

THE MOUNTAINTOP

by KATORI HALL

PETER FINLAYSON

April 3rd 1968. It's a cold rainy night in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. Martin Luther King having just concluded one of his most powerful speeches, "I Have Been To The Mountaintop", is in want of a cup of coffee.

Thus *The Mountaintop* begins. An often-funny journey into what may have been running through Dr. King's mind on the last night of his life. His foil for this journey is a maid/housekeeper/concierge who while seemingly simple has much to offer to a man pondering a bigger future than he had planned for himself.

Joseph Stern, (Joe to his friends) is the founder and Artistic Director of the Matrix Theatre, is very personally committed to improving race relations. For the past seven years, he has sought out and produced works that force the conversation about race. While the Matrix has been a leader in the intimate theatre scene going back to 1969, Mr. Stern states, "Every show I've done in the last six years has been chosen to bring focus to the subject."

Starting with *Stick Fly* by Lydia Diamond in 2009, a window into the world of a prosperous African American family dealing with life in Martha's Vineyard. *Neighbors* by Branden Jacob-Jenkins, produced in 2010, stares at the dichotomy of the African American Experience. In 2011-12, a multiethnic cast for Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* shed new light on race. In 2013, *We Are Proud To Present A Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, between the Years 1884-1915*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury was about an historical event, and its impact



Danielle Truitt & Laary Bates

Phot by Daren Scott

the presentation has on "friends" really underscores hidden truths.

Now we have a different perspective. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a transforming figure in American culture, and he himself went through some pretty radical changes. While the initial concern, equality for the "Negro" was the founding principal of his movement, by the end Dr. King, saw that his original hope was just a part of a vista that needed to be changed.

Joe Stern has been a soldier in this fight for a long time. While a Producer of more than 200 episodes of *Dick Wolf's Law & Order*, Joe very pointedly sought to have people of color playing out of stereo type. Casting a diversity of actors as Judges and lawyers etc, The ide was to integrated the imagery into the fabric of the American Life. His show, *Judging Amy* always kept a mind to diversity. Upon returning full time to theatre, Joe has redoubled the effort to bring the conversation of race to the forefront.

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"There is no greater issue in our time than the relationship between the races." Mr Stern believes that a dialogue is essential.

The playwright, Katori Hall, "As a post-civil-rights baby, I'm very cognizant of the great responsibility that has been passed down to me, but I can also look through the lens of history in a different way," she told the Los Angeles Times. "It allows me to be a little more clinical, more honest, sometimes a little irreverent while treating the subject matter with utmost respect."

The Mountaintop Starring Larry Bates as Martin Luther King, Danielle Truitt as Camae, and directed by Roger Guenveur Smith opens at the Matrix Theatre, 7657 Melrose Ave, Los Angeles, Ca 90046.