

For Immediate Release

March 14, 2024

THE KITCHEN PRESENTS NEAL MEDLYN: *HOLY SATURDAY*, MARCH 30

Performances on and About the Day Between Jesus' Death and Resurrection Open into an Exploration of American Religiosity and the Transitory Moments Between Loss and Transformation.

***HOLY SATURDAY* Features a Series of Free Afternoon Events, including Two Collaborative Projects with Gillian Walsh, and Culminates with *PLAINSONG*, a New Work for Which Medlyn, Accompanied by a Full Band, Performs The Cure's *Disintegration*.**

All *HOLY SATURDAY* Events Take Place at the General Theological Seminary

The Kitchen presents ***HOLY SATURDAY***, a day-long multi-event performance liturgy created by **Neal Medlyn** in collaboration with **Gillian Walsh** and others, held during and organized around the day-before-Easter (March 30). As an artist twenty-plus years into a practice wherein he is no longer young and nowhere near done, Medlyn's life, history, and practice merge, as in all his previous work, with themes and subjects of a grand scale. In this case, religion, death, and anticipation. Medlyn brings various strands of research and work together in this afternoon of free smaller performances and installations culminating in a ticketed, evening-length performance. Neal Medlyn: ***HOLY SATURDAY*** is organized by **Matthew Lyons**, Curator, and takes place at the **General Theological Seminary** (429 West 20th Street between 9th and 10th Avenue).

HOLY SATURDAY seeks to continue a conversation that stretches backward and forward in time at the borders between gatherings of faith and gatherings of artists. From the prophet holding the tambourine 4,000 years ago to performance, music, and dance in theaters today; from the holy mountain to the local church, art and ministry have sought to approach those places where the veil is thinnest between this world and the next one.

HOLY SATURDAY is part three of Medlyn's *Death and Dying* series of performance pieces, following *Comeback Comeback* (2022), an Elvis-centric show, and *The Comfort in Being Sad* (2023), which imagined an alternate reality for the band Nirvana. *HOLY SATURDAY* culminates with *PLAINSONG*, for which Medlyn and a full band perform songs from The Cure's 1989 album *Disintegration*, accompanied by tableaux vivants. All three works in the series examine the figure of the aging artist, and continue considerations from Medlyn's seven-part *Pop Star Series* (whose final two works, *Wicked Clown Love* and *King*, were presented at The Kitchen) burrowing into the mythology surrounding the American celebrity. Incorporating those ideas into his more recent theological practices, Medlyn mines the religious undercurrents of much pop, rock 'n' roll, and soul music, and their intersection of the sacred and profane. Like the outsize personalities he's embodied and the various corners of American religiosity he's studied, this day of performances embraces a cathartic maximalism.

Disintegration opens with "Plainsong," on which Robert Smith sings, "'I think I'm old and I'm feeling pain,' you said, 'And it's all running out like it's the end of the world,' you said...Sometimes you make me feel like I'm living at the edge of the world." Throughout *HOLY SATURDAY*, Medlyn explores moments of transition and in-between—after loss, whether on the brink of the transformative or apocalyptic, embodying, as he describes, Robert Smith "wandering in this miasma of sad feelings." In the liturgical calendar, Holy Saturday is the day between Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, a time of mourning and uncertainty before a world-altering event.

HOLY SATURDAY also has its roots in a series of mail art projects Medlyn began in 2020 at the height of the pandemic, for which he created seven sets of writing, collages, art works, and a performance for no audience. For *HOLY SATURDAY*, however, Medlyn offers explicit welcomes to live audiences: The day features **INVITATORY XIII** and **XIV**, two new iterations of a monthly series of informal performance events that Medlyn conducted at General Theological Seminary in 2022-2023 while pursuing a Masters in Divinity Studies at the seminary.

On view throughout the event is **ADVENTURES IN WORSHIP**, an installation of video and photos documenting a series of research and performance trips that Medlyn and Gillian Walsh undertook in 2021 and 2022 to various sites of religious/spiritual significance in the United States. They shot video, met people, wrote postcards, and took photographs at sites significant to the histories of Mormonism; spiritualism; American Revivalism; American apocalypticism; evangelicalism, civil rights, and the Black church; mystical Catholicism; and eccentric incarnations of American religiosity.

Walsh also performs with Medlyn in **GODS NOT FINISHED**, their abstract music project begun in 2022. They have previously performed at General Theological Seminary and at Union Theological Seminary, where Walsh

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is pursuing a Divinity degree. *PLAINSONG* closes the day, with a full band including **Carl Baggaley, Joan Chew, Carmine Covelli, and Mike Jackson** as well as dancers **Hannah Applebaum, Emma Cohen, and Brianna Lux.**

HOLY SATURDAY, like its constituent parts and preceding projects, seeks to restart a dormant dialogue about how art and faith can talk to each other: non-dogmatically, open to conversation, open to allowing ourselves to be transformed by one another. As always, the dialogue is unique to the artist and the audience, but there is generally—perhaps due to the pandemic and the gradual ebb of the colonial Enlightenment era—a renewed desire for a thicker universe. One in which experience is not commodified, rationalized, and contained, and where art can grapple again with the spiritual, the internal, the felt, the messy, the glorious.

Says Medlyn, “Holy Saturday is a day in which some actual human people like Mary Magdalene lost somebody that they really loved, and they didn't think it was going to happen, and it happened very suddenly and brutally. And then it was, ‘what the fuck happens now?’ In both this post-pandemic era and also where I’m at in my personal and artistic life — of feeling things closing or transitioning but they haven’t fully changed quite yet — there feels like a connection to the confusion of Holy Saturday. It’s interesting to sit in this weird space of, ‘what’s going on?’ I’m really invested musically and artistically and personally in the in-betweenness this day represents.”

HOLY SATURDAY Schedule of Events

2pm: *INVITATORY XIII* and *ADVENTURES IN WORSHIP*

FREE with RSVP

4pm: *GODS NOT FINISHED* and *INVITATORY XIV*

FREE with RSVP

7pm: *PLAINSONG*

Tickets: \$5-\$15

About Neal Medlyn

Neal Medlyn (he/him) is an artist whose work straddles the lines between theater, performance art, comedy, faith, and music. His most well-known work is his seven show *Pop Star Series* and Champagne Jerry, the subsequent iteration of his work with popular music. *The Pop Star Series* spanned seven shows and eight years, as Medlyn remade himself in the images of Lionel Richie, Phil Collins, Prince, Britney Spears, Miley

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Cyrus, Insane Clown Posse, and Michael Jackson, excavating the deep, generative weirdness of celebrity. *The Pop Star Series* works have been presented at venues such as Dance Theater Workshop, The Kitchen, PS122, the Chocolate Factory and others, as well as in various festivals and theaters around the U.S. and abroad such as American Realness, New York; the TBA Festival, Portland, OR; the Live Art Festival at Kampnagel, Hamburg, Germany; and others. *The Pop Star Series* was made into a book published by 53rd State Press featuring photographs by Paula Court. Medlyn's work as Champagne Jerry has appeared at Joe's Pub, BAM, New York Live Arts and on tour in various music venues, art galleries and Walmart parking lots as well as online. His album *For Real, You Guys* debuted in 2014, followed by *The Champagne Room* in 2016 and *I've Grown* in 2018. His albums feature collaborations with Max Tannone, Adam Ad-Rock Horovitz, Bridget Everett, Kathleen Hanna and others. Other work, notably his reenactment of a Beyoncé concert, has been presented by the New Museum for Contemporary Art, the Andy Warhol Museum and others. He was the recipient of a Bessie award for sound design for his work with Miguel Gutierrez & the Powerful People's *Last Meadow* and has danced for Adrienne Truscott, David Neumann, and Gillian Walsh.

He has lectured at NYU and the University of Michigan, been a guest artist at CalArts, guest taught at Sarah Lawrence and was an adjunct professor teaching devised theater at Playwrights Horizons Theater School / NYU for six years. He was a board member of the academic journal *Women & Performance* and has served on the artist advisory council for Movement Research. Medlyn is ordained and has a master's in theology from General Theological Seminary.

About Gillian Walsh

Gillian Walsh is a choreographer and performer from Brooklyn, NY. She has presented work at Gropius Bau, The Kitchen, Performance Space New York, Performa, Danspace Project, New York Live Arts, and other spaces. Over the past decade she has worked with a range of artists both as a performer and collaborator. Most recently she's worked with Richard Maxwell, Sarah Michelson, and Neal Medlyn. She is a student of theology at Union Theological Seminary.

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About The Kitchen

Founded in 1971 as an artist-driven collective, The Kitchen today reaffirms and expands upon its originating vision as a dynamic cultural institution that centers artists, prioritizes people, and puts process first. Programming in a *kunsthalle* model that brings together live performances, exhibition-making, and public programming under one roof, The Kitchen empowers its audiences and communities to think creatively and radically about what it means to shape a multivalent and sustainable future in art. The Kitchen seeks to cultivate and hold space for wild thought, risky play, and innovative and experimental making, encouraging artists and cultural workers alike to defy boundaries and sending them into the world to remake art history and catalyze creative change.

Among the artists who have presented significant work at The Kitchen are Muhal Richard Abrams, Laurie Anderson, ANOHNI, Robert Ashley, Charles Atlas, Kevin Beasley, Beastie Boys, Gretchen Bender, Dara Birnbaum, Anthony Braxton, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Julius Eastman, Philip Glass, Leslie Hewitt, Darius James, Joan Jonas, Bill T. Jones, Devin Kenny, Simone Leigh, Ralph Lemon, George Lewis, Robert Longo, Robert Mapplethorpe, Sarah Michelson, Tere O'Connor, Okwui Okpokwasili, Nam June Paik, Charlemagne Palestine, Sondra Perry, Vernon Reid, Arthur Russell, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Spiegel, Talking Heads, Greg Tate, Cecil Taylor, Urban Bush Women, Danh Võ, Lawrence Weiner, Anicka Yi, and many more.

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