Monster

steppenwolf
for YOUNG ADULTS

2016/17 season
steppenwolf
YOUNG ADULT COUNCIL

The Young Adult Council

is a unique program for passionate and motivated high school students who wish to learn the inner-workings of professional theater from the most celebrated artists in the city. In addition to face time with these leading professionals, Council members attend the best plays in Chicago, learn how to analyze and speak about these plays and lead events for their peers around Steppenwolf productions in hopes of inspiring a new generation of theatre enthusiasts and practitioners.

Applications are available on **March 1, 2017.**

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Or visit **steppenwolf.org/youngadultcouncil** for more information.

The Young Adult Council's 10th anniversary season is generously sponsored by Ann and Richard Carr

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Steppenwolf for Young Adults is a citywide partner of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) School Partner Program.

ANNA D. SHAPIRO†
Artistic Director

DAVID SCHMITZ
Executive Director

HALLIE GORDON
Artistic Director of SYA

STEPPENWOLF FOR YOUNG ADULTS PRESENTS

Monster

By **Walter Dean Myers**
Adapted by **Aaron Carter**
Directed by **Hallie Gordon**

FEATURING

ALANA ARENAS†*, CHERYL GRAEFF*, KENN E. HEAD*, TEVION DEVIN LANIER, DANIEL KYRI, CHRIS RICKETT, NAMIR SMALLWOOD* AND GINNEH THOMAS

PRODUCTION

JOANNA IWANICKA Scenic Design
SAMANTHA JONES Costume Design
J.R. LEDERLE Lighting Design
CHRISTOPHER KRIZ+ Sound Design and Original Music
RYAN BOURQUE Fight Choreographer
JONATHAN BERRY Artistic Producer
BRIANNA PARRY Production Manager
JC CLEMENTZ Casting Director
BRIAN MASCHKA* Stage Manager

Monster was commissioned by Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago;
Anna D. Shapiro, Artistic Director; David Schmitz, Executive Director.

Steppenwolf Theatre Company is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for nonprofit professional theater.

† member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble.
* member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.
+ member of United Scenic Artists, Local 829 of the IATSE.
° Member of the Casting Society of America.

WELCOME TO *MONSTER*

Walter Dean Myers, the author of the *New York Times* Bestseller *Monster,* as part of his research, interviewed many young men who were in situations similar to the main character of his book, Steve Harmon, who is on trial for felony murder. Mr. Myers created a composite character out of these interviews, one that drew upon many of the shared experiences, the circumstances and conditions that were common among his interview subjects. The story Mr. Myers was interested in telling was, "... of a young man who came very close to spending a long, long time in prison. I wanted the reader to consider the consequences of Steve's actions and understand the enormity of the risks involved." At one point in the play Steve's defense attorney states: "you're young, you're black and you're on trial. What else do they need to know?" – a line which on first read might seem glib or overly fatalistic, but given the prospects of young men of color who become ensnared in the criminal justice system, whose fate is effectively a foregone conclusion, it is an aptly bitter pill to swallow.

Steve Harmon represents many such young men, men who daily enter a system that already views them as guilty and treats them as such even before facts are presented. It is a system that was put into place long before this book was published, and long before the thousands of tomorrow's Steve Harmons were born; it is a system that shows no signs of stopping or even slowing down - it is a system that is flawed.

I feel very lucky that Steppenwolf Theatre was given the opportunity to adapt this book for the stage. And in Aaron Carter's adaptation, you will find that the play asks you to struggle with your preconceived notion of what a criminal is, of who Steve Harmon is: a filmmaker, a brother, a son, a student, a criminal? Is he, as the title pointedly reveals our societal assumption to be, a Monster? What do we see when we look at him, and how/why does that change over the course of the play? It is precisely such preconceptions that form the basis for the system that incarcerates the Steve Harmons of the world, so we'll all do well to examine our own preconceptions, whatever discomfort such scrutiny might cost us.

I am thrilled to say that we will be touring this production to three Juvenile Justice Facilities in Illinois as part of a collaboration with Storycatchers Theatre, a youth development arts organization that prepares court-involved and otherwise marginalized young people to make thoughtful life choices through the process of writing, producing and performing original theatre inspired by personal stories.

Thank you for being here.

Hallie Gordon
Artistic Director for Steppenwolf for Young Adults

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GET PLAY'D

STEPPENWOLF'S TEEN SERIES

THE SCENE

THE SCENE is a special opportunity for high school students to score an affordable ticket to a Steppenwolf production, meet Chicago's most celebrated artists and connect with other teens who are passionate about theater. Each ticket includes dinner and post-show discusion with the actors.

TICKETS ARE $10

Purchase tickets at the door 30 minutes before the show, or in advance by calling **Steppenwolf Audience Services** at **312-335-1650**. Use code 24361.

UPCOMING EVENTS

THE SCENE: *MONSTER*
FRIDAY, MARCH 3
AT 7:30PM (post-show)

STEP IN

STEP IN is a new series that offers teens from all over the city the chance to participate in hands-on theatre workshops alongside some of the most exciting theatre artists working in the city right now while learning more about the Steppenwolf Young Adult Council, an afterschool program for teens interested in careers in the arts.

ADMISSION IS FREE!

To reserve your spot, please RSVP to Education Coordinator Jared Bellot at jbellot@steppenwolf.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5
WEDNESDAY, MAY 3

All events last from 4:30 – 6:00pm

Questions? Please contact Education Coordinator **Jared Bellot** at **312-654-5643** or **jbellot@steppenwolf.org**.

CAST AND CONTRIBUTORS

CAST

DANIEL KYRI
Steve Harmon

TEVION DEVIN LANIER
Actor 1

NAMIR SMALLWOOD*
Actor 2

ALANA ARENAS†*
Actor 3

KENN E. HEAD*
Actor 4

CHERYL GRAEFF*
Actor 5

GINNEH THOMAS
Actor 6

CHRIS RICKETT
Actor 7

UNDERSTUDIES

ERIC GERARD
Steve Harmon/Actor 1

TERENCE SIMS
Actor 2/Actor 4

JOHN BYRNES
Actor 7

EBONY JOY
Actor 3/Actor 6

ELIZABETH BIRNKRANT
Actor 5

SETTING

In and around New York. 1999

There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance.

ADDITIONAL STAFF

LAUREN KATZ
Associate Producer

SARAH ILLIATOVITCH-GOLDMAN
Dramaturg

BENJAMIN RAMOS AND **MARK VINSON**
Additional Carpentry

MICHAEL DOLD
Additional Properties

MIKE BESANCON
Additional Paint

FINN BELKNAP
Storyboard Artist

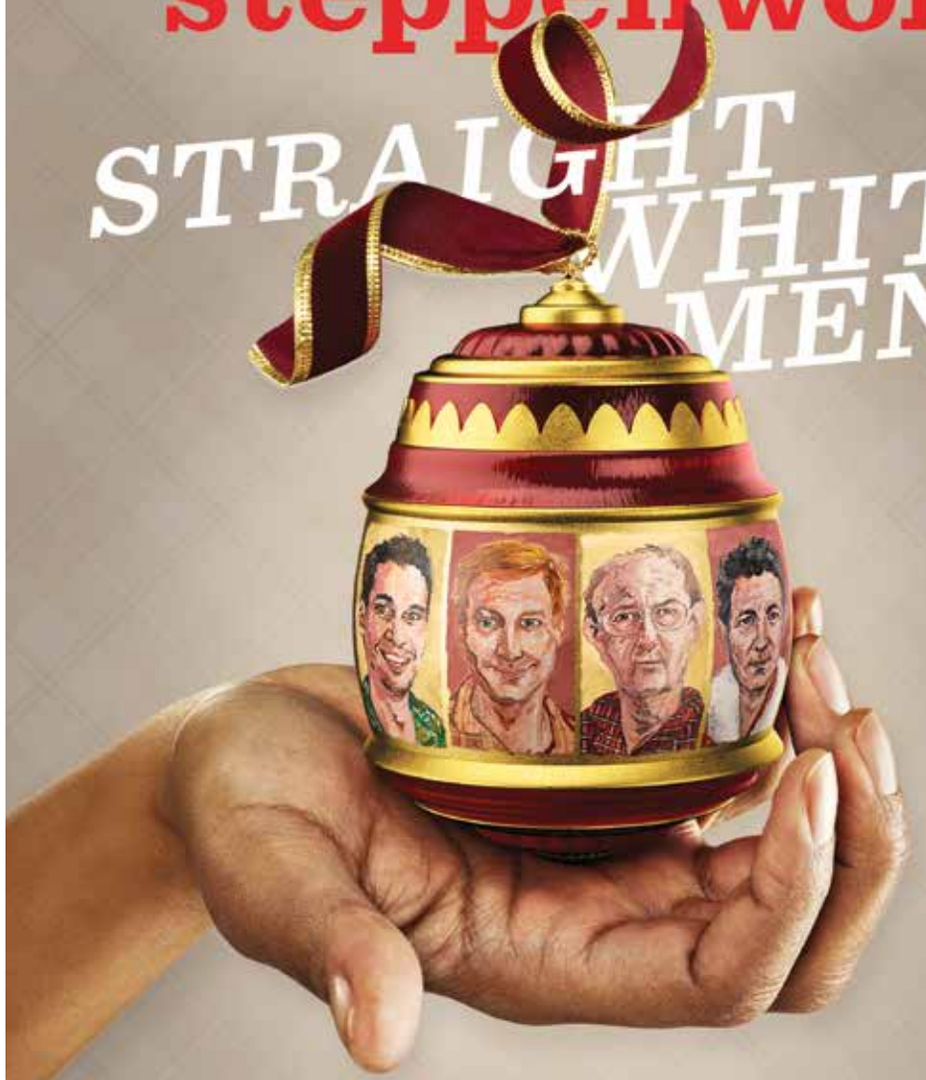
COLLEEN SCHULDEIS
Stage Management Apprentice

As a courtesy to the actors and your fellow patrons, please turn off your cell phones before the performance. The taking of photographs and the use of any type of recording device are not allowed in the theater during performances and is a violation of state and federal copyright laws. Digital media will be deleted, and tape or film will be confiscated.

* member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.
† member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble.

steppenwolf

STRAIGHT WHITE MEN



Written and Directed by **Young Jean Lee**

February 2 – March 19, 2017
Tickets start at just $20 | steppenwolf.org | 312-335-1650

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MONSTER BIOS

ALANA ARENAS
(Actor 3) joined the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble in 2007 and created the role of Pecola Breedlove for Steppenwolf for Young Adults' production of *The Bluest Eye,* which also played at the New Victory Theater Off-Broadway. She recently appeared in *The Fundamentals, Marie Antoinette, Tribes, Belleville, Head of Passes, Good People, Three Sisters, The March, Man in Love, Middletown, The Hot L Baltimore, The Etiquette of Vigilance, The Brother/Sister Plays, The Tempest, The Crucible, Spare Change,* and *The Sparrow Project*(Steppenwolf Theatre Company); *Disgraced* (American Theater Company); and *The Arabian Nights* (Lookingglass Theatre Company, Berkeley Repertory Theatre and Kansas City Repertory Theatre). Other theater credits include *Eyes* (eta Creative Arts); *SOST* (MPAACT); *WVON* (Black Ensemble Theater); and *Hecuba* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater). Television and film credits include *Crisis, Boss, The Beast, Kabuku Rides* and *Lioness of Lisabi.* She is originally from Miami, Florida where she began her training at the New World School of the Arts. Alana holds a BFA from The Theatre School at DePaul University.

CHERYL GRAEFF
(Actor 5) is thrilled to return to Steppenwolf Theatre Company. She was last seen in *The Fall to Earth*. Recent theater credits include *Appropriate*, *The Whale* (Victory Gardens Theater); *I Put the Fear of Mexico in 'em* (Teatro Vista); and *American Myth* at American Blues Theater where she has been an ensemble member since 2002. Chicago Sun Times wrote her up as "One of 3 Can't Miss Stars of Chicago Stage" in 2009. Television and film credits include *Chicago Fire, Chicago Code* and *Stranger Than Fiction*. Her web series, *It's You,* can be found at itsyouanewwebseries.com. "Big thanks to Kelly, Sandra, Torrey and the SGI."

KENN E. HEAD
(Actor 4) is a veteran of the Chicago theater scene. Previous Steppenwolf Theatre Company credits include *Airline Highway* and *The Unmentionables*. Other Chicago theater credits include *Douglass* (Theatre Wit); *Sucker Punch, The Lost Boys of Sudan* (Victory Gardens Theater); *The Project(s)* (American Theater Company); *Fish Men* (Goodman Theatre); *Invisible Man, Spunk* (Court Theatre); *Romeo and Juliet* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *The Overwhelming* (Next Theater); and *Seven Guitars* (Congo Square Theatre - Jeff Award for Best Play and Ensemble). Television credits include *The Exorcist, Chicago Fire*, *Shrink*, *Early Edition* and *ER* along with various commercials.

DANIEL KYRI
(Steve Harmon) is thrilled to be working at Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Chicago credits include *Tug of War: Foreign Fire, Civil Strife* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Moby Dick* (Lookingglass Theatre Company); *Twelfth Night, The Bluest Eye, Our Lady of 121st Street* (University of Illinois at Chicago); *The Other Cinderella* (Black Ensemble Theater); *Carnival Nocturne* (Silent Theatre Company); *13 The Musical, The Wiz, Godspell* and *West Side Story* (After School Matters at Gallery 37). Regional credits include *Look Away* (TheatreSquared). Film credits include *Unexpected, Henry Gamble's Birthday Party* and *Perfect Day*.

TEVION DEVIN LANIER
(Actor 1) is thrilled to be working with Steppenwolf Theatre Company for the first time. Tevion is a graduate of Senn Arts High School and a company member of The Yard. He was last seen in *How We Got On* (Haven Theatre) and *I and You* (Jackalope Theatre Company/ The Yard). Tevion is represented by Paonessa Talent agency.

CHRIS RICKETT
(Actor 7) is very happy to return to Steppenwolf Theatre Company for *Monster*. He also appeared in 2015's controversial *This is Modern Art*. Chris is an associate artist with Timeline Theatre Company where he performed in *Chimerica, Spill* and *A Raisin in the Sun*. He is also a theatrical violence designer and has choreographed violence in productions with Northlight Theatre, Theater Wit, The Arc Theatre, American Blues Theater, Redtwist Theatre and Chicago Dramatists. Television credits include *Chicago Fire* and *Mind Games*. Chris holds an MFA in Acting from The Theatre School at DePaul University. He is represented by Paonessa Talent Agency.

NAMIR SMALLWOOD
(Actor 2) returns to Steppenwolf Theatre Company where he was last seen in Christina Anderson's *Man In Love* and *The Hot L Baltimore*. Other Chicago credits include *The Lost Boys of Sudan* (Victory Gardens Theater); the world premiere of Philip Dawkins' *Charm* (Northlight Theatre); *The Grapes of Wrath* (Gift Theatre); and *East Texas Hot Links* (Writers' Theatre). Regional credits include Marin Theatre Company, Pillsbury House Theatre, Ten Thousand Things and Guthrie Theater. Television credits include *Chicago Fire* and *Betrayal*.

GINNEH THOMAS
(Actor 6) is excited to be working with Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Chicago credits include *The Submission* (Pride Films and Plays) and *Unspeakable* (Broadway Playhouse). Other credits include *Home* (Jubilee Theatre); *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare Dallas); *Woyzeck* (Kitchen Dog Theater); *Trysts in Toledo* (Theatre Three); and *The Story* (Boarshead Theatre/Plowshares Theatre). Television credits inlude *Chase*. Ginneh received her MFA from Southern Methodist University. "Thank you mom, because of you I am me."

WALTER DEAN MYERS
(Author) is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *MONSTER*, the winner of the first Michael L. Printz Award, and the 2012-2013 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. In a career spanning over 45 years, Walter Dean Myers wrote more than 100 books for children of all ages and many notable essays and several plays. His impressive body of work includes two Newbery Honor Books, three National Book Award Finalists and eleven Coretta Scott King Award/ Honor-winning books. He was the winner of the first-ever Michael L. Printz Award, the first recipient of the Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement and a recipient of the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement in writing for young adults. In 2012, Walter was recognized as an inaugural NYC Literary Honoree, an honor given by former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, for his substantial lifetime accomplishments and contribution to children's literature.

AARON CARTER
(Adaptor) is currently an artistic producer at Steppenwolf Theatre Company where he has served as dramaturg on such projects as *The Way West* by Mona Mansour and *Airline Highway* by Lisa D'Amour. Previously, he served as the Literary Manager at Victory Gardens Theater where he played a key role in the IGNITION Festival, and was involved in the production of *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*, *Year Zero*, *Love Person* and *Living Green*, among others. As a new play developer and dramaturg, Aaron has worked with many theaters and labs including WordBRIDGE, the Kennedy Center, Timeline Theater, Route 66 and Chicago Dramatists. Aaron has taught courses in playwriting, dramaturgy and dramatic literature at Northwestern University, DePaul University, Roosevelt University and Grinnell College. As a playwright, Aaron's work focuses on race, faith and obscure performance skills. Aaron's play *Gospel of Franklin* was part of First Look 2013 at Steppenwolf. His latest play is *Start Fair*.

HALLIE GORDON

(Director) For SYA, Hallie has directed the world premiere of *Animal Farm, The Book Thief,* along with George Orwell's *1984, To Kill A Mockingbird,* the world premiere of *The House on Mango Street* and *Harriet Jacobs* adapted for the stage by Lydia R. Diamond. A new premiere of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* also adapted by Lydia R. Diamond won a Black Excellence Award from the African American Arts Alliance of Chicago, this production also transferred Off-Broadway to The New Victory Theatre. Hallie created and facilitated many educational programs and produced serval plays at Steppenwolf including the Pulitzer Prize winning *The Flick* by Annie Baker, and *The Christians* by Lucas Hnath. Hallie has been a freelance director throughout Chicago over the past 20 years and is a proud ensemble member at Rivendell Theatre Company where she directed *Eat Your Heart Out* and *Dry Land*. She is the recipient of The Helen Coburn Meier and Tim Meier Achievement Award.

JOANNA IWANICKA

(Set Design) is thrilled to make her Steppenwolf Theatre Company debut and to reconnect with Hallie Gordon, after collaborating with her on *Dry Land* (Rivendell Theatre Ensemble). In her decade-long career on Chicago storefront theatre scene, she has designed sets for *Last Train to Nibroc, Seminar* (Haven Theatre), *Carroll Gardens, Yasmina's Necklace, Merchild, Pinkolandia* (16th Street Theater), *No Beast So Fierce, Romulus, The President* (Oracle Productions) as well an award-winning production of *Great Expectations* (Strawdog Theatre Company) to name a few. Joanna is committed to creating unforgettable experiences for audiences of all ages here and abroad.

SAMANTHA C. JONES

(Costume Design) is grateful to make her Steppenwolf Theatre Company debut with this challenging piece of art. Primarily a Chicago-based designer, her work has been seen at Lookingglass Theatre Company, Chicago Children's Theatre, American Blues Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, TimeLine Theatre Company, Jackalope Theatre Company, Next Theatre, Congo Square Theatre and others. Regionally she has worked with Triad Stage, Arkansas Shakespeare Festival, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Peninsula PlayersTheatre, plus some more. Her work has been seen in Porchlight Music Theatre's regional premiere of *The Scottsboro Boys* as well. samanthacjones.virb.com.

J.R. LEDERLE

(Lighting Design) also designed *The Burials, The Compass, This is Modern Art (based on true events),* George Orwell's *Animal Farm, Leveling Up, The Book Thief, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, To Kill A Mockingbird, The Bluest Eye* (also at New Victory in New York), *Harriet Jacobs, The Water Engine* (also at Theater on the Lake), *Winesburg, Ohio, Division Street* and *Whispering City* for Steppenwolf for Young Adults. His work has also been seen at Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Piven Theatre Workshop, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Victory Gardens Theater, About Face Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Remy Bumppo Theatre Company, Writers Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Walkabout Theater Company and elsewhere at Steppenwolf Theatre Company including *Sex with Strangers*. J.R. also designed lighting for seven years for the Steppenwolf Traffic series and for five Steppenwolf performances in Chicago's Millennium Park. He has served as head Lighting Supervisor at Steppenwolf since 1995.

CHRISTOPHER KRIZ

(Sound Design and Original Music) is a composer and sound designer based in Chicago. Previous Steppenwolf Theatre Company credits: *Constellations, The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*. Recent regional credits include *Roz and Ray* (Seattle Repertory Theatre); *The Magic Play* (Olney Theatre); and *Sticky Traps* (Kansas City Repertory Theatre). Some recent and upcoming credits include *The Magic Play, Carlyle* (Goodman Theatre); *Roz and Ray, Hand To God, The House That Will Not Stand* (Victory Gardens Theater); *Gem Of The Ocean* (Court Theatre); *Pygmalion, The Life Of Galileo* (Remy Bumppo Theatre Company); *Paradise Blue, Sunset Baby* (Timeline Theatre); *A Life Extra Ordinary, Good For Otto* (The Gift Theatre); and *The Columnist* (American Blues Theatre). Kriz has been honored with 13 Jeff Nominations and 3 Jeff Awards, recently winning for *The Grapes Of Wrath* (The Gift Theatre). Recently, Lifeline Theatre produced Kriz's new musical, *Soon I Will Be Invincible*. Kriz is a proud member of United Scenic Artists 829. christopherkriz.com

RYAN BOURQUE

(Fight Choreographer) has acted in and choreographed the violence for *The Glory of the World* at Brooklyn Academy of Music Harvey Theater and Actors Theatre of Louisville. Other theatre credits include *Pilgrim's Progress* (A Red Orchid Theatre); *Cyrano De Bergerac* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *All Our Tragic, Sophocles: Seven Sicknesses* and *The Pirates of Penzance* (The Hypocrites). Choreography credits include *1984, Marie Antoinette* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); *Macbeth* (Actors Theatre); *Underground Railroad Game* (Ars Nova); *Twelfth Night* (The Public Theater); *Thaddeus and Sloccum* (Lookingglass Theatre Company); *Prowess* (Jackalope Theatre); *Appropriate, Oedipus El Rey* (Victory Gardens Theater); and *Hit The Wall* (The Inconvenience). He won the 2015 Joseph Jefferson Award for his fight design in *All Our Tragic*.

BRIAN MASCHKA

(Stage Manager) is pleased to return to Steppenwolf after previously working on *Visiting Edna, Mary Page Marlowe* and *Domesticated*. Chicago credits include *Edward Tulane* and *Wonderland* (Chicago Children's Theatre). New York credits include *Frost/Nixon* (Jacobs); *Anna Nicole* (BAM); *100 Saints You Should Know* (Playwrights Horizon); *Here Lies Jenny* (Zipper); *Indoor/Outdoor, Thom Pain, Ears on a Beatle* (DR2); *Sakharam Binder* (Play Company); *The Glass Cage, Susan and God* and *John Ferguson* (The Mint). Regional credits include *Kiss Me Kate, Swingtime Canteen* (Weston Playhouse); *Boeing-Boeing, Doubt, Rabbit Hole, Santaland Diaries, Opus, Shirley Valentine, Dancing at Lughnasa* (Florida Repertory Theatre); *Peter Pan, Wit* and *Art* (Syracuse Stage).

ANNA D. SHAPIRO

(Artistic Director) joined the Steppenwolf ensemble in 2005 and was awarded the 2008 Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play for *August: Osage County* (Steppenwolf, Broadway, London). She was nominated in 2011 in the same category for *The Motherf**ker with the Hat* (Public Theatre, Labyrinth Theater). Other directing credits at Steppenwolf include *Visiting Edna, Mary Page Marlowe, Three Sisters, A Parallelogram, Up, The Crucible, The Unmentionables* (also at Yale Repertory Theatre), *The Pain and the Itch* (also in New York), *I Never Sang for My Father, Man from Nebraska, Purple Heart* (also in Galway, Ireland), *The Drawer Boy, Side Man* (also in Ireland, Australia and Vail, Colorado), *Three Days of Rain, The Infidel* and *This is Our Youth* (which transferred to Broadway). Other Broadway credits include *Of Mice and Men* (with James Franco) and *Fish in the Dark* (with Larry David). Off-Broadway credits include *Domesticated* (Lincoln Center). She is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and Columbia. She is a full professor in Northwestern University's Department of Theatre.

DAVID SCHMITZ

(Executive Director) has worked at Steppenwolf Theatre Company for 11 years, serving in the role of Director of Finance and Administration, General Manager and currently as Executive Director. Prior to working at Steppenwolf, David was the General Manager at Lookingglass Theatre Company, Associate Artistic Director of Stage Left Theatre and Business Manager at the entertainment agency Adair Performance. Currently, he serves as Vice President of the Board for The House Theatre of Chicago as well as on the boards of the League of Chicago Theatres and Arts Alliance Illinois. David is a former board member for the Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce and has worked as a strategic planning, business practices, finance and hiring consultant for numerous Chicago organizations, including The House Theatre of Chicago, The Hypocrites and Stage Left Theatre, among others. He holds a BA in theatre from the University of Northern Colorado, an MFA from the Theatre Conservatory at the Chicago College of Performing Arts, Roosevelt University and a Certificate in Non Profit Management from Roosevelt University.

Cast members Kenn E. Head, Daniel Kyri, Tevion Devin Lanier and Namir Smallwood

Cast member Ginneh Thomas

Cast member Chris Rickett

Director Hallie Gordon

Ensemble member Alana Arenas

Cast members Daniel Kyri and Cheryl Graeff

Associated Press

WALTER DEAN MYERS:

10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE MAN BEHIND *MONSTER*

By **SYA Apprentice Fatima Sowe**

FACT 1. Walter Dean Myers had a professional writing career that spanned over 45 years during which he wrote over 110 novels, picture books, graphic novels, poetry collections and nonfiction texts. Some of his most popular titles include: *Slam!* (1996), *Fallen Angels* (1983), *Sunrise Over Fallujah* (2008) and *Somewhere in the Darkness* (1992).

FACT 2. Born on August 12, 1937, Myers would be 80-years-old this year. Myers wrote so much that since his death on July 1, 2014, he has had several books published posthumously including: *On a Clear Day* (2014), *Juba!* (2015) and a graphic novel adaptation of *Monster* (2015).

FACT 3. Myers was born Walter Milton Myers in Martinsburg, West Virginia. When he was just two years old, his mother died giving birth to a younger sibling. As such, he was raised by his father's first wife Florence Dean in Harlem, NY. Walter would later change his middle name to "Dean" to honor the adopted parents who raised him.

FACT 4. Walter beat the odds to become a prolific writer. He was bullied for growing up with a speech impediment and acted out in self-defense. Myers ultimately dropped out of high school to enlist in the army in 1954. Though he wasn't always the strongest student, several of his teachers remarked on his classroom leadership and his great ability to write.

FACT 5. Myers got his first big break after winning a writing contest for *Writers' Digest* magazine in 1969. His award was five hundred dollars and a publishing contract. That winning entry, entitled *Where Does the Day Go?,* is a picture book about a child and his father's walk in the park. It went on to win an award from the Council on Interracial Books for Children.

FACT 6. Basketball, military service and Harlem were all prominent themes in Myers' life and in his books. Harlem, where Myers was raised, is the setting for many of his books including *Fallen Angels* (1988), *Hoops* (2012), *Scorpions*(1990) and *Monster* (1999).

FACT 7. The idea of writing *Monster* came to Myers after he observed the trial of a 16-year-old African American boy on trial in Harlem. His interviews with prison inmates sparked the book's distinctive style after Myers observed that inmates would often refer to their pre-prison selves in the first person, and their post-conviction selves in the third person. In *Monster*, this tense switching is represented by Steve's switching back and forth from his third person point-of-view in his screenplay, to his first person point-of-view in his diary.

FACT 8. *Monster* was a *New York Times* Bestseller and is Myers' most critically acclaimed and awarded book, with 27 awards including the first Michael L. Printz Award and the Coretta Scott King Award Honor (which he also won five additional times for other books!)

FACT 9. Starting in 1992 Walter wrote a series of books for young girls entitled *18 Pine Street…* under the pseudonym Stacie Johnson!

FACT 10. Walter Dean Myers used literature as a tool to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices that created unfair perceptions of marginalized teenagers. He put these teens front and center in his books. Throughout his lifetime, Myers strongly believed that literacy was imperative. He knew that in order to encourage students to want to read, someone had to create the books and characters they could identify with. Walter Dean Myers created those books and characters and recorded the lives of those teenagers, letting them know that their lives were valuable enough to record.

Associated Press

STORYCATCHERS THEATRE AND STEPPENWOLF: ON TOUR TOGETHER

By **Education Coordinator Jared Bellot**

We at Steppenwolf are thrilled to be able to partner with Storycatchers Theatre to tour this production of *Monster* for a week to three Juvenile Justice Facilities in Illinois, and wanted to take a moment to catch up with some members of the Storycatchers family to learn a bit more about how they use art to amplify the stories of the youth they work with.

"By writing my story, I've learned how important it is to speak out on whatever your story is. I find freedom in that, and I think others would too."

— Cameron, Storycatchers Youth

The youth and staff at Storycatchers Theatre (based in Chicago) are using their art to shine a light on stories that are often ignored. We asked Rachel Combs, Development Director at Storycatchers, to give us a bit more background on the organization. She explained "Storycatchers is a Chicago-based nonprofit that uses creative youth development programs to work with court-involved young people. The company's mission is to prepare young people to make thoughtful life choices through the process of writing, producing and performing original musical theatre inspired by personal stories. Storycatchers uses its nationally recognized, award-winning process to help young people navigate court involvement and reentry successfully; and to develop the tools to become peer leaders and agents of positive social change."

Images courtesy of Storycatchers Theatre

By using art to help young people navigate the complexities of the world, Storycatchers is doing the work of making room for young people to tell their stories. As Rachel reminds us, "this work is important because it actively engages young people who have been failed by this community and who live and struggle under the radar. Storycatchers gives these young people a process by which to become more self-aware, self-reflective and expressive; and then offers them a platform to make their stories public. I have seen young people progress from sullen non-compliance to enthusiastic leadership over and over throughout my eight years with this company."

Cameron, a youth who participates in the program first joined to have a new experience, but has continued with the group because he wants to restore justice to his community and to improve himself. He says "Storycatchers' program helps me to be more creative. It motivates me to step out of my comfort zone. I believe that communication is key in building relationships, and through touring this musical with my program, Changing Voices, I am able to communicate directly with people in the audience, and that can be life saving."

This work has allowed young people like Cameron to use art to tell stories, and use their voices to make real life change. Cameron says "by writing my story, I've learned how important it is to speak out on whatever your story is. I find freedom in that, and I think others would too."

To learn more about the amazing work of the Storycatchers team, visit their website at www.storycatchers.org.

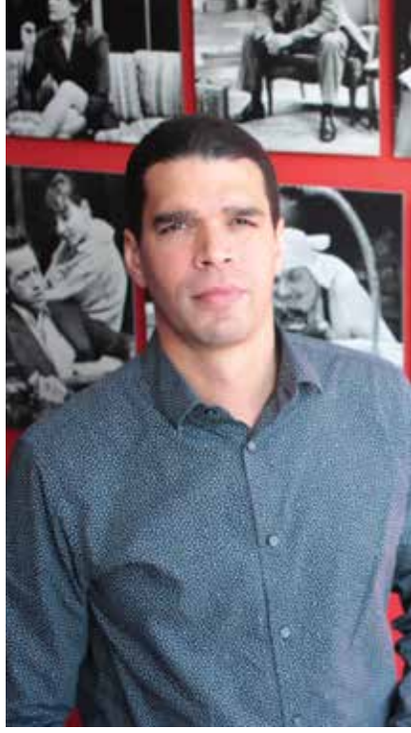
ADAPTATIONS, TRANSLATIONS AND REPRESENTATION:

A CONVERSATION WITH PLAYWRIGHT AARON CARTER

Conducted by **Education Coordinator Jared Bellot**

Education Coordinator Jared Bellot sat down with *Monster* playwright Aaron Carter to discuss his process of adapting a beloved novel for the stage, and why it's so important to be telling Steve Harmon's story today.

"An adaptation is like a translation in the sense that you're using the tools of one particular genre to tell the same story in a completely different form."



Jared Bellot: Aaron, thank you so much for taking the talk with me about our upcoming Steppenwolf for Young Adults' play, *Monster*. This production is an adaptation of a novel by Walter Dean Myers. What does it mean to adapt a play? How is that different than writing an original play?

Aaron Carter: The biggest difference is that in Wan adaptation, the story is already there. An adaptation is like a translation in the sense that you're using the tools of one particular genre to tell the same story in a completely different form. Every genre has its own specific set of tools that it utilizes to tell a story. In this case, that meant using the tools of fiction to tell a story in the theater.

Monster was tricky, because the source material, the novel, is actually written in the form of a screenplay. So, in this case, the source material is using a combination of fiction tools and screenplay tools to tell its story, and I had to find the balance between those two different kinds of tools.

JB: How do you reach that balance in your adaptation?

AC: While I was reading the novel, whenever I saw a tool or technique used, I asked myself, to what end is this tool being used, and how can I translate that effect? In the novel, the screenplay is being used to constantly remind the reader that Steve Harmon is authoring this piece, that this young man is writing his own story.

To translate this for the stage, I used a theatrical technique that I call conjuring. William Shakespeare uses this in his plays; some dude walks out and says, "In fair Verona, where we lay our scene." And that character has conjured location; he has spoken it into existence. And so, in my play - Steve is talking to the audience and he conjures characters and location, and he uses the language of screenplay to do it: "Cut to exterior on a stoop." Steve's direct address to the audience becomes a way of communicating his authorship of his story.

"The major dramatic question of the work revealed itself to be Steve Harmon asking himself, "Am I the monster they say I am?"

— Aaron Carter

JB: While you're adapting, how do you know what to cut and what to explore more deeply?

AC: I asked myself "What is major dramatic question? What question does the work exist to answer?" For me, based on the work that I had put in to breaking down the text, the major dramatic question of the work revealed itself to be Steve Harmon asking himself, "Am I the monster they say I am?"

With that question in mind, I went back and I picked out the events and exchanges that had to exist in order for Steve to ask that question. That was the first draft of the play, just an exploration of the events and moments that explore that major dramatic question. I interpreted the book, I narrowed the story down to what I thought was the essence, and that left me with a set a raw material that I could work with.

JB: What about this story spoke to you? Why this play today?

AC: While the play does deal with the criminal justice system and notions of guilt and innocence, to me, the most active thing about the book is the question of perception of black bodies, particularly black, male bodies. Any time I can engage a story about that is important to me. I mean, I'm a mixed-race, light-skinned dude myself, and you know, the way that I am able to and have navigated the world in relationship to my particular appearance as a particular kind of black man—and how that is different than others is something that has always informed my work.

"Monster" is inhuman—we're wrestling with reminding people of the humanity of a group of people who don't always get assigned their humanity. And when we're not assigned our full humanity, that's when bad things happen.

— Aaron Carter

I think it's important because the way that individuals are perceived helps drive what happens to them and what opportunities they have, and I think that continuing to interrogate that all the time hopefully means that we get better at preventing ourselves from limiting peoples' opportunities based on how they look or how they sound. And that's what this title Monster to me is about. "Monster" is inhuman—we're wrestling with reminding people of the humanity of a group of people who don't always get assigned their humanity. And when we're not assigned our full humanity, that's when bad things happen.

JB: Can you talk more about this idea of representation in storytelling? In your adaptation of *Monster*, how did you ensure Steve is allowed his full humanity?

AC: Mostly I just followed the lead of Walter Dean Meyers and tried not to flatten out the character he created. That character is a young man who is striving to figure out who he is. He's doing that through art and his aspiration to be a filmmaker. And he's also doing it by hanging out with different people, trying to learn who he wants to emulate. And you know, some of those choices might be mistakes. He loves his family, particularly his little brother. But he's no saint. I think seeing characters as fully human means that they aren't defined by just one thing. They are flawed, contradictory and can be wrong. They are people who want to

"Seeing characters as fully human means that they aren't defined by just one thing. They are flawed, contradictory and can be wrong."

— Aaron Carter

change, and who try a bunch of different things—good and bad—to make that change.

JB: Thousands of students from across the Chicagoland area will be seeing this show. What do you hope that they will take away from it?

AC: I think the big question in the play is the intersection between personal responsibility, personal choice, and the systems that we operate inside of and navigate through. I hope that what everyone takes away is a desire to really question those assumptions about how those two things intersect. It's not as simple as guilt or innocence. It's not as simple as, did this person do a bad thing? Do they need to be punished? I think that is a difficult and ongoing conversation that all of us need to keep having about what we're responsible for when we make mistakes. What is justice, and how do we pay for those mistakes? How do we right those mistakes? How do we make up for them? If those questions are activated, I think we'll have been successful.

JB: Thanks for taking the time to speak with me, Aaron – can't wait for *Monster*!

The articles in this program were created for the *Monster* study guide. Steppenwolf for Young Adults creates an original study guide for each of its productions. Study guides are available for all teachers attending the production and accessible for all for free on our website at www.steppenwolf.org/education.

THE STEPPENWOLF ENSEMBLE first began performing in the mid-1970s in the basement of a Highland Park church, the ambitious brainchild of three high school and college friends: Jeff Perry, Terry Kinney and Gary Sinise. Fast forward 41 years and the Steppenwolf Theatre Company has become the nation's premier ensemble theater—redefining the landscape of acting and performance. The ensemble has grown to 47 members who represent a remarkable generation of actors, directors and playwrights. Thrilling, powerful, groundbreaking productions from *Balm in Gilead* and *The Grapes of Wrath* to *August: Osage County*—and accolades that include the National Medal of Arts and 12 Tony Awards—have made the theater legendary. Steppenwolf's artistic force remains rooted in the original vision of its founders: an artist-driven theater, whose vitality is defined by its sharp appetite for groundbreaking, innovative work. That work is represented in production photos displayed throughout the theater.

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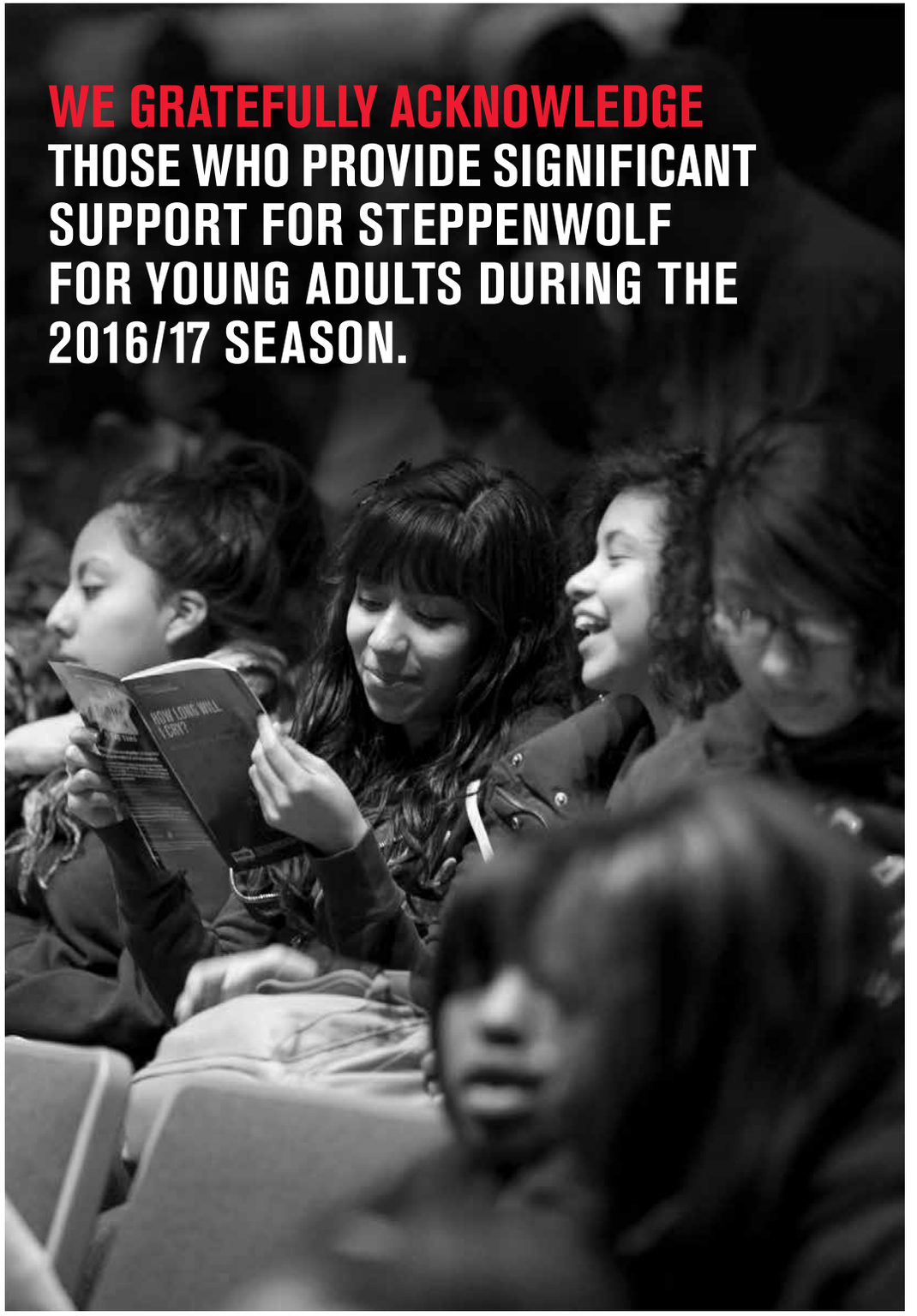

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