The Department of Theatre Arts Announces its 2015-16 Production of Sarafina!

Our 2015-16 season, In the Break: Radical Childhood, Youth & Insurgency, interrogates children and youth as figures of power and as agents within power structures. What emerges are complicated portraits of young people challenging authority, inciting rebellion, disrupting hierarchies, dismantling hegemony, and (re)storing order.

In 1976, about 200,000 black students assembled to protest against government decree that imposed the “official” language of Afrikaans as the new medium of instruction in their classes, instead of their own language, Zulu. Through story and song Sarafina! takes place at Morris Isaacson High School in Soweto. The police and army came to break up the crowd, and many children were injured or killed during this protest. The uprising marked the beginning of a period of violent unrest that continues even today. The students’ focus has grown beyond the issue of Afrikaans to encompass every aspect of the black political struggle. In the musical’s finale, the students present a class play about the symbolic Day of Liberation they all dream of, which is realized when their hero, Nelson Mandela is released after more than 20 years in prison. This year, America has witnessed a record number of student-led movements that have changed history, and influenced the fight for democratic and social justice around the world. The students of Howard University have participated in some of these very movements; indeed Sarafina! is a timely production.

The Howard production is the first occasion that the play will be presented with a commissioned update in the prologue, highlighting the end of Apartheid, and the release of Nelson Mandela from his 25-year imprisonment. Under the Direction of Eric Ruffin; book, music and lyrics by Mbongeni Ngema; arranged by Mbongeni Ngema and Hugh Masekela; choreography by Jakari Sherman - Performances take place in the IRA Aldridge Theater March 2-5 & 9-12, 2016.