LOS ANGELES POVERTY DEPARTMENT:
I FLY! OR HOW TO KEEP THE DEVIL DOWN IN THE HOLE

APRIL 4–6  8:30pm

presented by
REDCAT
Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater
California Institute of the Arts
CALARTS
LOS ANGELES POVERTY DEPARTMENT: I FLY!
OR HOW TO KEEP THE DEVIL DOWN IN THE HOLE

Directors: John Malpede, Henriëtte Brouwers
Light design: Henriëtte Brouwers, Matthew Johns
Performers: Stephanie Bell, Henriëtte Brouwers, Christina Collier, Walter Fears, Tom Grode, Chas Jackson, Keith Johnson, Jamaya Kapri, Ray Lewis, John Malpede, Lee Maupin, Reggie McCray, Natosha Smith, Adrian Turnage
Rapper: Crushow Herring
Skid Row Drummers: Walter Fears, Ray Lewis, Mack Floyd, Michael Clark
Keyboards, Music Director: Joseph Warren
Lead, Rhythm Guitar, Vocals: Edwin Fountaine
Bass Guitar: Gregory Vaughan
Drums, Percussions: Joseph Hicks
Lead Vocals: Demetra “DeDe” Wilson
Trumpet, Vocals: Kenneth “Kenny” Christopher
Video and Scenic Design: Alan Tollefson
Video Contributor: T Antonakis Kane
Stage Manager: Thaddeus Nagy

I Fly! or How to Keep the Devil Down in the Hole is part of LAPD’s Public Safety for REAL project (2016–18), produced with support from the MAP Fund (supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.), The National Endowment for the Arts, and The City of LA Department of Cultural Affairs. Additional funding provided by the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, and California Humanities (a non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities).

ABOUT THE WORK
I Fly! is dedicated to longtime Skid Row activist and Los Angeles Poverty Department principal Kevin Michael Key (1950–2017). His ideas and passion provided the impetus for the project. On the one-year anniversary of his passing, a group of Skid Row visionaries convened for a community conversation on public safety. They invoked his memory and spirit of fearlessness enabled by love. These are a few excerpts from what they shared.

Charles Porter: When we started doing Movies in the Park, the idea was, ‘Oh, if you do movies in the park, you’ve got to fill the park with police officers. And you can’t do events at night in Skid Row.’ And the first night, the park was full of police officers and nobody came. And then the captain was like, ‘We got too many cops here. We gotta send them away.’ But by the end of the first year, there were no cops, no security guards. We told them in the beginning, we don’t need cops and security guards. This is a community event that people want, that the community help set up and clean up, and that maintains civility, ‘cause it’s their neighborhood.

Chris Mack: My personal idea with safety is that it starts with a person’s economic growth. I’ve had the privilege of working on the BEST project, which means I had to go and find people who were disabled and who needed more income. Going from $200 to $850 brought about a lot of safety because a lot of people began to participate in their own life.
Steve Diaz: I feel like community safety starts with the ability to have voice, it starts with the ability to have decision, and it starts with others recognizing the power that you have in the destiny of that space, because if you can’t control that space, you can’t be safe in it. It’s about how we build together, and create infrastructure that brings us all safer together. It’s okay to be different. It’s okay to accept someone’s differences as well. But that’s not what people believe when they think about public safety.

Charles Porter: And a lot of times, even some of the services are forcing somebody to be what they’re not. And then when people don’t use services, we blame them. Oh ‘they’re service resistant.’

Sara Shortt: There’s a knee-jerk reliance on law enforcement and an entrenched belief that law enforcement makes people safer. It’s still very much a given amongst many social service providers. And part of that is because they’re stuck in the paternalistic old school model of ‘we know what’s best for you.’ But that needs to come from, be defined by, the community and by the people who are most impacted. The more we can create other systems, restorative justice practices, resources, or just a different kind of emergency responder-type that’s more community based, then it would be much easier to change the mindset.

Alisa Orduna: So you’ve gotta think about things on the day-to-day, like what I see in my old neighborhood even now. Say the kids are smoking weed and a senior’s walking by. You just walk up and be like, ‘Hey. Put that away. You seen that such-and-such was about to come past you.’ Or even in the situation where there was a person that lived with severe mental illness under me, and one day I knocked on the door and he was cursing up a storm and I just took a bottle of honey. I was like, ‘You need to add some sweetness to your tongue.’ And he looked at me like I was the crazy one.

The July 19, 2018 convening was one of six public conversations conducted while we built this project. We want to thank all of the wise people who contributed their thoughts on community generated public safety in these and other conversations with us: Ivette Alé, Pastor Cue, Sarah Deleiden, Becky Dennison, Steve Diaz, General Dogon, Walter Fears, Luis Garcia, Cathy Gudis, General Jeff, Lanetta Kimmons, Christopher Mack, Hayk Makhmuryan, Kim McGill, Fred Moten, Donna Murch, Amara Ononiwu, Alisa Orduna, Charles Porter, Adrian Riskin, Laura Ramos, Gregory Sale, Mohamed Shehk, Sara Shortt, Alex Vitale, Kimberly Welch.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

John Malpede It’s been a long time coming. Extra thanks to all who were there for the whole ride.

Henriëtte Brouwers The public will be safe when your neighbor is safe. It’s been a wonderful and wild journey getting to know them.

Stephanie Bell loves to hi-jack meetings and all sorts of things. Love and peace and happiness.

Christina Collier What?! I’m not just running for coffee.
Walter Fears Lemme tell ya `bout a place I kno.

Tom Grode I can’t decide if my favorite is Robot Baby Me or Martial Arts Baby Me.

Charles Jackson From Bridgeport, Connecticut and proud of it—forever.

Keith Johnson The Prime Minister, God’s servant to Skid Row.

Jamaya Kapri I’m the master of my own spoken words and a slave to those words that should have remained unsaid.

Ray Lewis You are who you’ve been waiting for.

Lee Maupin I’m just your friendly neighborhood monkeyman letting his feet do the talking.

Reggie McCray Let’s do this thing.

Natosha Smith Love the life you live, live the life you love—until.

Adrian Turnage I am learning to live life for now.

Crushow Herring, aka Showzart, is actively working from the streets of Skid Row, fighting for equal rights for everyone.

Mack Floyd I don’t care if it’s me or them. Somebody’s got to take the lead.

The LA Playmakers is a local band founded by Joseph Warren and Stan Watson, and that includes Gregory Vaughan, Joseph Hicks, Demetra “DeDe” Wilson and Kenneth “Kenny” Christopher. Playing a variety of genres, all band members were once a part of the Praise and Worship Team at Central City Church of the Nazarene in Downtown Los Angeles.

Alan Tollefson is a multimedia artist. He teaches performance art and experimental theatre at the University of La Verne.

T Antonakis Kane is a senior at Sequoyah High School. His interests include photography and filmmaking. He will be attending School of The Art Institute of Chicago as a studio arts major.

Thaddeus Nagey is currently a television and film actor, musician, playwright, and theatre arts graduate student at California State University, Northridge. Find him on social media!

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