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SERPENTWITHFEET HEART OF BRICK

Presented in collaboration with The Englert Theatre

Thursday, October 5, 2023 7:30 p.m. The Englert Theatre

Photo: Justin French



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2023-2024

A JOYCE THEATER PRODUCTION HEART OF BRICK

CREATED BY SERPENTWITHFEET

Thursday, October 5, 2023, at 7:30 p.m. The Englert Theatre Part of Hancher Auditorium's 2023–2024 Season

Music & Concept: Director: Choreographer & Dramaturg: Set Designer: Lighting Designer: Costume Designer: DJ: Music Director: Sound Designer: Performers:	serpentwithfeet Wu Tsang Raja Feather Kelly Carlos Soto Luke Rolls Julio César Delgado with support from Telfar Donte Collins & serpentwithfeet in collaboration with Performers Rush Davis Sensei Bueno Asma Maroof Shaquelle Charles, Dylan M. Contreras, Justin Daniels, Matthew Deloch, Chrystion Dudley, Brandon Gray, Nelson "Nellie" Enrique Mejia Jr.
Production Manager/Stage Manager: Lighting Supervisor: Sound Engineer: Producers: Associate Producer/Company Manager: serpentwithfeet Manager:	Olivia Brown Devin Koenig Stephanie Loza Ross LeClair, Joyce Theater Productions Barbara Frum, outer/most Bridget Caston, Joyce Theater Productions Kazz Laidlaw, EQT
Funding Credits:	Produced: The Joyce Theater Foundation Co-Produced: Kampnagel International Summer Festival Co-Commissioned by: The Joyce Theater Foundation, Kampnagel International Summer Festival, The LA Phil—with generous support from Linda and David Shaheen, Seattle Theatre Group, Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa

HANCHER EVENT PARTNERS

Little Village Alan & Liz Swanson

CAST OF CHARACTERS

serpent	serpentwithfeet
Brick	Dylan M. Contreras
Redwood	Chrystion Dudley
Amir/Darius	Justin Daniels
Jamar	Brandon Gray
Saige	Nelson "Nellie" Enrique Mejia Jr.
Dorian	Shaquelle Charles
Quan	Matthew Deloch



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SYNOPSIS

HEART OF BRICK tells the story of a nightclub from an intimate and tender Black gay perspective. Surreal and film aesthetical elements are used to blur the lines between fiction and reality: spoken word, poisoned plants, and mysterious riddles from a familiar elder weave together a magical telling of serpentwithfeet's new album, GRIP. The piece reverently nods to Isaac Julien's 1989 film Looking for Langston, which explores the life of the poet Langston Hughes and Black queer nightlife during the Harlem Renaissance. Heart of Brick also takes inspiration from a New York City bar called Langston's, which was long considered to be the oldest (last?) Black Gay Club, where portraits of Hughes hung. For serpentwithfeet, Langston's "was a huge part of my New York experience when I lived there and I often say this venue raised me a 2nd time. The dance floor has been a medium for Black queer people to decompress and build community." This community is also evident on stage. The group of performers represent the creators and patrons of the club, through their conversational dynamics and movements. A romantic relationship that evolves between serpent and club owner Brick touchingly demonstrates tenderness and closeness between two men, as well as the tensions that emerge when an outsider enters the community.

ACT I

We first meet serpent, who is new to the city and hopelessly romantic. At the same time, a group of friends are excitedly preparing for a wild night out. They all come together at the legendary Back Yard—a Black gay club owned by Brick and his exlover Redwood. When serpent meets Brick, sparks fly.

ACT II

A few days later, Brick and Redwood are congratulating themselves on their successful party when Darius, an elderly man, wanders by with a mysterious warning. Later on, serpent and Brick's relationship grows deeper, but Brick fears intimacy. He leaves to go back to the bar, where Darius reveals that someone has poisoned the plants on the patio.

ACT III

Through gossip and fear imbued in the plants, Brick has been poisoned and is rushed to the hospital. serpent visits Brick. Darius reappears offering another riddle to save Brick's life with a mystical flower. With this new knowledge, serpent rushes to the club, to ask for help to save Brick—nobody wants to help. serpent returns to Brick whose condition is getting worse. Brick has a fever dream, where angels confront him with his issues of intimacy. serpent sets off to find the mystical flower. The others find and help him. Together, they find what they're looking for.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Josiah Wise savors romantic moments under his alias serpentwithfeet. The 35-year-old Los Angeles-based artist with a background in R&B and classical music expresses desire and pleasure in songs so beguilingly gentle that he has become one of the most exciting alternative R&B voices. Now he is developing his first stage work with award-winning visual artist Wu Tsang, who expresses queer identity in films and is resident director at Schauspielhaus Zürich. Completing the team is Raja Feather Kelly, one of New York's most luminous choreographers, with both Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway works and his own experimental dance works; as well as Solange and Bob Wilson designer Carlos Soto, star stylist Julio Delgado, and poet Donte Collins. Together with seven dancers, the team tells the story of a Black gay nightclub. This is where the utopian potential of a safe space and a great love story between the club security guard Brick and serpent unfold. The latter is on stage himself—with songs from his new album, *Grip*.

Music from the album GRIP:

Spades Hummin' Damn Gloves Black Air Force Safe Word Rum 1 to 10 Deep End Lucky Me





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serpentwithfeet is simply letting the pendulum swing nowadays. The Los Angeles-based singer is taking the natural steps that a singer as talented and as versatile as he is would take from chapter to chapter in his career. Throughout his career, serpent has exhibited this versatility through experimental R&B music. Two years removed from his second album, *DEACON*, serpentwithfeet is gearing up to return with his third album, *GRIP*.



GRIP finds its home on the dance floor of Black gay clubs and the intimate moments that happen there and

afterward, no matter the location. For serpentwithfeet, Black gay nightlife spaces "raised him a second time." These clubs provided a sense of welcoming that nurtured him in a new way.

GRIP explores the intimate forms of physical touch and how they occur. Whether it be a grip around the waist or the face, serpentwithfeet managed to explore all angles thanks to the second lens he looked through.

"Going out while working on the album and seeing how people stood at the bar when ordering a drink, I wondered, are they on their phone trying to disappear from the scene? Are they flirting with the bartender? Are they writhing slowly to the music? What does it look like when a guy runs into his ex and that ex is with someone new? I'm curious about all of this."

GRIP begins with the lively dance record "Damn Gloves" with Ty Dolla \$ign. The record kicks off the album for an unusual jarring yet exciting start to the project, one that goes against his track record of gentle and smooth album intros. "Safe Word" squeezes itself into the tightly interlocked relationship of partners who know each other very well. And "Spades" places monumental value on a loved one's desire and patience to teach them how to play the card game that is so tethered to the Black community.

serpent set his attention on the world that he called home in the important adult years of his life, and with this, we see a study of community on *GRIP*. This community had a huge impact on the Baltimore-born singer, and through ten songs, he gives it its flowers with a body of work that highlights the moments that are most close to the heart.





WU TSANG (*Director*) is an award-winning filmmaker and visual artist. Tsang's work crosses genres and disciplines, from narrative and documentary films to live performance and video installations. Tsang is a MacArthur 'Genius' Fellow, and her projects have been presented at museums, biennials, and film festivals internationally. Awards include 2016 Guggenheim Fellow (Film/Video), Creative Capital, Rockefeller Foundation, and Warhol Foundation. She has collaborated with brands including Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Marni, Saint Heron x Woolmark, and Swarovski. Tsang received a BFA degree (2004) from the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and an MFA degree (2010) from University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Currently Tsang works in residence at Schauspielhaus Zürich, as a director of theater with the collective Moved by the Motion.

RAJA FEATHER KELLY (*Choreographer, Dramaturg*) is a choreographer and director, and the Artistic Director of the feath3r theory (TF3T), a dance-theatre-media company. Kelly has created 18 evening-length premieres with the feath3r theory, most recently *UGLY Part 3: BLUE* at Chelsea Factory. The company's latest work, *The Absolute Future*, premieres in 2024. His choreography can currently be seen in *White Girl in Danger* at the Second Stage Kiser Theater, written by Michael R. Jackson and directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz. He choreographed the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical A Strange Loop (Lyceum Theatre, premiered off-Broadway at Playwrights



Horizons), and is also a choreographer for Off-Broadway theatre with frequent collaborators like Jackson, Blain-Cruz, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, and Sarah Benson. Recent works include *Bunny Bunny* (UC San Diego), *We're Gonna Die* (Second Stage Theater), *SUFFS* (The Public Theater), *Lempicka* (La Jolla Playhouse), and *Scenes for an Ending* for the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company. He has received numerous accolades, including a Princeton Arts Fellowship (2023–2025), three Princess Grace Awards, an Obie Award, an Outer Critics Circle honor for choreography for the Pulitzer Prize-winning and Tony Award-winning musical *A Strange Loop*, a Randjelović/Stryker Resident Commissioned Artist at New York Live Arts, a Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship, a Creative Capital award, a Breakout Award for choreography from the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation (SCDF), the Solange MacArthur Award for New Choreography, Dance Magazine's Harkness Promise Award, and the SDCF Joe A. Callaway Award finalist for outstanding choreography of *Fairview* (Soho Rep, Berkeley Rep, TFANA, and winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Drama)

LUKE ROLLS (*Lighting Designer*) is a British Lighting Designer working mainly in the U.K. and U.S. He recently designed the 2022 Rex Orange County *Who Cares* Tour and is the Lighting Director for Lil Nas X since his first tour *Long Live Montero* last year. At the start of 2022, Luke designed the *We Will Rock You* 2022 U.K. Tour with Rob Sinclair as well as Spanish Entry Chanel's song "SloMo" for the Eurovision Song Contest 2022. *We Will Rock You* made a return to the London Coliseum in the summer of 2023 for a three-month run, which Luke designed with Rob Sinclair again. In 2021, he designed the U.K. and Festival tour Californian Soil for London Grammar, along



with the album release stream at Alexandra Palace. Beyond lighting design, Luke has worked as a design associate for Rob Sinclair on Greta Van Fleet's *Dreams in Gold*, System of a Down's 2022 Tour, *MØ* - *The Motordrome Experience*, Kylie Minogue's *Infinite Disco*, and Jessie Ware's *What's Your Pleasure* Tour. Other theater credits include Lighting Design for *We Will Rock You* German Tour 2021/2022 and Associate Lighting Designer for *Starlight Express* in Bochum.

CARLOS SOTO (Scenic Designer) is a New York-based designer and creative director's credits include Orfeo (Santa Fe Opera, dir. Yuval Sharon); Proximity (Lyric Opera of Chicago with Yuval Sharon); The Valkyries (Detroit Opera, dir. Yuval Sharon); Tristan und Isolde (Santa Fe Opera, dir. Zack Winokur); Only An Octave Apart with Justin Vivian Bond and Anthony Roth Costanzo (St. Ann's Warehouse, Wilton's Music Hall, Spoleto Festival); The No One's Rose by composer Matthew Aucoin and choreographer Bobbi Jene Smith (Stanford Live); The Black Clown with Davóne Tines (ART, Lincoln Center, 2018–19). Other recent highlights include Eldorado

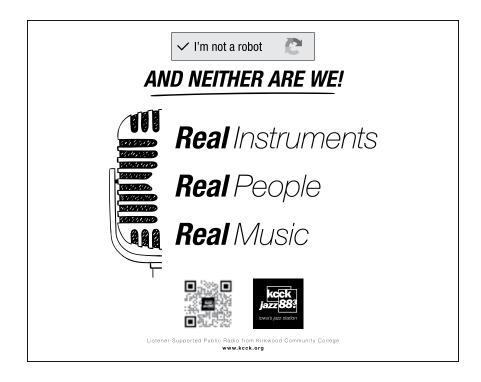


Ballroom (BAM, designed and co-curated with Solange Knowles); Passage with Solange Knowles & Wu Tsang (International Woolmark Prize 2021), In Past Pupils and Smiles with Knowles (Venice Biennale, 2019), Witness! (Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg and Sydney Opera House, 2019/20), and When I Get Home (film and concert tour 2019). Soto has collaborated closely with Robert Wilson since 1997, most recently on Bach 6 Solo, Der Messias, and I was sitting on my patio this guy appeared I thought I was hallucinating.

JULIO CÉSAR DELGADO (Costume Designer) is a stylist and costume designer based in New York City. A fashion enthusiast at heart, Julio has managed to interweave his love of storytelling through clothing and costume design to create imagery using various visual outlets including, music videos, editorials, and live performances. Some recent career highlights of his have been working with Solange Knowles' Bridge-S (2019) for the Getty Museum, and We Might Appear as Forest Fires (2023) for the Berggruen Institute with director George Miller in Los Angeles, California. He has also been working with American opera singer Davóne Tines, most recently in



collaboration with the Louisville Kentucky Orchestra to celebrate and honor the late and beautiful, Breonna Taylor. His editorial work has been featured amongst various media publications, including *Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Interview Magazine,* and *WSJ Magazine.* His work was recently on display in the exhibit *Fool of the Month* (2022) for the Art Basel fair in both Switzerland and Miami in collaboration with Swiss photographer James Bantone—where they built a series of grotesque portraits referencing the infamous Employee of the Month program—Delgado and Bantone examined the smile as a narrative of racialized terror.





PERFORMERS

SHAQUELLE CHARLES (*Dorian, dancer*) is a Afro-Caribbean solo artist-choreographer who obtained a BFA degree in dance at Marymount Manhattan College with a concentration in ballet. With an aptitude in numerous forms of art; photography, film, and choreography, Shaquelle orchestrates intimate moments drawn on human connection and the external factors of the world which connects us all. Hailing from Atlanta, Georgia, Shaquelle focuses his efforts on utilizing the physicality of his ballet technique, incorporated with the body's individual history to extend a sui generis experience for the audience. He gives credence to the body as a source



of history and proceeds to pull from these histories and experiences to connect the audience with his movements. Based in New York, Shaquelle has performed with the Metropolitan Opera, gone onto choreograph and performed at La Biennale di Venezia 15th international dance festival under the direction of Wayne McGregor. Shaquelle continues to freelance and return as a guest artist for NY based companies like Mark Morris Dance Group and Dianne McIntyre's Sounds in Motion, all while continuing his choreographic endeavors.

DYLAN M. CONTRERAS (*Brick, dancer*) is a Brooklynbased dancer and interdisciplinary creator. As a graduate of The Boston Conservatory, he has been featured in works by Doug Varone, Juel D. Lane, and Dam Van Huynh. Professionally, Dylan's worked with Jon Batiste, Tiesto, David Dorfman, Cherice Barton, Hivewild, as well as Kampnagel Hamburg, and Fire Island Dance Festival. Currently, Dylan is a performer and dramaturg for both Haus of PVMNT and Motlee Party. Centralizing the work he creates and performs around the Black queer experience, Dylan dances for every little Black boy, who longs to see someone who looks like them, doing the thing they love most in the world.



Native of Atlanta, Georgia, **JUSTIN DANIELS** (*Amir/ Darius, dancer*) began his artistic career while attending Tri-Cities High School Visual & Performing Arts Program in Eastpoint, Georgia. From there, furthering his studies and training, he earned a BFA degree in contemporary dance performance with a minor in psychology from The Boston Conservatory and abroad at The Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. Now as an New York based dance artist, choreographer, and photographer, he is represented by BLOC NY. Featured in Dance Italia! (spring 2021) and *VoyageATL* magazine (spring 2022), Justin has had the opportunities to explore and expand the collectiveness of concert, commercial, and digital dance spaces.



PERFORMERS

MATTHEW DELOCH (Quan, dancer) is originally from Gonzales, Louisiana, where he started dancing at the age of two. Although he didn't enjoy it just yet, he would soon fall in love with dancing around the age of seven. When he was 15, he attended his first dance convention ever, which was Tremaine, and couldn't stop talking about how much he loved it for months. After seeing the closing show and all of the assistants and fun, vibrant dances, he knew his next goal was to be one of those assistants! The following summer he auditioned and became a part of the Tremaine Performance Company and then the following year was given the title of Tremaine Senior Male Dancer



of the Year. During these years with Tremaine, Matthew decided he wanted to make a career out of dancing and do it professionally. In the fall of 2017, Matthew moved to New York City to attend Pace University where he worked toward a Bachelor of Fine Arts in commercial dance. After the pandemic, Matthew received a BFA in commercial dance from Pace University in 2021. Since then Matthew has been living full-time in New York City chasing his dreams of performing and fulfilling his love for dance. Following Matthew's graduation, he was lucky enough to land his first movie (*Blue's Big City Adventure*) and his first professional theater job being a part of the ensemble in the *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*. Matthew has gotten to check off some of his other dream jobs such as performing in the Super Bowl Halftime Show, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and the Mariah Carey Christmas Show. Matthew has worked with choreographers such as JaQuel Knight, Sonya Tayeh, Bryan Tanaka, and so many more.

CHRYSTION DUDLEY (*Redwood, dancer*) is from Indianapolis, Indiana. He has been performing for 16 years. Training in genres such as ballet, modern, musical theatre, hip hop, aerial, tap, and contemporary. Chrystion received a BFA degree in dance performance from The University of the Arts where he collaborated with artists such as Sidra Bell, Tommie-Waheed Evans, and Gary Dennis Jeter. Now he tours with Royal Caribbean Cruise Line as a dancer/aerialist and hopes to continue his journey connecting and collaborating with performing artists all around the world.



PERFORMERS

BRANDON GRAY (*Jamar, dancer*) was born in Maryland and began dancing at age 13. He graduated from Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington DC and attended Towson University. He then studied at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater on scholarship. Brandon is a brand ambassador and has modeled for GAP, MCM Worldwide, Patrick Church, Nihl and has been in *Vogue* as well. Gray is also signed to the talent agency MSA. With his love for acting as well, he has been on Netflix, CBS, and is currently in a documentary called *Black As U R*. He loves hosting and being a part of podcasts on topics of racial and gender equality, acting as a voice and example



for others to continue his goal of representation for all young men to be exactly who they want to be, no matter what. Gray was recently a part of Taraji P. Henson's 1,000 men shoot celebrating men of color finding therapy through activities where he represented dance. Brandon performed and toured the world with Complexions Contemporary Ballet from 2017–2022. Gray has also dove into immersive shows as he's performed at The McKittrick Hotel (home of *Sleep No More*).

Originally from Virginia, **NELSON "NELLIE" ENRIQUE MEJIA JR.** (*Saige, dancer*) is a freelance artist based in Brooklyn, New York. A 2022 graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University's Dance and Choreography department, he received awards for Outstanding Creative Work and The Carpenter Scholarship. Additional training includes Arts Umbrella, Gagalab, and Springboard Danse Montréal. Upon graduation, Nelson performed repertory by Gaspard Louis regionally and internationally with Gaspard&Dancers. He is currently with Pony Box Dance Theatre and Brian Brooks Moving Company. Nelson has also danced works by Kyle Abraham, Rena Butler, Alanna



Morris, Yoshito Sakuraba, and Urban Bush Women, among others.

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Only beverages purchased from the Stanley Café can be taken into the auditorium. The 2021–2022, 2022–2023, and 2023–2024 Season Cups can be used. Patrons should not bring beverages from home. Also, alcoholic beverages cannot be taken out of Hancher Auditorium in a Hancher Season Cup as this would violate "open container" restrictions.

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PRODUCTION TEAM

JOYCE THEATER PRODUCTIONS (JTP) is the in-house producing entity for The Joyce Theater Foundation, Inc., formed to create original work for The Joyce's stage and for worldwide touring. This initiative provides dance artists who have little or no formal management or infrastructure the means to create productions of the highest standards of excellence. The program also includes the Associate Company model, offering sustained producing, fiscal, and/or administrative management to companies that may require short or longer term support.

OLIVIA BROWN (*Production/Stage Manager*) is a Production Stage Manager and Theater Technician who specializes in dance production, originally from New Hampshire and now living in New York City. She has worked at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in multiple capacities, most recently serving as the Production Manager for the Henry J. Leir Stage during the 2022 festival season. In between production jobs, Olivia spends her time as a freelance personal trainer, lighting technician, and an avid cyclist.

DEVIN KOENIG (*Lighting Supervisor*) is a lighting supervisor, production manager, and programmer based in Astoria, New York. Currently, she is the lighting supervisor for Dorrance Dance, and has previously worked with Music from the Sole, GALLIM, and the Radio City Rockettes.

BRIDGET CASTON (*Company Manager/Associate Producer*) is the Associate Producer for Joyce Theater Productions and acting Company Manager for SW!NG OUT. An alum of The University of Texas at Austin (2021) with a BFA degree in dance performance and choreography and a BBA degree in consulting and change management, Caston was born in New Orleans, raised in Fort Worth, and grew up dancing at local studios and summer dance programs across the country. Since graduation, Caston has worked with Gesel Mason Performance Projects, K.DMC (a corporate events agency), and at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in company

management. At Jacob's Pillow she worked with acclaimed dance companies such as Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, A.I.M. by Kyle Abraham, and Miami City Ballet among others. Caston is also the Company Manager for Malpaso Dance Company, an associate company of Joyce Theater Productions.





PERFORMING ARTS AT IOWA MUSIC THEATRE ARTS DANCE HANCHER

FEATURED FALL 2023 EVENTS:

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

- Key Change Piano Revolutionaries Series Fall Concerts Voxman Music Building / Concert Hall • Sunday, October 22, 7:30 p.m.

 - Thursday, November 30, 7:30 p.m.
- Scott Dunn guest piano recital with Nathan Platte Thursday, November 2, 7:30 p.m. Voxman Music Building / Recital Hall
- The University of Iowa Symphony Orchestra and Choirs Wednesday, November 29, 7:30 p.m. Hancher Auditorium / Hadley Stage / Auditorium Seating

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS

- Macbeth by William Shakespeare Directed by Mary Mayo October 6–8 and 11–14 Theatre Building / E. C. Mabie Theatre
- Men On Boats **by Jaclyn Backhaus** Directed by Mary Beth Easley November 3–5 and 8–11 Theatre Building / David Thayer Theatre

DEPARTMENT OF DANCE

- Uncharted Myths: Reckonings, Reflections, and Riffs on American Stories A collaboration with the International Writing Program Part of Hancher's Infinite Dream festival Saturday, October 14, 2:00 p.m. North Hall / Space Place Theater
- MFA Thesis concert 1: L.D. Kidd and Todd Rhoades October 26-28 North Hall / Space Place Theater
- Dance Gala with quest artist Aaron Samuel Davis November 10-11, 7:30 p.m. Hancher Auditorium / Hadley Stage / Auditorium Seating

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