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PRIME STAGE THEATRE PRESENTS *SOJOURNER*

(Performances available with Closed **captions** and **audio description** for recorded performances only. **Sensory Inclusive** with a social story included on the web site)

(Pittsburgh, PA – January 13, 2021) The very first show produced by Prime Stage Theatre 25 years ago was *A Woman Called Truth*, the story of **Sojourner Truth** by **Sandra Fenichel Asher**. On February 12, 2021 her legacy will once again come to life with this virtual live-stream stage performance simply called ***Sojourner*** by **Richard LaMonte Pierce**.

Pierce is a produced prolific playwright and published author with over 30 plays and two books to his credit. **Pierce's** work expounds on the Black and American experience. He excels in bringing forth the natural conversational tone of the everyday person. His works have been performed off Broadway, throughout the United States and Africa. Richard is a founding member and playwright in residence at First World Theatre in Philadelphia.

“Having a Zoom conversation with **Sojourner Truth’s** great, great grandchildren we are learning and confirming very exciting facts about **Sojourner Truth** that audiences will see in the performance by **Delana Flowers** and **Sam Lothard** and directed by **Linda Haston**,” said **Wayne Brinda**, Prime Stage Theatre’s co-founder and Producing Artistic Director, “The life of **Sojourner Truth**, along with her passion, determination, faith and vision is important for audiences of all ages. As young people seek a hero, **Sojourner Truth** is perfect.”

The play takes a hard look at **Sojourner Truth’s** life, not only as a black woman, but as a slave. Set not in the American South, but in the North. Her story will inspire you to take a look at the morals, values and conditions that shaped America, and instill in you awe at **Sojourner Truth’s** unwavering spirit to overcome and sojourn for the truth. She gave herself the name **Sojourner Truth** in 1843 after she became convinced that God had called her to leave the city and go into the countryside to testify the hope that was in her.

Born into slavery in 1797 as Isabella “Belle” Baumfree in Swartekill, New York. She was bought and sold four times and subjected to harsh physical labor and violent punishments. In her teens she was united with another slave with whom she had five children. In 1826 the year before New York’s law freeing slaves was to take effect **Sojourner Truth** escaped with her infant daughter to freedom. After going to court to recover her son in 1828, she became the first **black** woman to win such a case against a white man.

As one of the only black women of the time who spoke for women’s rights, **Sojourner Truth** is most well known for her “Ain’t I a Woman” speech at the 1851 Women’s Rights Convention in Akron Ohio. Prime Stage is committed to being accurate and authentic with all productions so audiences are inspired. For example, we are using her “Ain’t I a Woman” speech that was transcribed by Marcus Robinson who actually attended the event. Also, being that **Sojourner Truth** was from New York and grew up speaking Dutch, we are pleased to have **Lisa Bansavage** as our dialect coach and confirmation of the dialect by her grandchildren.

By showing her own strength, **Sojourner Truth** embodied her feminist message and gained important publicity for the suffrage and abolition movements. She used her spiritually influenced oratory skills to give speeches promoting the equality of women as well as the equality of African-Americans and the issues of temperance, abolition and supporting African-Americans fighting in the Civil War.

A memorial bust of **Sojourner Truth** was unveiled in 2009 in Emancipation Hall in the U.S. Capital Visitor's Center. She is the first African American woman to have a statue in the Capitol Building. In 2014 **Sojourner Truth** was included in the Smithsonian Magazine's list of the "100 Most Significant Americans of all Time."

Delana Flowers who plays **Sojourner Truth** makes her debut with Prime Stage Theatre by powerfully telling the story of this important woman's life. She has been gracing regional and community stages, playing roles from Dinah Washington in *DINAH* to Lorrell in *Dreamgirls*, from the wife of John Henry in *Mechanics of a Legend* to ancestors in *Do Lord Remember Me*. Whether acting, singing, doing spoken word, or public speaking she is no stranger to the stage. As a teaching artist, she is a firm believer in art as a vehicle for education and a catalyst for change.

In doing her research for playing the role she found that many had commented on how straight and dignified **Sojourner Truth's** posture was. This is no trivial accomplishment when the weight of the world bearing down on your shoulders would rather see you bowed down and hunched over the weight of so many forms of oppression.

Flowers portrays **Sojourner Truth** by channeling her grandmother who she cared for during the last part of her life until she passed away in 2013.

"I knew immediately who I would channel to bring this physical representation of **Sojourner Truth's** resilience. My Nanny, **Annie Flowers** was exactly the kind of strength and dignity I could relate to. She was the **Sojourner Truth** of my lifetime," said **Flowers**. "One of the things that stood out the most to me over the course of that last month of my grandmother's life was her perfect posture. It amazed me that though her body was failing, the dignity with which she held herself never faltered. Right up to the end she always sat with such unbelievable poise and a confident grace that you couldn't help but notice. Just like **Sojourner Truth**."

“This performance is dedicated to my Nannykins”, said **Flowers** “Thank you for taking this journey with me. Thank you for giving me the courage and strength to honor the legend that is **Sojourner Truth**. Thank you both for teaching me how to stand tall in my truth, in my Blackness, in my womanhood, in my power. Thank you both for showing me how to look adversity in the eyes with my shoulders squared and press on.”

The casting of **Flowers** as **Sojourner Truth** is the brilliance of the production’s director **Linda Haston**. She is a director, performer, and teaching artist. For 10 years she resided in New York City working as a professional (AEA) actress, singer, dancer and director. She has performed her own cabaret act, did national and regional tours, from musicals, dinner theatre to outdoor drama. She has directed and performed in the past and present seasons with various major Pittsburgh theatre companies. She also is a teaching artist in the educational system in Pittsburgh. Her background includes a BFA and MFA in theatre. She heads the Teacher’s Advisory Committee (TAC), the Literacy in ACTION Program, the Discover Your Inner Hero Program and the Global Learning Program for Prime Stage Theatre’s Education Department.

Despite never appearing on stage **Sam Lothard** creates a strong stage presence with his powerful speaking voice bringing to life several characters who are key to telling **Sojourner Truth’s** story. Born in Youngstown, Ohio he is now a proud Pittsburgher. Some of his many performances include *Project Amelia* with Bricolage Theater, August Wilson’s *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* and *King Hedley II*, Dr. Maya Angelou’s *I know why the Caged Bird Sings*, Negro Ensemble Company, Inc.’s *Hercules Didn’t Wade in the Water*, Monteze Freeland’s *Kalopsia*, Mark Clayton Southers’ *Savior Samuel*, and John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*.

As with all Prime Stage productions we strive to make our online performances accessible to everyone. This production will be available with options for audio description and captions for the recorded performances only. The performance is Sensory Inclusive and a social story will be posted on the web site. Prime Stage Theatre is the only theater company in the Pittsburgh area to attain Certified Sensory Inclusive status through KultureCity, as a leading nonprofit recognized nationwide for using their resources to affect change for those with sensory needs.

WHAT: ***Sojourner***
By Richard LaMonte Pierce
Directed by Linda Haston

WHERE & WHEN: Recorded links are available for purchase on February 12 through February 19, 2021. As with all streaming once you purchase a link it's good for 24 hours.

TICKETS & INFO: Pay what you can per household with a minimum of five dollars.

Prime Online www.primestage/events

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