

The Bitter Game

Black Lives Matter



NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS – Basketball, block parties, traffic stops — on **Saturday, October 14, at 8pm**, Keith A. Wallace takes us on a ride through North Philly on a night he won't forget. A searing solo theater piece charged with pain, poetry, and laughter, *The Bitter Game* blends verse, prose and sh*t-talkin' into a stirring commentary that begs the question: what does it mean to survive while Black in America? Wallace draws on his own youth in Philadelphia to examine the effects of racism, the question of excessive force used by police, and the value of Black lives in this country.

Two years after Trayvon Martin was gunned down in Florida, Michael Brown's death in 2014 spurred actor, writer, and director Keith A. Wallace to use his art to

change lives. "The thing that struck me to my core was that they left his body lying on the ground where he had been murdered, uncovered for four hours. It was a public display, in the way that public lynchings used to take place as a warning sign and display of power and supremacy over people" (*The Los Angeles Times*). One week later, Wallace was similarly public, and similarly face-down, motionless, and bloodied in front of Robert Indiana's iconic Philadelphia LOVE sculpture, in a spontaneous, silent, viral protest. This was the first of Wallace's work as a now self-described "actorvist" and a precursor to his award-winning, critically acclaimed one-man play, *The Bitter Game*.

"A sharp reminder of the persuasive powers of live theater," *The Bitter Game* was commissioned by the La Jolla Playhouse for the International WOW Festival while Wallace was still a graduate student at UC San Diego (*The New York Times*). Originally performed on an outdoor basketball court, with its five acts structured as the four quarters and overtime of a basketball game, this multi-character performance explores the experience of being Black in America through the relationship between a young man named Jamel and his mother. Wallace, along with his director (and co-creator) Deborah Stein, personalize the words, individualize the experience, and close the gap between artist and audience, giving the familiar subject an "unignorable visceral immediacy" (*The New York Times*). We follow the charismatic Jamel from childhood to young adulthood to the heart-wrenching moment he has to act on the mantra his mother gave him years ago: "Keep your head up. Keep your eyes forward. Keep your ego down."

Since its debut, *The Bitter Game* has received critical acclaim from *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and the *San Diego Tribune*, among others, and has toured internationally, making notable stops at the Skirball Cultural Center, The Public Theater, The Kennedy Center, and the Dublin Theater

Festival. The play also won the 2016 Princess Grace Theater Award and was a semi-finalist in the 2016 Sundance Theater Lab and the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference. Wallace hopes the play will eventually reach beyond the theater, to be used as a tool of sensitivity training for law enforcement and performed with schools and communities reflected in the story.

On **Saturday, October 14**, at **8pm**, Club B10 transforms into a North Philly basketball court, the hub of the neighborhood and the center of Jamel's story. Wallace brings us along for the revelry, the devastation, the celebration, and the despair, in a spellbinding performance of *The Bitter Game* that will rock you to the core. Lickety Split, MASS MoCA's in-house café, serves up fresh salads, homemade soup, and lip-smacking pub fare. The MASS MoCA bar is always well-stocked with local beer from Bright Ideas Brewing and Berkshire Mountain Distillery spirits. Tickets are \$10 for students, \$14 in advance, \$20 day of, and \$30 preferred. Tickets for all events are available through the MASS MoCA box office located on Marshall Street in North Adams, open 11am to 5pm every day except Tuesdays. Tickets can also be charged by phone by calling 413.662.2111 x1 during box office hours or purchased online at massmoca.org.

Images

High-resolution images of MASS MoCA's fall 2017 events are available through this link:

<http://bit.ly/mm2017fall>

About MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest (and largest) centers for making, displaying, and enjoying today's most important art, music, dance, theater, film, and video. MASS MoCA nearly doubled its gallery space in spring 2017, with artist partnerships that include Laurie Anderson, the Louise Bourgeois Trust, Jenny Holzer, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, and James Turrell.

Gallery admission is \$20 for adults, \$18 for veterans and seniors, \$12 for students, \$8 for children 6 to 16, and free for children 5 and under. Members are admitted free year-round. The Hall Art Foundation's Anselm Kiefer exhibition is seasonal and currently on view. For additional information, call 413.662.2111 x1 or visit massmoca.org.

Hours

11am to 5pm, closed Tuesdays