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CONSTELLATION CONVERSATION — Mercury

Daniel Alexander Jones & Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams

Daniel Alexander Jones:

There have been people I've met in my life where instantly I've known. Like there's been a "click" and a sense of, "This is going to be an important human being in my life journey", and you were one of those people when I got to meet you all those years ago—we won't say how long—at Goddard College.

[Laughter]

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Right, yes.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

You were there pursuing your MFA in Transformative Language Arts. And I was there teaching in the MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts Program and we just went shoot, *boom*. We just found one another. And what's true is that there are some people, I think we are like this with each other, where it's about knowing that you're going to be there for the whole lifetime. So we may go a long time without talking, but there's always a little place in my consciousness, I'm like, "I wonder what Yvette is doing." And following through social media what you've been up to and seeing the fruit of the work that you've been doing is so extraordinary.

So when it came time to talk about Mercury and talk about communication, you were the person that came to my mind because I said, "You are the person who lives with language in such a way that it reminds me of what's possible with language as a means of building a world." And I was talking with my co-producer, whose name is Kyla Searle about you. And I gave her a lot of stuff to read about you and she was doing her research and she said, "Yeah, Yvette architects worlds." And I said, "That's it, right there." Yvette architects-

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

I may have to give her some change for that monthly!

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right! But you really do. So what I'd love to do is just to ask you if you will, in whatever way feels exciting for you, to introduce yourself to our listeners. And just tell me, maybe we can just start with, when did you find out that language was something that was important to you?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Oh, wow. That's such a big question. Well, thank you. First of all, I just need to just say how grateful I am to be in this space with you having this conversation because I always feel connected to you and thank goodness for social media that I can keep up with so many of my talented friends and heart friends because our connection at Goddard was so important and real. And to get to know you as some of the other talented folk that I have the pleasure of learning with at Goddard is a gift that just keeps giving. So, thank you for that. And thank you for just staying in my life because I always feel like no matter where we are—we eating Japanese food, we meet in New York, or *whatever*. And it's like... *boom*. What? This happened, that happened. And all [sorts of] creative stuff comes up. So, I love our interactions.

So in terms of language, one of those things is... I was invited as a speaker last week. It seemed like I've had back-to-back speaking engagements, but I was with a group of African-American women who are business owners and entrepreneurs and I was in their company and I was thinking about what am I going to talk with these sisters about because I know, and they know that I know, because we are all in this same space, right? And something just popped in my head to say, "Your grandmama and your granddaddy ain't never lied to you."

And so when I really sit on that and I think about the work that I've been doing and the poetry and the prose that I've been writing and what I seem to take out into the world are those stories and that sense of community and truth-telling through language. And so my parents, my grandparents, particularly, were incredible storytellers. And when I tell people I'm a storyteller, I said, "I want you to hear it not as someone who is performing in front of a group in that space." When people hear storytellers, they think about kids and maybe a type of *environment*. I mean, that is a form of storytelling, which it's beautiful. I'm a storyteller where I not only speak about things that I want to share, but I write them and I architect them on the page in terms of writing and expressing myself as a poet.

So I am a complete storyteller as wide as your imagination can go, as well as sitting in a circle of everyday folk, and just creating a safer nurturing space for people to speak their truth as stories. And so when I think about the connection to the work that you're doing with Mercury...communication... and when people talk about Mercury is in retrograde and I can't use my phone, I can't use my... I mean, things don't work, so that's something for real, right? "Where's Mercury at right now?"

I think that it is a way in this space around telling story. It's the way we communicate culture. When we were talking earlier, right before we started to record, about folk from Africa and Asia and in communities around the world about how they're really looking at ideas of changing their communities and lives. The way I chose to look at that was through narrative, was through storytelling, not only my own storytelling on the page, storytelling on the stage, but actually the world stage is sitting in and listening because of big part of storytelling is story *listening*.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Oh, that's beautiful. That's beautiful. When did you first...? Can you recall...? I'm thinking about that incredible thing you said. *Your grandma and your grandpa never lied to you*. Do you remember what it was like being young and hearing people tell stories? Can you maybe tell me a little bit about where you grew up and who were those tellers?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Oh, my goodness. Yes. Well, first of all, my maternal grandparents, they had us call them by their first names, which at the time we never thought anything about it. But it was Flo and Eddie. Flo and Eddie were my grandparents.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Really?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Yes, yes.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

I love that.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Flo and Eddie. And I grew up in Washington, DC and in the Maryland area. But growing up in Washington, DC in the late '60s, growing up, becoming a teenager in the '70s, I mean the world was changing. I didn't even know the world was changing. It was just what we were living in. I didn't realize that burning down buildings on 8th Street, in Downtown, Washington, DC, on 8th Street was about Black people responding to the murder of Martin Luther King. I didn't realize the sadness of having President Kennedy murdered, having Malcolm X murdered, having Robert Kennedy murdered, having Martin Luther King murdered. I mean, all these murders happen in the decade of my 10th year of existence, as a 10 year old, which from all things psychology says, "You have really locked in who you are and your values by the time you're six, 10 years old."

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

So this thing, there was no internet. But there was Walter Cronkite news that came on-

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

... that reported that and also the Vietnam War was on TV and folks were flipping out because they'd never seen war on TV that didn't star John Wayne.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

So, so all of this was happening and there were Afros and there was Black power, and Marvin Gaye was singing "What's Goin' On?". I mean, all this stuff was happening and I'm dancing and my grandparents

were telling stories about the country. My grandmother's family is from Appomattox, Virginia, where we own about 200 acres of land still, right?

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Wow.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

And Black people didn't own no land!

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right. That's huge.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

200 acres of land! And he was a tobacco farmer. That was family. And we went to the country. It was just great. Oh, it's like gnats and bees and things like that. But then it was also this beautiful nature. It was like, "I don't wanna be out there and all that hot sun," and all that. But then we had a mountain that was part of the land that my Aunt Lucy would take us hiking on. We didn't call it... Aunt Lucy walking in the woods. I loved it. She would tell us stories, my Aunt Lucy, about her growing up time. And she was such a wonderful storyteller that I could see the movie in my brain.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

I love that.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

So I was always an imaginative kid. I was a musician at six years old. So the way that I kind of channel my energy was through playing keyboard; I played the organ. And so I would just make up songs and I taught myself how to read music. And then I would play music or take sheet music and play and add to it. And later that turned into guitar and then I wrote songs and so that whole imagination was fed through my creativity and through the stories of Flo and Eddie and Grandma Roxy and Aunt Lucy. And I could just name all of these relatives and... So they are my ancestors. So the part that also rings true for me about what you said about Asian culture and African culture, there is such an honor to the ancestors as a part of

their everyday lives. That for me, we have lost touch with in our US culture. And so when I really step back and see communication, I'm not only seeing it from sitting in a circle today, but how am I communicating with my ancestors?

Daniel Alexander Jones:

You better say that. That is so powerful and beautiful and true. And it is something that I feel in your description and thank you for that beautiful, beautiful telling. I felt it. I could see it. I was on those walks with you as you were describing it. Again, here you are a master storyteller. I'm already right there with you. But what I appreciate is this sense that it is in our stories that we see beyond the obvious thing. So even in your description of growing up at that time and almost like the news of the day about what somebody from the outside might see, looking at DC at that time, you just broke that open and populated it with questions about our world and our society, questions about the news, questions about what it meant to be a young, Black girl at that time with a family that actually had a big part of their life outside of the narrative that the world might put on them about what DC was, right? So the truth of our lives is always more complicated, always more nuanced, and always more surprising, but you don't get to that unless, as you're saying, you get to those stories. And so for you, when you got into your young adulthood and you were kind of moving through the world, and I love what you're saying about the ancestors, it's so important to me as well. And I think a way that I move in the world in a deep fashion, what were the things that you dreamed of doing? What do you feel in a way like what... Having come from this place where people felt capacious, it feels like they had big lives, big hearts, what did you dream of doing?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

I was going to be Georgette Benson. I worship George Benson. I played guitar. I was excellent guitar player. That was who I was going be. I studied guitar. I taught guitar. I went to Ithaca College for a minute, for jazz guitar. And at that time, and again, everything is in context. Nobody knew Monnette Sudler. Nobody knew any Black woman or any woman who was playing jazz guitar. So I would go perform in these little local clubs and places. And there was always an expectation because I was in an all-female band. Okay. And this is in the middle of disco. So disco was on the hump there. And so here I am, this jazz guitar player with a bass player, and a drummer and they want to know, "Okay, girls, if you want to play, what do we get in addition to your performance? You need to perform a little something else too."

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Wow.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

So just being... Enter this like man, male-dominated world of what... In order for me to perform my instrument, I have to perform sexually? So this whole piece around sexual harassment was introduced to me way earlier in life, in very real ways that affect my ability to take my artistry to the next level. I think women weren't seen as serious enough as musicians.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

And so I didn't get a lot of support. I didn't get a lot of support. My family was really scared. They were like "You won't be a musician and you're going to be a starving artist." That whole starving artist that every parent has. I'm sure, probably people in your audience who are artists will relate to the story. It's like, "You're going to starve as an artist!" So there really was no model of what it looked like for a Black woman to be a jazz instrumental artist. I mean, we had vocalists for sure. And I was not a singer. I studied opera for five years and that was just not my thing.

I have a good ear, so I know when I'm singing out of tune. So, I can't hit that note. I wanted to sound like Aretha Franklin. You know what I'm saying? I ain't got no soul. Oh, no soul. But what I could do on my fingers on guitar was amazing. And so when you ask what that was like, I could make my guitar sing and I could make it say the words that my heart felt, but I had no actual language that you could understand that was non-musical because I see music as a language as well.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Right.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

So I spoke in music and that is how I express myself. In my growing up life, when I was 10, we had a tragedy in my family where my Uncle Paul was murdered by his boss at the Post Office. He was 27 years old-

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Wow.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

... in the post office. Yes. Washington, DC. And so that changed the trajectory of my entire family life. I mean, you can never predict the future of what's going to happen. But what I truly experienced, and it took me years later to really move through that trauma, realize how that trauma actually impacted me and my life to unpack it and understand it and metabolize that trauma. It wasn't until I was in my 30, 40 years old, really going through Goddard was a big help towards that healing.

So part of this journey and this storytelling is that a project that I'm currently working on is looking at what happens *after* the gun violence. What happens to the families like *after* the funeral, *after* all that is done, and how do people live on and really understanding that and how that lives in our society. So, yeah. I like to use my art of storytelling, creative storytelling, poetry, prose, epistles, different modalities, and to have people sit in a circle and say, "Well, what happened to you? And can you tell that story? And can you tell what happened next and how did that make you feel? Where did that leave you? Where are you now? Where you want to be?"

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Hearing you say that, my whole body just went... It just relaxed. This is part of what... I think one of your gifts is your ability to create that kind of space even in a one-on-one conversation. I remember that in early conversations with you that the care that you bring to listening and the care that you bring to language. And so I'm curious because there are couple places in what you said that feel like very important things to pick up on. One, that you're not a starving artist and you made a decision not to be, and you speak and you work in such powerful ways to say, "I'm going to be in a land of abundance. I'm going to move that way." And you teach that in your workshops and your work in the community.

And then this other imperative piece around trauma that you keep inviting us back to wholeness, back to healing, right? And so my question for you is when did... If you spoke in music and if you were

unexamined maybe in terms of how you turn that, transmute that trauma, transmute that pain, when in your life journey... And maybe it was Goddard, I don't know. But like when did all of a sudden it clicked for you? Oh, I have the ability to change my world by engaging language. When did that happen? And what are the ways in which you have kind of walked with that as a practice?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I want to say that it really did begin playing the guitar when-

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Interesting.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

... I realized that when I played my guitar, that it could say the things I was feeling and didn't have to open my mouth. And I could just hit notes and I could just be with that groove and I could be improvising or doing what I do and I loved playing jazz. I love playing classical music. It is the music of feeling and expression. And so when I think about being an instrumentalist, that was powerful. And then I went through this thing as a composer, as songwriter to say, "How do I change these notes into words?" I know how this is feeling, so then this is when I started to write music and song where I could express the feeling. And what I then started to do, as I became in my 20s and of course, an avid reader, as a writer, there were different things I was learning about manifesting and writing things down and making them happen and imagining what you want.

And so, as I was moving through my 20s and 30s, I was practicing things I didn't know I was doing and then learned about what I was doing. So let me just give you an example. One of the things I really got into was doing this collage art. So I would sit and get these magazines, no words, just pictures, magazines in old books or whatever, and I would put colors and patterns, but they would mean something to me. I might be looking at corals and blushes and teals, that's what I'm into, like now, these colors. And they speak about a peace and abundance to me that I understand what they mean.

And when I put them together and arrange them in a certain way, I could give language to that around what these colors mean. And then what it is I want for my life. And it's like that I'm channeling every cell in my body to be connected with that vision. And then I open up my front door and then there's Daniel standing there, "Hey, you know what, I need to talk with you about something that I'm working on. I'm wondering if you are interested in." I was like, "Oh, my God. I just dreamed this."

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

This is what I want. And so when that happened, the first time, it was a coincidence. When it happened the second time, I said, "Oh, just luck." When it happened the third time I said, "I think I got something going on here."

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right. That's right. So there's a recognition, right? That communication. And I want to go back for a second to something you were talking about with regard to the ancestors, right? So, when you're in a relationship, an active relationship to the ancestors, you are then in a relationship that actually lives both in and outside of time. It's across time. And so what you've been describing is that there's some perception that gets activated when you're in that creative zone, whether it is playing the music or making the collage where you get to see differently than you see in everyday life. And I even feel that, like I talked to you about that feeling of when you tell me your story, my body relaxes because, in that moment, we lift out of time. We lift out of the relationship that we're in right now. So maybe, can you speak about time a little bit and language?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Right. So now here's what's going to make the listeners go a little wild, maybe, they talk about artists and their woo woo, right?

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Bring it on.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Look, I've always been a *Star Trek* girl. So let me start there. As a young girl, love *Star Trek* could not get enough of it, right? I'm still a big *Star Trek* fan. There was a part of me that witnessing *Star Trek* at that time, could see the possibilities of being beyond the Earth. So I fell in love with the planets. Now, my

particular favorite planet was Mars at the time. I love being Mercury now, but... Because Mars was something that was so elusive, growing up in school during the time period that I was there, we were first going on the Moon. When we would be in a classroom, we have the TV on, and we going to watch man step on the moon for the first time, that was big deal.

Well, now, people say, "Shuttle's going up." It's like, "Oh yeah, really? Okay. Where am I going for coffee?" It's like no big deal. You have millionaires wanting to go take a circle around the Earth. And so for me, just that interplanetary possibility always felt very real for me. And on top of that, I really do believe in cosmic energy. We are in constant communication between what's happening here and the stars and above, and that's always happening. I mean, it's happening. I live at the beach now. So, I get to see the tidal waves. I get to see what's happening with the Moon, and then what's happening with water on a regular basis.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

That's right.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

So those things are not coincidental. We're in the middle of a nor'easter right now, down here, so that means rain in Florida, a lot of rain. And so part of this thing is like the weather, the Earth is constantly communicating. And so my job as a mindfulness practitioner is really to be still and quiet and listen. So when I'm in this space, it's like what is the rain telling me now? What is it telling me through its rhythms? So when I sit back and I really step back and listen and just be still in that space, I really do hear what I need to hear. And so that's why this work that you're doing and I think it really is important. It is introducing to us, sound and feeling and an awareness that is outside of our earthly experience if that makes sense.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

It makes so much sense. And thank you for seeing it that way and recognizing it that way.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Yeah.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Because again, it reminds me... Bringing back to the beginning of our conversation, I certainly feel like I grew up in... I even call it this way. I grew up in heartbreak because I grew up in a family, in a community that had been wounded by that trauma you described of all those assassinations, of the deliberate murder of the freedom movement. As you say, you asked yourself that question, what do you do *afterward*? And in a way I grew up in the *afterward*.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Right.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

But what I always understood was that even as growing up in the economic and political turmoil of the '70s and when Reagan came in the '80s, even as the thing shifted toward this kind of horror show that we're living in right now of corporate hypocrisy and right word political thinking, that is it was not about genuine conservatism, but it was about an ideology of singularity and erasure of difference. I could look around me, at the people I met, at the experiences that I was fortunate enough to have and say, "Oh, my goodness. All of those things that they said that they killed are still alive, but they're now living on the inside or they're living in space." So they're not readily apparent. So what the work was for me, and I can see the echo in terms of what you're describing with your own practice is to say, "How can we listen better to hear where they are?"

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Right.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

And it may no longer be on the surface. And I remember one of my great teachers, Constance Berkley told me one time that sometimes the revolution/evolution is like a river. And sometimes rivers go underground. They're not always above. They're not always visible. So what you described is like watching *Star Trek* and feeling... I bet there was some part of you that recognized it, right? It felt familiar.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Right.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

And that original crew where it's like Uhura and Sulu and Spock, and all of the OG crew that they were with one another in such a way that felt normal. They were like, "Oh, we're this wild range of people, but what we're here to do is to go on this five year mission."

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Exactly.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

And the focus was on that mission.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Yes.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

So, one more big question I have for you is, would you be willing to share some of your writing with us?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Well, I do have a piece and it's so funny. It just really jives nicely with what we're talking about. My current book manuscript is called *Black Joy Lives in the Revolution*.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

I love it.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

And so, my agent kind of reached out to me. My literary agent reached out to me and says, “Yvette, people want to hear about...” This is after George Floyd. There’s so much about racial turmoil. What about Black joy? And I was like, “I’m not feeling the Black joy right now.” I’m not smelling that right now. And so I went on a personal exercise. I like to challenge myself on a regular basis. And I went on an exercise of listing. I said, “I’m going to list out all moments of Black joy for me.” Right? And so I said, let me just take time to do that.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

And when I got down to about 201 on my list, and this is like one evening, then it became an awareness of... You know what? Black joy always lives in the revolution. And that was a story I needed to tell. And it does have to do with your ancestors. And it does have to do even with all of these voices and people that are literally trying to kill us off... what did Lucille Clifton say in her poem, “Won’t You Celebrate With Me? Something every day has tried to kill me and has failed.” Let us celebrate this. And so part of that I want to do, I’m going to try to pull up this poem. It’s the longest one page, for me, it’s a prose poem. So I’m going to pull it up on my computer if it’ll let me here because you know-

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Awesome. And you can read that long poem. That’s beautiful. We want it.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

All right. I was about to say because Mercury is not in retrograde, but my communication devices are not wanting to cooperate with me today. They’re trying to tell me to sync, which I need for you to sync your stuff up before I’m going to open up.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Isn’t that irritating?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Yeah, really.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

I find that so irritating.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Let me let it do what it do because I had it up and now it disappeared.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

All good.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

All right, thanks. But what I will say to you is... Here we go. Put it up. I wrote this piece knowing that I needed to talk about Black joy and I needed to talk about it in a way that maybe people who weren't there, who could really understand and appreciate... I needed to talk about it in a way that they could be there with me, if you would.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Understood. Yes.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

So this is the opening poem to the book, *Black Joy Lives in the Revolution*. And I called this piece is that Black joy, in spite of... I call it *Black Joy Always Lives in the Revolution*. So here it goes, if you can bear with me here.

[Reads poem]

Daniel Alexander Jones:

I have tears in my eyes. What a gift you've given.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Thank you for letting me read that long poem.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

It's interesting because it didn't feel long. It felt full. It felt wide. It felt so true.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Yeah.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

And I thank you. Yvette, in conclusion, I want to ask you one more thing, which is you're a master teacher in addition to being a master writer. Excuse me. I wonder if you have a word of wisdom for us about something, a practice, a thing that we can do now. What you've shown us today and everything that you've described from your life journey through this incredible piece that you share with us is that there are more worlds to discover on that enterprise, right? What is a lesson or a task or an exercise or a practice, something you would say to all of us that we should do now to begin opening up our world?

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

This is such a great question, Daniel, because I firmly believe all of us... Because I started this practice in my 30s, right? If you could do one thing is write in your journal, tell yourself the truth. Tell yourself the truth in your journal in explicit detail, your feelings, your thoughts, your smells, your taste. Just take five minutes. If you can't write every day, write once a week. Just put your thoughts down because thoughts that have been written down have become history and truth. And folk have told our stories that we didn't tell because we couldn't write, we couldn't read the language. We couldn't write that colonized language. And so we need to start of documenting our own reality and our own voice.

And one of the ways that everyday folks, they say, "Oh, I'm not a writer or I don't do this." Write someone you love, your child, partner, nephew, niece, write them a letter once a year. A year of reflection;; a year of what's been going on in your life, how you observed them in their life and give that to them and keep a copy for yourself because now we have technology, we can keep copies for ourselves. But since the time my children were babies, I wrote them every year a letter. And I have a copy of all those letters in their baby books. And when they were growing up, they used to get their baby book and want me to read them those letters like it was a story. And this is the way that we are the architect of our own stories and our own lives that we can share with anybody we want to sit in our lap and hear.

Daniel Alexander Jones:

Yvette, I thank you. I love you. And thank you for animating the possibility and the song Mercury says, “Oh, all the colors I see when you look at me,” and I feel that every time I’m in your presence, I see more colors. I see more possibilities and I see a future that is a very resonant future. And I know you’ve given us some tools to use to help us get there. I thank you and I bow to you. Thank you so much.

Yvette Angelique Hyater-Adams:

Thank you for having me.

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This conversation was recorded as part of *ALTAR NO. 1 – Aten*. For more information, additional conversations, and to participate in this immersive journey, visit:

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ALTAR NO. 1 – ATEN is commissioned by The Public Theater, and created with support from CalArts Center for New Performance and New York Live Arts’ Live Feed Residency, with funding from Rockefeller Brothers Fund, National Endowment for the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and the Partners for New Performance.

ALTAREDDSTATES is made possible with generous support from the New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Theater Project, with lead funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and additional support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Additional support provided by the Sundance Institute Theatre Lab.

Produced by CalArts Center for New Performance.

