and social innovator Theaster Gates, our projects support artists and strengthen communities by providing free arts programming, creating new cultural amenities, and developing affordable housing, studio, and live-work space. Rebuild's mission is to make art accessible by demonstrating the impact of innovative, ambitious and entrepreneurial arts and cultural initiatives. The work is informed by three core values: Black people matter, Black spaces matter, and Black things matter. Learn more about our work at www.rebuild-foundation.org.

ABOUT CONGO SQUARE THEATRE COMPANY

One of the nation's premier African American theaters, Congo Square Theatre Company, under Executive Director Charlique C. Rolle and Artistic Director Ericka Ratcliff, is an ensemble dedicated to producing transformative work rooted in the African Diaspora. We are a haven for artists of color to challenge and redefine the theatrical canon by amplifying and creating stories that reflect the reach and complexities of Black Culture. Congo Square is one of only two African American Actors' Equity theatre companies in Chicago. Founded in 1999, Congo Square aimed to provide a platform for black artists to perform and present classic and new work that exemplified the majesty, diversity, and intersectionality of stories from the African Diaspora. Congo Square has risen to become one of the most well-respected African American theaters in the nation. Previously mentored by two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright

GRAY

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August Wilson, Congo Square would go on to cultivate talents such as playwright Chadwick Boseman (*Black Panther*), who penned the 2006 Jeff nominated play *Deep Azure*, and playwright Lydia Diamond, who penned the massively successful *Stick Fly*, a critically acclaimed play that explores race, class, and familial friction. *Stick Fly* ultimately ran on Broadway and is currently being developed into a full-length series for HBO with Alicia Keys serving as a producer. Congo Square also produced the widely praised *Seven Guitars*, which would eventually go on to win top honors for best ensemble, best direction, and best production at the 2005 Joseph Jefferson Awards. This would earn the theatre company the distinction of being the first African American theatre company to receive such an honor.

Congo Square's Educational Programs bring the impact of theater to young audiences. Its outreach programs, CORE (Curriculum Objectives Residency Enrichment), and CAST (Congo After School Theatre), present and teach theater arts by providing classroom and after-school residencies that provide Teaching Artists to build upon already established Chicago Public Schools literature and art curriculums. CORE and CAST impact students and schools located on the South and West sides of the city

For more information about Congo Square Theatre Company or its production of *What to Send Up When It Goes Down*, please call 773-296-1108 or visit www.congosquaretheatre.org.

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