

# PRESS RELEASE

**STUDIO**  
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**NEXT UP ON PSALM'S SALONS AT STUDIO—THEATRE-MAKER PSALMAYENE 24 TALKS WITH ACTOR JUSTIN WEAKS AND ARTIST-ACTIVISTS FROM GALVANIZE DC AND THE MAKING SPACE TO BREATHE/GATHERING TO GRIEVE VIGIL**

Studio Theatre's series of digital dance parties with conversation—**Psalm's Salons at Studio**—continues on **July 23 at 5 p.m.** with director, theatre-maker, and Studio Artist in Residence **Psalmayene 24** in conversation with actor **Justin Weaks**, **Galvanize DC** founders **J.J. Johnson** and **Jefferson A. Russell**, and **Jjana Valentiner**, executive producer of the Making Space to Breathe/Gathering to Grieve vigil. Galvanize DC has been pivotal in creating space and a support network for Black theatre artists and administrators in Washington; together with Valentiner and other volunteers, Galvanize DC facilitated the Breathe/Grieve vigil for community members to come together in solidarity during a time of unrest.

Psalm's Salons are an online gathering space to highlight the work of creatives, signal-boost local and Black-owned businesses, kick back to live music, and promote a sense of community. Salons are hosted by Psalmayene 24 with original music from **DJ Nick tha Ida**, sampling from the Library of Congress's Citizen DJ tool. **Events are free and streamed live on Studio Theatre's [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) pages.**

Justin Weaks was last at Studio earlier this year in Dominique Morisseau's *Pipeline*, and previously appeared in *Curve of Departure* during the 2017-2018 season. Select local credits include *Fences* at Ford's Theatre; *BLKS*, *Gloria*, and *Describe the Night* at Woolly Mammoth; *Long Way Down* at The Kennedy Center; *Gem of the Ocean* at Round House Theatre; *The Christians* at Theater J; *Word Becomes Flesh* and *Still Life with Rocket* at Theater Alliance; and *Charm* at Mosaic Theater Company. Psalm and Justin will discuss their careers, artistic inspirations, life in DC during this turbulent period, and the role of theatre during this pivotal moment. During the rapid-fire Q&A *Top 5*, Justin will share his favorite theatre productions, before taking audience questions.

J.J. Johnson and Jefferson A. Russell, local actors, and administrators of Galvanize DC, will discuss being Black theatre artists amidst a global push for racial equality, being artists of color working in DC, and how the city's theatre landscape is changing. Jjana Valentiner will share her experience amplifying Black artistic voices as an ally and accomplice.

Studio will share cocktail recipes and recommendations for local food to enjoy during the salon prior to the event so audience members can join in on the interactive party vibe.

The next Psalm's Salon will be held Thursday, August 20 at 5 p.m. (guest TBA)

Psalm's Salons are supported by a capacity building grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's (DDCF) Building Demand for the Arts program. The program funds artists and arts institutions working to forge long-lasting relationships with diverse audiences. Studio, working with Psalm, has committed to

expand on its efforts to forge meaningful connections with African-American millennial audiences in DC. The grant funds engagement efforts through the 2020-2021 season.

DDCF's Building Demand for the Arts program supports organizations and artists in joint efforts to ignite interest and engagement in jazz, theatre, and contemporary dance. This program is predicated on the beliefs that artists are key connectors to communities, and that artists and organizations can work together in imaginative new ways to attract and engage audiences. These grants also promote deeper partnerships, longer relationships, and new kinds of conversation and cooperation between organizations and artists.

### **About the Artists**

**Psalmayene 24** (host) is an award-winning director, playwright, and actor. Directing credits include *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, and *The Shipment* by Young Jean Lee at Forum Theatre. He has received commissions from the African Continuum Theatre Company, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, The Kennedy Center, Theater Alliance, Solas Nua, and Mosaic Theater Company. His one-man play, *Free Jujube Brown!*, is published in the anthology *Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy: Theater from the Hip-Hop Generation* (TCG).

**Nick "tha 1da" Hernandez's** (DJ/Sound Design) recent work includes: *The Hip-Hop Children's Trilogy* with playwright Psalmayene 24 (Imagination Stage); *Fences* (Ford's Theater); *Native Son* and *Les Deux Noir* (Mosaic Theater); *Word Becomes Flesh* (Helen Hayes Award, Outstanding Production) at Theater Alliance; *Long Way Down* and *Darius & Twig* (The Kennedy Center); and *Havana Hop* and *All the Way Live* with sibling Paige Hernandez (Discovery Theater). Additionally, Nick has produced for Hot 97 FM, Red Bull Big Tune, Netflix, DC Public Library system, and Smithsonian Associates.

**Justin Weaks** has performed in Dominique Morisseau's *Pipeline* and Rachel Bonds's *Curve of Departure* at Studio Theatre. He was recently seen in *Fences* at Ford's Theatre. Selected local credits include *BLKS*, *Gloria*, and *Describe the Night* at Woolly Mammoth; *Long Way Down* at The Kennedy Center; *Gem of the Ocean* at Round House Theatre; *The Christians* at Theater J; *Word Becomes Flesh* and *Still Life with Rocket* at Theater Alliance; and *Charm* at Mosaic Theater Company. Additional regional and New York credits include work with Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Shakespeare & Company, and Barter Theatre. Justin holds a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor and Ensemble (*Word Becomes Flesh* at Theater Alliance) as well as three additional Helen Hayes nominations. He is a teaching artist in the Washington, DC metro area and a company member at Woolly Mammoth. He earned a BA in Theatre from Greensboro College.

**James J. Johnson** (J.J.) is an actor who was last onstage as "Wynton" in 1<sup>st</sup> Stage's co-production of *The Royale* (with Olney Theatre). Other regional theatre credits include: *Les Deux Noirs: Notes on Notes of a Native Son* (Mosaic Theatre Company); *Ruined* (Arena Stage); *Hero's Welcome* (1<sup>st</sup> Stage); *Stick Fly* (UVA Department of Theatre); *Our Suburb* (Theater J); *The Member of the Wedding* (Ford's Theatre); *The Unmentionables* (Woolly Mammoth Theatre); *Kingdom*, *Wedding Dance*, *Buffalo Hair* (African Continuum Theatre Co.); *Twelfth Night*, *Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare Project of Frederick); *Stonewall Country*, *Macbeth* (Theatre at Lime Kiln); *Anna Lucasta* (Rep Stage); *Jungle Book* (Adventure Theatre MTC); *Zomo the Rabbit*, *P. Nokio*, *Lyle the Crocodile* (Imagination Stage); *Homer P. Figg* (Kennedy Center). FILM: *Too Saved*, *Nocturnal Agony* and *The Henchman's War*. EDUCATION: BFA, Virginia Commonwealth University. James is also a founding member of Galvanize, a support network for Black DMV theatre artists.

**Jefferson A. Russell** was born and raised in Baltimore. He is a graduate of Baltimore City College high School, and obtained a BA Sociology/Criminal Justice from Hampton University, as well as an MFA in Classical Acting from the George Washington University and Shakespeare Theatre Company's Academy for Classical Acting. He has been a professional actor and voice artist for over 25 years. Previously, he

served as an officer in the Baltimore Police Department and as a Maryland Department of Juvenile Services juvenile probation officer. He is a founding member of Galvanize, a network of Artists of Color (est. 2005); veteran of Baltimore's Arena Players and a Resident company member of Everyman Theatre.

**Jjana Valentiner** is a Washington, DC based actress, cupcake activist, teaching artist, improviser, makeup artist, playwright, producer, and director. Jjana has worked as an actress at various DC-area theatres, including Arena Stage, Folger Theatre, The Kennedy Center, Round House Theatre, Studio Theatre, Imagination Stage, Rorschach Theatre, Constellation Theatre, Forum Theatre, and The Hub Theatre (Helen Hayes nomination for Best Ensemble for *Birds of a Feather*), among others. She also originated the role of Leopard in Imagination Stage's *Zomo the Rabbit: A Hip Hop Creation Myth*, written by Psalmayene 24 (Helen Hayes Nomination for Best New Play TYA).

## **ABOUT STUDIO THEATRE**

Studio Theatre is Washington's premier venue for contemporary theatre, "where local audiences will find today's edgiest playwrights" (*Variety*). One of the most respected mid-sized theatres in the country, Studio produces exceptional contemporary drama in deliberately intimate spaces. Drawing inspiration from great ensembles—where people work together with a spirit of generosity and professional rigor—Studio brings characteristic thoughtfulness and daring to its work onstage and off, through its new work incubator and engagement, education, and workforce training initiatives. Studio serves nearly 75,000 people each year, including more than 1,000 youth and young adults through community engagement initiatives. Founded in 1978, the quality of Studio's work has been recognized by sustained community support, as well as 72 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in professional theatre.

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