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For High Res Photos, go to: http://www.jalc.org/TheRoad_noFI/embassy.html



Universes

WHO/WHAT: **Universes** is a hip-hop a capella ensemble comprised of **Gamal Abdel-Chasten, Mildred Ruiz, William "Ninja" Ruiz and Steven Sapp**. The group will tour as part of the 2007-2008 Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad program, produced by Jazz at Lincoln Center and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Over the past two years, the program has presented 17 tours visiting 120 cities, in 66 countries, on 5 continents.

WHEN: January 26 - February 23, 2008*

WHERE: **MOROCCO** (January 26-February 1); **TUNISIA:** (February 2-5); **TURKEY:** (February 6-11); **KENYA** (February 13-19); **UNITED KINGDOM:** (February 20-23)*

*Dates and locations subject to change

HOW: Please visit **The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad** at www.jalc.org/TheRoad for more information on this program. In addition, you can listen to music and stories about the program for free on **Jazz at Lincoln Center Radio** at <http://www.jalc.org/jazzcast/program.asp?programNumber=205>

BACKGROUND:

The program, produced by Jazz at Lincoln Center and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, is designed to foster cultural exchange with audiences worldwide. Between Fall 2007 and Spring 2008, six jazz quartets and four urban music ensembles will visit regions including Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. Participating bands were selected from a national pool of applicants in a competitive audition process.

International tour activities include public concerts, master classes, lecture-demonstrations, workshops, jam sessions, media outreach and collaborations with local musicians. The program also incorporates free performances by each quartet hosted by Jazz at Lincoln Center at Dizzy's Club *Coca-Cola* in New York and at The National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C.

"Cultural diplomacy allows artists and audiences to share in a common experience that reaches beyond differences in culture, religion, language and generations and to connect as people without borders," said Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Professional and Cultural Exchanges Alina L. Romanowski.

"In the historic tradition of such musical alumni as Armstrong, Ellington, and Gillespie, these tours focus on diverse geographic audiences and the dynamic interaction born of music. The emphasis on education as well as performance leads to powerful exchange for our audiences and musicians alike," said Susan John, Director of Touring for Jazz at Lincoln Center.

CONTACT:

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UNIVERSES is an ensemble company of multi-disciplined writers and performers who fuse poetry, theater, jazz, hip-hop, down-home blues and Spanish boleros to create challenging and entertaining theatrical works. Committed to their roots in the New York City poetry scene, the group has performed in venues all over the five boroughs, including Nuyorican Poets Café, Joe's Pub, Aaron Davis Hall and The Bronx Academy of Art & Dance, among

others. They also present their work in schools and colleges across the U.S. and recently completed a tour to Chile.

Gamal Abdel-Chasten (co-founder, vocals, poet, percussion) is known as “the base” of the group, as his roots reach deep into music and lyricism. He has been a professional writer and performance poet for over 11 years and met UNIVERSES co-founders Sapp and Ruiz at a Nuyorican Poets Café open mic night. Chasten counts Nikki Giovanni, Willie Perdomo, Louis Reyes Rivera and Muhammed Ali among his poetic inspirations and recently wrote, directed and starred in a one-man show inspired by Ali’s story. In addition to his long list of on-stage and directorial credits, Chasten is also the artistic director of Voices UnBroken, a community-based organization dedicated to providing under-heard members of the community with the tools and opportunity for creative self-expression.

Mildred Ruiz (co-founder, vocals, poet) is the “earth mother” of the group and her full-throttled vocals supply the musical foundation for the rest of the members to build on. Ruiz’ voice is a cultural hybrid, mixing Spanish boleros with gospel, the blues and contemporary sounds. She works all over New York as a playwright, actor and vocalist and recently participated in an Arts Link International Exchange with Teatre Polski in Poland. Ruiz is a past recipient of the TCG National Theater Artist Residency Program Award, OBIE Award Grant, Bessie Award and BRIO Awards from the Bronx Council on the Arts. She is currently working with Barco Music Productions to launch her debut CD, *Blues & Boleros in a Bag*.

William “Ninja” Ruiz (MC, beatbox, poet, verbal DJ), the UNIVERSES crew’s newest member, brings with him a unique brand of Nuyorican-flavored vocals, beats and rhymes. He was born and raised on the Lower East Side of New York City and received his bachelor’s degree in theater from Bard College, where he studied under Joan Akaliuts, Elizabeth Smith and Bob Holman. In addition to his work with UNIVERSES, Ninja has appeared in Jack Kerouac’s *Ti-Jean Blues*, which was adapted and directed by Joan Akalaitis, Nicole Quinn’s *Tree Tails* directed by Shelly Wyant, Oscar Wild’s *Salome* directed by Nick Jones, Anthony Rivera’s *Latin Howel* directed by Todd A. Jackson and Nicky Cruz’s *Run Baby Run* directed by Chris Fredricks. He also wrote and directed his own adaptation of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* entitled *Waiting for Gordo*.

Steven Sapp (co-founder, poet, and percussion) is a Bronx-born director, playwright and poet. He cut his theater teeth at Bard College, where he met UNIVERSES co-founder Ruiz while directing her stage debut. The recipient of honors from prestigious theatre institutions like New Dramatists and the Eugene O’Neill National Playwrights Conference, Sapp directs the theater program at the Abrons Arts Center in New York. He and Ruiz are also co-founders of The Point, a South Bronx cultural center offering classes and performances in theater, poetry, dance, visual art and other invaluable services to the community’s youth.

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Jazz at Lincoln Center is dedicated to inspiring and growing audiences for jazz. With the world-renowned Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and a comprehensive array of guest artists, Jazz at Lincoln Center advances a unique vision for the continued development of the art of jazz by producing a year-round schedule of performance, education and broadcast events for audiences of all ages. These productions include concerts, national and international tours, residencies, weekly national radio and television programs, recordings, publications, an annual high school jazz band competition

and festival, a band director academy, a jazz appreciation curriculum for children, advanced training through the Juilliard Institute for Jazz Studies, music publishing, children's concerts, lectures, adult education courses and student and educator workshops. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis Jazz at Lincoln Center will produce nearly 2,000 events during its 2007-08 season in its home in New York City, Frederick P. Rose Hall, and around the world. For more information, visit www.jalc.org.

U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs promotes mutual understanding between the United States and other countries through international educational and exchange programs. Through its Cultural Programs Division, the Bureau supports a variety of cultural exchanges programs that support U.S. foreign policy, foster America's artistic excellence, and demonstrate America's respect and appreciation for other cultures and traditions. The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad program presents selected professional American performers of jazz and urban music on concert tours in countries with limited exposure to live American culture. For more information, visit <http://exchanges.state.gov/education/citizens/culture/index.htm>.

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For more information please visit <http://www.jalc.org/TheRoad>

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