



PAUL OUTLAW:
BIGBLACKOCTOBERSURPRISE

OCTOBER 22-24; 28-31, 2020 8:30pm

OCTOBER 24 & 31, 2020 11:00am

presented by
REDCAT
Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater
California Institute of the Arts
CALARTS

We gratefully acknowledge that we operate on the traditional lands of the Tongva, Tataviam, and Chumash peoples—including the Gabrieleño, Fernandeño, and Ventureño; members of the Takic and Chumashan language families; and other Indigenous peoples who made their homes in and around the area we now call Los Angeles.

PAUL OUTLAW: BIGBLACKOCTOBERSURPRISE

Written and performed by Paul Outlaw

Directed by Sara Lyons

Sound Design by Jonathan Snipes

Video Design by Adam J. Thompson

Produced by OutlawPlay

Consulting Producer: Abby Marcus

Special thanks to Ray Busmann, Cristina Bercovitz, Joey & Lauren Borgogna, John Henningsen, Rachel Scandling, Christopher Fleeger, Lars Jan, Marike Splint, Nishani Frazier, Ben Johnson, Edgar Miramontes, Chu-hsuan Chang, Rosanna Gamson and Alexander Gedeon for their invaluable support in this adventure.

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OutlawPlay is a fiscally sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts service organization.

“When Gregor Samsa awoke in his bed one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself transformed into a monstrous vermin.”

—First sentence of Franz Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung*
(The Metamorphosis), 1915

“Strolling in a verdant grove, Tiresias saw two serpents coupling. When he smacked them with a stick, they separated and slithered away. At that moment he was transformed from a man into a woman for the next seven years.”

—From Book 3 of Ovid’s *Metamorphōseōn libri*
(Books of Transformation), 8 AD

ABOUT *BIGBLACKOCTOBERSURPRISE*

A conservative American white woman finds herself transformed into what she considers a “monstrous vermin”: a Black man... In 2020, Black Americans continue to face inequality, disenfranchisement and the constant threat of violent death. In the final week before The Most Important Election in Our History™, as the nation goes to the polls to elect The Most Powerful Man in the World™, *BigBlackOctoberSurprise* offers a meditation on isolation, imprisonment and imperiled Blackness in America—not only in this year of COVID-19 and insurrection, but throughout a history that began in the holds of the slave ships.

PLAYWRIGHT/PERFORMER’S NOTE

Each time I watch work presented during this Zoom-dominated year, I ask myself: Is this theater? What distinguishes these performance objects made for cyber-audiences from cinema or television? For me, a performance doesn’t come close to a true theater experience if I can access it any time I want and then pause it at will to attend to something else or because it’s “too much.” No, it needs to be a scheduled event that I experience simultaneously with other people, even if we’re miles apart. And there needs to be a live element to these presentations that we applaud in our communal isolation—the potential for something to go very wrong, or incredibly right.

In a COVID-free October 2020, a live audience would be sitting in the REDCAT auditorium in Los Angeles attending the world premiere of a full-length version of *BBC* (*Big Black Cockroach*), the Kafka-inspired solo play we workshopped here at last summer’s NOW Festival. Instead, you—possibly in New York, Berlin, Sydney or San Juan—are live-streaming *BigBlackOctoberSurprise*, a detour in this year of metamorphosis.

Which part of this performance is a recording and what is happening “now”? Are these transmissions from the past or the present—or maybe even the future?

In performing this project, I’ve had to shift between a kind of silent film acting, audio drama performance and storytelling, between tropes of Black manhood and white womanhood. These dissociations echo the loss of speech, anatomy and identity experienced by Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* as he succumbs to a cockroach existence.

“In order to rise from its own ashes,” wrote Octavia Butler, “a phoenix first must burn.”

Kafka’s novella ends with the inevitable death of its protagonist. In writing a new script for *BBC*—fragments of which are included in *BigBlackOctoberSurprise*—I was inspired by the endings of the tales in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where the protagonists often find an escape through transformation rather than death. In a further nod to the classics, our ending also includes a *deus ex machina*...

Burn, baby! Burn!

—Paul Outlaw, October 2020

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

October 2020. The eve of the most important election in American history.

BigBlackOctoberSurprise shouts directly into the anxious void of this moment, blinding us with the precarious reality of living in a Black body in the United States, whose economy was built off the backs of the enslaved and whose society was formalized in laws written to protect that status quo. Outlaw's text, and the metamorphosing Kafkaesque world it constructs, does not want us to consider history through stories and timelines. He wants us to feel history the way he does: through a lifetime of fear for one's life.

This piece is also a meditation on isolation—in its content, and how it was created, through computer screens and wobbly WiFi connections. Nearly eight months of quarantine is a strange new ingredient to add to our surreal cocktail of Kafkaesque body horror. How do our relationships to our bodies and the world shift in extended isolation? It turned us inward, toward American ancestors buried just beneath our Black and white skin, between our ribs, behind our eyes. What ideas, what figures live there? What future will they lead us toward? When Outlaw drops the consciousness of a white woman into his Black body, it is less playful provocation and more realism. History formulates us, festers inside us—whether or not we acknowledge it. It will survive doomsday alongside the humble cockroach. Our work is to listen to those voices that were ignored, buried alive, and let them lead us into the unknown.

Vote.

—Sara Lyons, October 2020

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Paul Outlaw, born in Manhattan's Bellevue Hospital and raised on the Lower East Side, is a Los Angeles-based experimental theater artist and vocalist whose award-winning solo projects have been presented across the United States and in Europe. The central themes of his artistic practice are the constructs of race and sexual identity, and the ways in which violence has haunted them throughout Euro-American history. Paul is the recipient of a 2012 COLA (City of Los Angeles) Individual Artist Fellowship, which honors artists "who dedicate themselves to an ongoing body of excellent work, represent a relevant progression through their pieces or series, exemplify a generation of core ideas in their field, garner respect from their peers, and serve as role models for other artists." He starred in Pepe Danquart's *Schwarzfahrer*, winner of the 1994 Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film. Under the banner of OutlawPlay, Paul is the creator/performer of *Here Be Dragons* (1995), *Berserker* (2003), *What Did I Do to Be So Black and...* (2011), *The Late, Late Show* (2013), "Becoming Angeleno" (2017), *BIRTHDAY SUITE* (2017), *Shine* (2018), and the upcoming BBC (*Big Black Cockroach*). Paul was the lyricist and lead vocalist for the Berliner bands Snow Blind Twilight Ferries, Fortified Static, General Motor and the legendary post-punk constellation Die Haut. He is a featured vocalist on *Splendor and Misery* (2016), clipping.'s second full-length album release on Sub Pop Records/Deathbomb Arc. outlawplay.com

Sara Lyons is a Los Angeles-based director who seeks to explode form and politic in critically embodied, often interdisciplinary new theatre and performance works. Working frequently in adaptation, social practice, and new media as well as theatre, their work has been presented nationally and internationally by REDCAT, OUTsider, SFX Festival, Ensemble Studio Theatre, HERE Arts Center, La MaMa ETC, Edinburgh Fringe, and more. They have been awarded residencies at Ucross and PAM Residencies. Sara's ongoing project *I'm Very Into You*, adapted from the published 1995 email correspondence between feminist legend Kathy Acker and media theorist McKenzie Wark, is a queer archival performance project engaging gender expansive artists in communities around the country in conversation with the '90s document of mediatized queer desire. Called "worth keeping an eye out for" by *American Theatre Magazine*, it has been presented by Sarah Lawrence College, The Wattis Institute (San Francisco), Los Angeles Performance Practice, OUTsider (Austin) and SFX/The Wild Project (NYC). Sara holds an MFA in Directing from Carnegie Mellon University and is an alum of the Hemispheric Institute's EMERGENYC program for artists working at the intersection of performance and politics at NYU. Sara teaches in the theater department at UCLA.
sara-lyons.com

Jonathan Snipes is a composer and sound designer for Film and Theater living in Los Angeles. He occasionally teaches sound design in the theater department at UCLA, and is a member of the rap group clipping. jonat8han.com

Adam J. Thompson is an artist, creative technologist, video designer, and editor working in expanded reality, cinema, and live performance. His work has been produced and presented Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway, regionally, on tour, and online. Recent projects include *Debate: Baldwin vs. Buckley* (the american vicarious), *The Fre* (The Flea), *Making Gay History* (NYU/Provincetown Playhouse), *(A)loft Modulation* (the american vicarious), and the American Theatre Wing's 63rd-65th Obie Awards ceremonies. Adam's live cinema creations have been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, and The Jerome Robbins Foundation among other institutions, and he was an invited exhibitor at and ambassador to the 2018 Beijing International Design Biennial. He holds an MFA in Video & Media Design from Carnegie Mellon University. adamjacobthompson.com

Abby Marcus is a producer, teacher, and consultant. Current projects: Managing Director for the Orchard Project; *The One You Feed*, an immersive dance theater production with Witness Relocation. Abby was the Managing Director/Lead Producer for the OBIE Award winning "geek theatre" company, Vampire Cowboys, where she produced *The Inexplicable Redemption of Agent G*; *Alice in Slasherland*; *Soul Samurai* (GLAAD Media Award nominee); *Fight Girl Battle World* (NY Innovative Theater Award nominee); and more. She has served as the General Manager/Interim Managing Director for the Playwrights' Center, the Managing Director for the Dramatists' Guild of America, General Manager for HERE Arts Center, Company Manager for LAByrnth Theater Company, and

the Director of Finance for Baryshnikov Arts Center and St. Ann's Warehouse. She served as Chair for the Honorary Awards Committee for the NY Innovative Theater Awards and was a founding Board Member for the League of Independent Theatre, New York.

REDCAT PRODUCTION STAFF

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Resident Lighting Design: Matthew Johns**

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Audio Engineer: Zach Crumrine
Camera Operator: Anthony Storniolo**

**Facilities Management, COVID-19 Compliance Officer: Jacques Boudreau
Production Coordinator: Hyesung li
Administrative Coordinator: Rolando Rodriguez**

The preceding performance was created in compliance with Los Angeles County Public Health Guidelines. Any performer without a mask appears using appropriate physical distancing, in alignment with those guidelines.

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