

ADGE/ArtPromotion and TNT Theatre Britain present

AMERICA: DREAMS & NIGHTMARES

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

written and directed by Paul Stebbings

composer John Kenny



It is five troubled years since the words „I have a dream“ shook Washington and the world. Martin Luther King stands on the balcony of a Memphis motel, exhausted and troubled. His liberal allies in government have deserted him for his opposition to Vietnam, his leadership of the Civil Rights movement is challenged by the radical followers of Malcolm X who accuse him of selling out to the white establishment, his own staff fear he has lost direction as he broadens his targets to include poverty itself, and above all his creed of non-violence is mocked and outflanked by extremists and those who simply see it as a form of surrender. Meanwhile the scheming Edgar Hoover of the FBI holds a dossier on his private life that might be released to the press and President any day now with heaven knows what effect on his reputation.

And what is he doing in Memphis supporting a small time strike when he is needed in Washington to coordinate his nationwide campaign against poverty? Seconds after he reaches the balcony to take fresh air a shot rings out. Martin Luther King falls and dies in the arms of his friends. The greatest political visionary of the twentieth century lies dead.

Our new play explores how this came about, following the spiritual and political journey of this once humble preacher to the status of icon and, tragically, martyr.

And this is the stuff of tragedy because Martin Luther King was man torn by inner demons and wracked with guilt; a man who lived by the creed of non-violence and saw his supporters savagely beaten, wrongfully imprisoned, humiliated and all too often murdered. The production avoids dull documentary by choosing a few essential moments that illuminate the whole story: Rosa Parks stand against segregated bus seats, the Selma voter registration marches and the final struggle for a wider vision that confronted the entire economic and military industrial power of the USA. Martin Luther King had a dream and much of that dream of racial equality has been realised, but his wider dream of peace and an end to poverty in the world's wealthiest nation has not been achieved or even approached. The contradictions in America and it's great myth as a land of opportunity are brought into startling and dramatic focus by this new work. A play which honours a true martyr but also recognises that he was a frail human who lived to make the American dream real but died in the American nightmare.

The play is written by Paul Stebbings and Phil Smith whose previous productions include GRAPES OF WRATH, MOON PALACE and ONE LANGUAGE – MANY VOICES. The score of live and recorded music is by well known composer John Kenny. This dynamic piece of physical theatre will combine documentary realism with stylisation, masks and song to create a challenging drama with a wide appeal.

„TNT – Highly effective and charismatic theatre“ – Village Voice, New York, USA

„ADGE – world class theatre“ – Süddeutsche Zeitung, Germany