



THE GOSPEL ELECTRIC

World Premiere of an immersive theatrical concert experience for audiences ages 10 and older at Park Avenue Armory in December

**Created and performed by Trusty Sidekick Theater Company
and commissioned by Park Avenue Armory**

New York, NY—December 2019—Park Avenue Armory presents the world premiere production of *The Gospel Electric*, a narrative rock & roll concert developed for middle-school audiences ages 10 & up, created and performed by Trusty Sidekick Theater Company (TSTC). There will be three public performances during the holiday season in the Armory’s **5th Floor Rehearsal Space**, **Saturday, December 14th at 11am** and **Sunday, December 15th at 11am and 1:30pm**, with additional showings for students from the Armory’s lauded arts-education program.

The Gospel Electric follows the story of **Sister Rosetta Tharpe**, considered by many to be the “Godmother of Rock and Roll.” In 1939, evangelical Christians and gospel music listeners had decided Tharpe had lost her way: Her music was too risqué, and her sound was too cavalier. Yet, somehow, this young woman from Cotton Plant, Arkansas, stitched together a musical palette of Mississippi Delta, Chicago blues, Philadelphia church music, and New York swing to create an entirely new sound, and in the process, became the most renowned female gospel singer and musician of the day. *The Gospel Electric* explores her musical coming of age and her navigation of a segregated, male-driven, and spiritually overbearing society. Combining original songs as well as motifs and songs from Tharpe, the work asks the question, “Who decides what ‘holy’ sounds like?”

The Gospel Electric is directed by Christina Eskridge, with dramaturgy by Pip Gengenbach, and features Daniel Townsend, Grace Galu, Jason Vance, Natalie Mack, Rachael Holmes, Christina Eskridge, Richard Arriaga, and Linton Smith.

The Gospel Electric is the final installment of *The Electric Doyenne*. The trilogy of narrative concerts commissioned for young audiences explores profound female figures in music history, who too often are overshadowed by their male peers, while reimagining what a concert and music theater experience for young people can be. Each features original music by the performers and asks young people to grapple with new ideas about the impact of art. *The Berlin Electric*, the first production in the series, premiered at Park Avenue Armory in May 2017 and followed the story of **Berta Geissmar**, the Manager and Lead Secretary to Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra before World War II. The series continued in December 2018 with the premiere of *The Mendelssohn Electric*, a 360-degree narrative concert that celebrates the story of **Fanny Mendelssohn**, the unsung but equally talented sister of the composer Felix Mendelssohn. *The Electric Doyenne* series was conceived by Drew Petersen, created with Trusty Sidekick Theater Company, and performed by The Electric Doyenne band.

The project is inspired by the Armory’s building and advances the institution’s role as an incubator of new works and a leader in arts education.

Tickets for *The Gospel Electric* are on sale for \$15 at armoryonpark.org, (212) 933-5812, and in person at the box office Monday through Saturday from 10am to 7:30pm.

This production is intended for audiences ages 10 and older and explores adolescent themes and content.

The Gospel Electric
Saturday, December 14, 2019 at 11am
Sunday, December 15, 2019 at 11am & 1:30pm
5th Floor Rehearsal Space, Park Avenue Armory

Cast

Daniel Townsend	<i>Lou & Ensemble</i>	<i>Guitar, Mandolin</i>
Grace Galu	<i>Rosetta & Ensemble</i>	<i>Guitar</i>
Jason Vance	<i>Joe & Ensemble</i>	<i>Banjo, Bass</i>
Natalie Mack	<i>Ceci & Ensemble</i>	<i>Ukulele</i>
Rachael Holmes	<i>Katie & Ensemble</i>	<i>Vocals</i>
Christina Eskridge	<i>Marie & Ensemble</i>	<i>Vocals, Guitar</i>
Richard Arriaga	<i>Tommy & Ensemble</i>	<i>Ukulele, Piano</i>
Linton Smith	<i>Gabriel & Ensemble</i>	<i>Drums, Horn</i>

Creative Team

Christina Eskridge	<i>Director</i>
Pip Gengenbach	<i>Dramaturg</i>

The show is written by Trusty Sidekick Theater Company, and the music is written by the band, The Electric Doyenne.

ABOUT TRUSTY SIDEKICK THEATER COMPANY

Based in New York City, Trusty Sidekick Theater Company creates bold, original productions for young people and their families. Hailed by *The New York Times* for “blur[ring] the boundaries between the imagined and the real,” Trusty Sidekick crafts new and exciting ways for audiences of all ages to interact with live performances. By developing new work in collaboration with young audiences as dramaturgs, the theater-going experience is redefined. Having created works in unique settings like a Revolutionary War-era battleground and traditional theater spaces, the company makes every production an adventure that is rooted firmly in the belief that youngsters deserve theater that ignites their imaginations and makes them think about the world in a new way. Commissions by Lincoln Center of multi-sensory works designed for audiences on the autism spectrum (*Up and Away*, *Campfire*) have garnered international attention for Trusty Sidekick’s hallmark of keeping the audience in mind when creating every element of a show. www.trustysidekick.org.

ABOUT PARK AVENUE ARMORY

Part palace, part industrial shed, Park Avenue Armory fills a critical void in the cultural ecology of New York by enabling artists to create, students to explore, and audiences to experience unconventional work that cannot be mounted in traditional performance halls and museums. With its soaring 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall—reminiscent of 19th-century European train stations—and an array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory offers a platform for creativity across all art forms.

Since its first production in September 2007, the Armory has organized and commissioned unconventional performances, installations, and cross-disciplinary collaborations in its vast drill hall that defy traditional categorization and challenge artists to push the boundaries of their practice. In two exquisitely restored historic period rooms, the Armory presents more intimate performances

and programs, including its acclaimed **Recital Series**, which showcases musical talent from across the globe within the intimate salon setting of the Board of Officers Room; and the **Artists Studio** series in the Veterans Room. A talk/performance series titled **Interrogations of Form** offers symposiums and salons that use the rooms throughout the building. The Armory also offers creativity-based arts education programs at no cost that serve more than 5,000 under-resourced New York City public school students a year.

Programmatic highlights from the Armory's first 12 years include **Bernd Alois Zimmermann's** harrowing *Die Soldaten*, in which the audience moved "through the music;" **Ernesto Neto's** sprawling and gauzy *Anthropodino; the event of a thread*, a site-specific installation by **Ann Hamilton**; the final performances of the **Merce Cunningham Dance Company** across three separate stages; *WS* by **Paul McCarthy**, a monumental installation of fantasy, excess, and dystopia; an immersive *Macbeth* set in a Scottish heath with **Kenneth Branagh**; Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* staged by **Peter Sellars** and performed by **Sir Simon Rattle** and the **Berliner Philharmoniker**; **Heiner Goebbels'** *De Materie* with floating zeppelins and a flock of 100 sheep; an acclaimed *The Hairy Ape*, directed by **Richard Jones** and starring **Bobby Cannavale**; **Pierre Boulez's** masterwork *Répons*, performed by **Ensemble intercontemporain** under the baton of **Matthias Pintscher**; **Simon Stone's** award-winning *Yerma*, starring **Billie Piper**; **Nick Cave's** *The Let Go*, an immersive, multi-sensory dance-based town hall; **Ivo van Hove's** adaptation of Visconti's *The Damned*, starring **Comédie-Française**; **William Kentridge's** massive and devastating music/theater work, *The Head & The Load*; **Sam Mendes' The Lehman Trilogy**; and **Satoshi Miyagi's** brilliant production on water of *Antigone*.

Concurrent with its artistic program, the Armory has undertaken an ongoing \$215-million revitalization of its historic building, designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron with Platt Byard Dovell and White as executive architects. www.armoryonpark.org.

SPONSORSHIPS



Park Avenue Armory's arts education programs are supported by generous grants from the Leonard and Judy Lauder Fund, The Thompson Family Foundation, The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation, the Zelnick/Belzberg Charitable Trust, the Hearst Foundations, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, the Emily Davie and Joseph S. Kornfeld Foundation, Janet Halvorson, Lester and Enid Morse, the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, Con Edison, the WME Foundation, the Ida and William Rosenthal Foundation, the Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, and the Michael Tuch Foundation. Additional support has been provided by members of the Armory's Education Committee.

The Armory's arts education programs are also made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature and are supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the city council.

###

Media Contacts

For more information or to request images, please contact:

Lesley Alpert-Schuldenfrei, lalpert@armoryonpark.org or (212) 933-5801

Allison Abbott, aabbott@armoryonpark.org or (212) 933-5834