

PHILADELPHIA
YOUNG PLAYWRIGHTS
Educating students for life

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**Students Use Playwriting As Powerful Tool to Promote Anti-Violence
in Professional Productions of Student Plays**
*Presented by Philadelphia Young Playwrights in association with
Philadelphia Theatre Company; February 27 – March 1*

PHILADELPHIA – Through the **Philadelphia Young Playwrights** program, two students of the Philadelphia School District have used playwriting to make powerful statements against violence in their communities. While Philadelphia's homicide rate and gang activity remain alarmingly high, student playwrights **Marquis Herring** and **Nia Davis** – both winners of Young Playwrights' Annual Playwriting Festival – explore alternatives to violence and the power of choice in two compelling and candid semi-autobiographical plays. As the national effort of "40 Days of Nonviolence" is launched in Philadelphia, these important student voices contribute to the ongoing discussion about violence in our city.

The plays will be presented as fully staged professional productions by Philadelphia Young Playwrights, in association with **Philadelphia Theatre Company** from **February 27 through March 1**. Part of Young Playwrights' Play Development Series and 20th anniversary year, the performances offer the students an extraordinary opportunity to interact with professional directors, a dramaturg, actors and stage crew and have their work featured on the main stage of the **Suzanne Roberts Theatre**, located at 480 South Broad Street in Philadelphia. The plays are directed by **Charles Dumas** with additional direction and choreography by **Myra Bazell**. Performances are open to the general public with free admission for school groups. All matinee performances include a post-show interactive discussion focusing on non-violence and conflict resolution. For more information, visit www.phillyyoungplaywrights.org or call (215) 665-9226. *[A full schedule of performances and ticket information follow below.]*

Marquis Herring's ***The Choices We Make*** draws from Marquis' personal experiences with homelessness and his time living in a shelter with his mother and siblings. In the play, when his brother is shot and killed, Marquis is forced to make a crucial choice between retaliation and non-violence that will affect the rest of his life. The choices made to walk away from violence or continue the chain of bloodshed have consequences for each character. Marquis wrote his play while he was a senior at Parkway Northwest High School, and he is now a freshman at Lock Haven University.

Nia Davis' *Poetic Life* also places her as the central character in a semi-autobiographic story that follows a teenage poetry club whose members strive to transcend stereotypes through their art. When violence erupts between female gangs, Nia finds a way to deal with her anger and sadness, and eventually finds empowerment and hope through poetry. Nia drew on personal situations and those of people in her life for her story and also incorporated stories she read in the newspaper or saw on television. "I named the main character after me because that's the 'Nia' I am working towards being," she says. She wrote her play while a junior at Northeast High School, and *Poetic Life* was presented last year as an enhanced workshop production performed by undergraduate students from Temple University's Department of Theater. Nia is now a freshman at Temple University.

Both extremely dedicated to the writing and revision process, Marquis and Nia have continued to work on their plays and together have written a new poem called "The Choice Is Yours," bridging the two plays and their messages of anti-violence together. The new poem will be premiered in the professional productions. Nia also continues her involvement as a member of Young Playwrights' board.

"Marquis and Nia are wonderfully accomplished young people and incredibly talented artists," says **Glen Knapp**, Executive Producing Director of Young Playwrights. "We are proud to feature the visions and messages of these playwrights, particularly when too many of our city's young people have lost their lives to acts of violence. As we all search for solutions and with our new year already darkened by daily stories of students in violent conflict, Marquis and Nia's timely plays show us young people grappling with violence and, ultimately, making choices to overcome it."

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE & TICKETS:

Wednesday, February 27

8 pm: preview performance

Thursday, February 28

11am: student matinee

8pm: performance

Friday, February 29

11am: student matinee

Saturday, March 1

2pm: matinee performance

All matinee performances include a post-show interactive discussion focusing on non-violence and conflict resolution. Plays contain mature content and language. Appropriate for students in grades 8–12.

Tickets: All performances are open to the general public, based on seating availability. Admission is free for all school groups, but reservations are required. Single ticket prices are \$15 and \$12 for students and seniors, and \$10 per ticket for groups of 10 or more.

For individual and non-school tickets, contact the PTC Box Office at (215) 985-0420 or www.philadelphiatheatrecompany.org. For school group reservations contact Nirvana Rivera at Young Playwrights at (215) 665-9226.

These productions are made possible with the partnership of Temple University Department of Theater and support from sponsors Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, and *Philadelphia City Paper*.

About Philadelphia Young Playwrights

Founded in 1987 by Adele Magner, and led today by Executive Producing Director Glen Knapp, Philadelphia Young Playwrights is an award-winning program that taps the potential of youth and inspires learning through playwriting in up to 50 public and private K-12 schools each year. A leader in the region's educational programs for youth and built upon its primary belief that all students have something important and valuable to say, Young Playwrights has enriched the Greater Philadelphia community, touching the lives of thousands of students, teachers and parents for the past twenty years. Since 1987, approximately 60 professional playwrights have led workshops, and nearly all of Philadelphia's professional theater companies have participated by performing, producing, or directing student works. Nearly 55,000 students have seen peers' work produced in class or by professionals. Young Playwrights' Literary Committee includes more than 60 educators, writers, parents, and former Young Playwrights students who read and critique each student script. Young Playwrights received the 2005 Barrymore Award for Excellence in Theatre Education and Community Service and is the past recipient of a 1997 Barrymore Award for Theatre Education, a 2003 George Bartol Award for Excellence in Arts Education, a national "Points of Light" designation, and a 2004 Eastern University Award for Nonprofit Excellence.

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For more information and to schedule interviews, please contact:

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