

Lambert Family Lecture: Saeed Jones

Followed by Conversation and Q&A, Moderated by poet Maggie Smith

Megan Cavanaugh: Hello. Hello and welcome. I'm Megan Cavanaugh. I am one of the co-interim directors here at the Wexner Center for the Arts. I use she/her pronouns, and my light brown hair is straight and shoulder length. I'm wearing a black top and pants.

Kelly Stevelt: Hi, I'm Kelly Stevelt, the other co-interim executive director at the Wex right now and I also use she/her pronouns and have brown hair that is straight and shoulder length. I'm wearing a pattern blazer and a black dress this evening.

Megan Cavanaugh: We're joining you today from the stage in the Film/Video Theater, which is set for the lecture tonight with a podium, a large screen featuring information about today's programs, and two chairs. Thank you so much for joining us this evening, whether you're tuning in virtually or here with us in the Film/Video Theater. This is a really exciting week for us at the Center. We had two amazing exhibitions opening today. Carlos Motta, *Your Monsters/Our Idols* and *Sharing Circles*, Carol Newhouse and *The WomanShare Collective*. We hope you stop by if you haven't already. They're actually open until eight o'clock tonight, so you have plenty of time after the lecture to see them and all they have to offer. They'll be up until the end of the year. We're really thrilled though tonight to be able to welcome Saeed Jones this evening to present the Lambert Family Lecture. Yay! This series is made possible by the generous support from the Lambert Family Lecture Series Endowment Fund, which promotes dialogue about global issues and art and contemporary culture. We'd also like to thank and acknowledge our additional sponsors. Learning and Public Practice Programs are made possible by American Electric Power Foundation, Huntington, and Big Lots Foundation. Special thanks are also in order for so many amazing colleagues throughout the Wex who've really made this program and exhibition possible, including Tech Services, Visitor Experience, Advancement, Learning & Public Practice, and really our entire amazing team here at the Wex that, if we went through all of them, would go on way too long. So, thanks to all of you.

Kelly Stevelt: Yeah, so we now have the pleasure of introducing Saeed. Saeed is an award-winning author, Columbus native, social commentator, and truly thoughtful contributor to our local community and society at large. His new collection of poetry, *Alive at the End of the World* was released this week by Coffee House Press and is available for purchase in the Wex Store, which will be open until 8:00 PM this evening. Following his presentation, Saeed will be joined on stage by Ohio State alumna and Columbus born poet and essayist, Maggie Smith, whose books are also available in the store. At the end of the program, we'll have time for audience questions, both in person and online, and via the Wex hotline at 614-813-3416. So again, you can text 614-813-3416 for questions during the Q&A. As the program concludes, we would love to have your feedback about the program, and we will have staff members just outside the doorway who will have paper surveys. We'll also be emailing a survey, and we would really appreciate your

feedback. We actually are going to be really delighted to share a couple of copies of both Saeed's and Maggie's books with a few of the folks who complete the surveys. So, without further ado, we would love to now have Saeed join us on stage and deliver this year's Lambert Lecture.

Saeed Jones: Thank you so much, thank you. Oh my goodness, oh a timer, okay, hi, hi. Hello, it is so good to be here at the end of the world with all of you. My name is... And thank you for all the work you both are doing and are going to do because buckle up. I wrote it, I know. Hi, I am Saeed Jones, my pronouns are he/him. I am an African American man wearing a postmodern afro. That's the only way I could think to describe it. And I'm wearing a black and white tunic and black gauchos. Okay, thank you to the Wexner for having me. The Lambert Lecture, this is incredible. You know, to have the opportunity to talk about the work and to talk even more specifically about what we are living through together. I'm honored to be here with you. Thank you for coming. Maggie is my girl. She is my happy hour, you know, ride or die, my coffee pal, and she is a writer, and I'm sure this is true for many of you. Hi, Brittany. Hi, hello, it's so nice to see friends. Emma, hi, hello, hello. You know, Maggie is someone whose work and whose spirit. Hi, Marcus. Okay, I'll stop, I'll stop. You know, that I look to. I look to you as a person, as a friend, as a literary citizen, and certainly as a poet to navigate these waters. And I know so many of you feel the same way. Keep moving. I was like, okay, we will keep on moving, you know. So, I'm so excited to talk to you. Okay, is there anything else? Probably.

I am going to read poems from this very chaotic book I wrote called *Alive at the End of the World*. It is a poetry collection, sure, but it is also my sincere attempt to embody chaos because I think one of the phenomenon's of our daily experience at this point is that our lives exist in a crucible where on one hand we are trying to process, acknowledge, survive, make art out of personal griefs, while also so it's like from the bottom, and then from the top we're also being besieged by what I think of as systemic betrayals, right? We're living in a city named after a colonizer on stolen land. We are here because of violence. We are here because of grief. While we're trying to shop for groceries. While we're trying to take care of our loved ones. While we're trying to organize for better labor rights. Like all of this is going on kind of at the same time. And then on another plane, collective events like the history of enslavement, like violence against indigenous people, like the HIV/AIDS crisis, which was an apocalyptic pandemic. It's not over, right? And as a black queer person, I hold that wisdom, that painful wisdom in my body. It's still happening. However, I'm in the present where also people talk about things in the future, like climate change and climate disaster, as if it's something on the event horizon. Whereas if you speak to people in the Pacific Northwest or in Pakistan, they will tell you that that disaster, that future is here. So, to be alive at the end of the world, it's like you're this little dot, and from every dimension, you know, the boundaries are blurred and it's confusing, so let's get into it. And, you know, it'll be fine. It'll be fine, it'll be fine. It'll be fine. It'll be fine.

Hi, so one of the weird things about this moment is that every day apocalypses keep happening. And I'm gonna read the first poem in the book, which is about gun violence. So, I'm gonna give you a second to process that, because it's not easy. But I think that's an excellent example. Like, as I was talking about recently, did you know there was a shooting in Uvalde, Texas a couple of weeks ago? Nope, I'm not talking about the one at the elementary school that killed all those babies and those teachers. I'm

talking about the one that took place about 10 days ago at the memorial downtown, right. So like, less than just like a couple of months after which just like a cataclysmic, horrible tragedy that should stop everything, there's already another shooting, you know? So you can't even keep up with that. And so one of the ways I wanted to nod toward that is not just to write this poem specifically about gun violence, but to have several poems in the book with the same title. Because don't you feel a little crazy where you're like, didn't that just happen? Which shooting? Who are we? Which police? Who got, huh? You know what I mean? Which abortion ban are we talking about? You can't keep up, you know, and that's part of the violence of repetition.

"Alive at the End of the World." "The end of the world was mistaken for just another midday massacre in America. Brain matter and broken glass, blurred boot prints in pools of blood. We dialed the newly dead, but they wouldn't answer. We texted, begging them to call us back but the newly dead don't know how to read. In America, a gathering of people is called target practice or a funeral, depending on who lives long enough to define the terms. But for now, we are alive at the end of the world. Shell shocked by headlines and alarm clocks, burning through what little love we have left. With time, the white boys with guns will become wounds we won't quite remember enduring. How did you get that scar on your shoulder? Oh, a boy I barely knew was sad once."

And I think I'm just gonna read a series of these just to stress us all out in the same. It's like, you know, this is our trauma bonding. It's like, it's an art experience. This book is my first poetry collection in eight years. My first book *Prelude to Bruise*. Oh my gosh, I'm so proud of that book and it feels like a different Saeed wrote it. But I wanted to at least have one poem that acknowledged the main character in that book. He was referred to as Boy. And so if you've read *Prelude to Bruise*, or if you're going to read him, know that this is how Boy is doing, you know, alongside the rest of us. Not well, you know, shocker.

"Alive at the End of the World." "The world ends, and I make a dress, out of the names I live to inflict on myself, painful, to put the dress on, even more painful to take it off. I banish the dress to my closet as long as my body can bear. The world ends again, so I drag the dress out, bandage myself back into the truth of beauty. A bejeweled bodice of screams, tight waist of wasted bullets. The train leaves bruises everywhere I walk. Neighbors call me a disaster when the world ends. This is what it means to be a man in pain, naked, in the middle of the street."

You don't have to clap for the end of the world. It gets weird, thank you. So, you know, I'm gay, so I say this with like full. I'm gay. Now you know. I say this with full transparency. Have you met men? Wanna talk about apocalypses. They're just very stressful to be around. You know, even more stressful to be attracted. Hi, Hoss, my boyfriend's over there. Hi, thank you. Love you, honey. He is a wonderful boyfriend, very supportive. I joke about that, but also, you know the thing is to suffer is to live. We all suffer. It is perhaps one of the few things we all have in common. However, I would argue, particularly for cisgender men, and you know how the hierarchy works in terms of power, there are these different notches on your way to the good ol' boys club. I don't think it's a coincidence though, that those of us who identify, and live, and benefit from the privileges of living as men, however, when we suffer, it's not just a problem for us. It tends to be a problem for everyone else around us. And I think it's important for us to think about that, because as I am writing into the collision between, you know, the personal grief and the kind of collective, I'm just like, yeah, that's how we bridge that gap, thinking about what that means. And so with Robert Hayden's poem, "Those Winter Sundays," in mind, I wrote this one.

"Alive at the End of the World." "The end of the world loved us like a father who bragged about the broken roof he kept overhead whenever we'd complain about the night air watching us sleep, or whenever we'd wince at his reach. The end of the world would shout, I made that roof. What have you made? Nothing but tears. Nothing but waste. Chairs and coffee mugs came at us like asteroids. We're sorry, we'd lie. No one loves us like you love us, we'd hiss from hiding places we treated like siblings. Crying alone in the kitchen, he had just ruined. The end of the world would scream, you're gonna miss me when I've gone. As if a man has to die to haunt his children. As if we didn't already daydream about the wood grain of his coffin, the thread-bare suit, we couldn't wait to see his body stuffed into, the hymns we'd stutter through, off-key on purpose, knowing damn well that the end of the world's ghost was mean as spit, and already on its way."

Thank you, thank you. Honestly, your startled mmms and, you know, private texts to your therapist mid-poem. It's enough, I feel it, I feel it. Well, now let's get to the intense poems. I want to think about the status quo. That is a beautiful dress, hello, hi. Thank you for joining us. Thank you for joining us. I wanna think about the status quo because I have to admit, as much as you know, I am, like all of you, bewildered by what's going on and it's like very stressful, and at times it feels unfair. I mean, like I said, we have to think about the systems that got us here. And there's a scenario in which the end of the world, however you want to frame that, is an opportunity for change, you know? So I wanna spend just a moment thinking about, let's set aside the end of the world, let's just talk about like a normal day, when things were fine, you know. Let's make America great again. "After the School Board Meeting." We're gonna have a good time tonight. That is exactly the energy I'm looking for. I love it, like mmmm. Mmm-hmm, "After the School Board Meeting" is exactly what you think.

"Somewhere in suburbia, a man-made creek runs black with junk we choked on then spat out, tin can curses and cracked bones from broken homes. We broke down, paved over, and built our shiny, short-lived lives on. All the foxes and coyotes have ghosted our gated, security guarded imitations of strife. Our dreams, gentrify your nightmares. And rumor has it, our high school was built on a black cemetery. Boo-fucking-hoo, we pulled ourselves up by your bootstraps, fucked missionary." I curse. "Fucked missionary under a nuclear moon to get here, and what we've got starts to rot as soon as we get it. So I say, good riddance, name of the game, America is American for wreck and repeat. This song isn't comfort. It's just to help me sleep. At least this misery is mine. I sing in my loaned and lonely dark, and in the poplar tree outside my window, a Mockingbird sings my song back to me."

Thank you. Hmmm, hmmm, this is "Heritage." In 2019, I published my memoir *Alive*, ooh, not *Alive at the End of the World*, oh my God, that is such a meta joke. That is such a Freudian slip. It's titled *How We Fight for Our Lives*. And I went on book tour and one of my stops was in Oxford, Mississippi. And it was just a surreal place to be, even as someone, I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, I grew up in Texas. I know the south very well. And I was like, this is some new shit. This is some neo-confederacy, you know? And so it was just very odd. I did not feel safe. And then the one other thing you need to know, remember, remember Donald Trump was president of the United States. And so in the middle of of my stay there, I'm like freaking out about everything, everything feels like a pointed metaphor, and then I wake up one morning, and remember, there was one of the inquiries, I think it was like the impeachment inquiry, Donald Trump tweeted that he felt like he was being lynched. And as a black person visiting the state of Mississippi, I was like, this is too much. So I wrote this and I refer to this, and Maggie and I are gonna talk about this form, this is what I call a nonfiction poem.

"Heritage, October, 2019, Oxford, Mississippi." "The color of a memory is the difference between haunted and hunted. In Mississippi, red, white, and blue don't mean, remember, this is America. They mean history is a gun. And every bullet in its chamber wants you to forget. They mean we tried our best not to be America and failed, and now we keep forgetting to forget. And anyway, who did you vote for? No need to ask us. You already know. They mean the white man in the White House who tweeted this morning that he's being lynched. Outside my hotel, no, I'm not from around here, on the street corner there's a plaque that tells me where I can find the body of the town's first white settler. But it's almost sundown, and I've been told darkness in Mississippi is not a metaphor, so I chase the shadows back into the hotel. At the bar, I beg the bartender to make me a stronger drink. He tries, and he fails. I'm scared, and black, and mostly sober at the hotel bar, and reading an essay about lynching when some Ole Miss frat boys explode into the room, cheering in a dead language, and my heart doesn't even wait for the check. My heart is already gone. My heart is cowering in the hallway in front of my hotel room because I have the key. And I just now got the check. And I keep forgetting to forget that the America I was born in will not be the America in which I die."

So, you know, maybe some things do need to change. Let's talk about colonization. I read this, okay, I saw a tweet. I read this morning. I saw a tweet. It's fine. It's all media. That the queue, you know they call it the queue in the UK. Everything's so chic and fancy over there. The queue to see Queen Elizabeth's body is currently 24 hours long. Y'all that excited to see your colonizer. She was 96. I think it was okay, you know? Not like she died in her prime, okay. I hope, you know, we take an opportunity as people who are lucky enough to live here and have these privileges. I hope we see Carlos Motta's show. I hope we think about how did Columbus get its name and why? What does it mean for us to be here? What does it mean for me to be able to say, I'm so happy to, what does that mean? You know what I mean? This isn't happenstance. And when I was in graduate school, something that would annoy me was that people would say, I wanna write persona poems to give voice to the voiceless. They're not voiceless. Give them the damn mic, they can talk. So I decided I wanted to write a persona poem to give voice to the colonizers. They're underrepresented. So this goes out to all my colonizers out there. I know you're so scared. I know it's such a hard time. This is in their voice.

"Grief #913." "I grieve the boy I killed and the country fashioned out of his blood stains. I grieve that it was so easy, the knife, lazy and confident, invading him. This is what love feels like. I grieve that he believed me. Dumb animal, doe-eyed, ready-made gift. Just another border outlined in barbed wire and crime scene chalk. I grieve that, even then, I already knew I'd do it again, again, again, again. I grieve a continent, nations united by the way terror turns me on. The hot instant between thrust and gasp. I want you and I had you. Again, again, again, again, I grieve my face onto the covers of history books. I grieve the descendants, dumb animals, dead eyed, ready-made gifts. This is what love requires. I grieve that they believe me."

I don't think it's a coincidence that at this moment that we're in this crucible, you know, the powers that be, however you want to define that, are working so hard to erase, censure, distort history in real time. In real time, you know? And I think we should pay attention to that because it's obviously proof of how important accuracy and a healthy relationship to reality is. But I think we should also acknowledge that it is a violent tactic that is acting upon us. And as I mentioned before, I'm interested in this book, in repetition, because that's the thing. You know, I'm a kid of the nineties and the early two thousands so, you know, I feel like we were spoon fed ideas about the apocalypse, the end of the world, by like executives in Hollywood. "Armageddon," "Deep Impact," "Independence." Like that's what it was. Or

even, you know, as someone, I grew up in the south, remember like the second coming books, that book series, that was like, right? It was like a very dramatic, linear, one-time event, and everything's fine until that one thing happens, you know? And we know that's not actually what it is, and so I'm interested in this book in finding different ways to acknowledge what it actually feels like to be living through apocalyptic events. And one of them is, you know, try writing a poem about police brutality with specific details. It's a very stressful enterprise. It just keeps happening. And so I'm going to read a note that I wrote at the time that this book came out, and then I'm going to acknowledge what has happened recently, here in Columbus, Ohio. The poem, 'The Trial,' was written with George Floyd and Darnella Frazier in mind, in particular. One of the many trials black people endure is the violent repetition of police brutality and images of that brutality. I wrote the first draft of the poem the morning of June 11th, 2021. That afternoon, Darnella Frazier was awarded a Pulitzer Prize special citation for quote, "Courageously recording the murder of George Floyd." But this is the thing, she was 17 years old the day George Floyd was murdered." Like she's not a citizen journalist, she was a child, you know? That is not a reasonable expectation that we should be forced on our young people, but here we are. And then according to the "Columbus Dispatch," earlier this week, the officer who shot 20-year-old Donovan Lewis in Columbus, Ohio on August 30th had been fired previously, and then reinstated by an arbitrator. Video footage of that murder shows that, within one second of entering Donovan Lewis's bedroom, this officer shot the fatal shot. Within one second. I can't even look down at the page and like, realize what line I need to read within one second, much less make such an important decision. We have to think about the way we let power function.

This is "The Trial." "I don't watch the video, but can feel it playing on a loop, in a room miles away from where he keeps dying behind my eyes. All I have left are tiny twitches, small choices. Please, I beg, alone in the box of my dark. I don't want to hurt that way today. I already hurt that way yesterday. Please, don't kill him again. No one listens when I talk myself in circles, not even me. When I hurt like this, I'm just someone's redaction. A slur the other slurs prefer not to utter, used and useless, while the video plays me, rewinds to unspool me, records over an old, innocent video of me breathing. This video has got me against the wall, or by the throat, or on my back, or, oh, who cares? Even my exhaustion is tired. Just pick a position, pick a reason, and if it doesn't kill me the way you prefer, try again tomorrow."

Thank you. Thank you. I'm gonna read a few more poems and then I'm excited to get to talk with my friend Maggie about them. And gosh, we could just talk all night. Weirdly, the apocalypse gives you a lot to talk about, who knew? This is "Date Night." Yeah, so I wrote a memoir, you know, and I'm also really interested, and the ethics of this worked, and the ethics of writing about my own experiences, of writing about people I care about. My mother, Carol Sweet Jones, raised me as a single parent, and she died of a heart disease in 2011, which means that May of 2021, in the midst of the pandemic, you know, I was thinking about her, of course. I was what I call 10 years into the afterlife of that personal grief, in the middle of a pandemic, which pointedly, disproportionately, impacts people like black and brown women, right? You know, my mom worked at an airport in the state of Georgia. And so I'm gonna read some poems about that grief.

This is "Date Night." "I meant to bring you flowers, but when I reached your door, all I had in my hands was teeth. Sorry, I meant to say grief. Seems like all I say is grief, or ghost, or please, don't leave. Lately, I say it in my mother's sleep. She used to cry and call out her brother's name in her sleep. I've written about this before. Grief, of course, but also her sleep, but also her brother. He doesn't call me anymore. He is my blood, and in a book I wrote, but I don't think he bothered to read. I grind my teeth in my sleep.

A man I used to sleep with told me I talk in my sleep, but blushed and held his tongue when I asked him to say what I said in my sleep. When a Venus fly trap flowers, two white blossoms sit atop of very tall stock, green teeth, way down at the bottom. It's trying to avoid triggering its own traps. It's trying to keep the bees it needs for pollination away from its own traps. I'm most dangerous when I'm hungry. I'm most hungry when I'm hurting. Seems like I'm always hurting. Nothing but teeth. Nothing but the same words calling out to me in my sleep. Grief, asking its ghosts not to leave, please. It's not up to me when I get to stop crying, or hurting, or holding memories in my mouth, gentle as bees. I promised not to eat, but, oh, the hurt is so sweet."

Um, okay, oh, thank you, thank you. Very kind, very kind. Ok. I'm going to read two poems. One, I'm gonna read, "The Dead Dozens." I'm gonna read "The Dead Dozens." A poem that is very close to my heart but it's also very wild. I just wanna acknowledge that because I'm excited to talk about mad humor and laughter. And as you've noted, I do like to laugh, and I have a pretty wild sense of humor, and it was fun to find a way to work that into the book. So I'm gonna read that first, and then I'll read, "A Spell to Banish Grief," and then we'll chat, okay. I'm telegraphing, we're like, you know? You'll notice our outfits match. We're just like that. "The Dead Dozens," you know, if you know, you know. If you know, you know. The girls who get it, get it. For the girls who don't, you're white. Yo mama jokes, you know yo mama jokes, you act like you don't but you know. And that is actually a really important tradition in black humor, it's a poetry form, it's a humor form. And I wanted to take it on because, the thing about grief is that it colors all of the emotions, and it is not always elegant and sympathetic. Sometimes it's just like you're annoyed, and you're just tired, and you're cranky, and you're messy. And so I wanted to embody that and it took me about 10 years to be able to do so. So acknowledging it's wild, just saying.

"The Dead Dozens." "Your grief is so heavy, when we lowered the coffin, all the pall bearers fell in too. Your grief is so heavy, when you cried your last goodbye, the end of the world said, nigga, get off me. You love your mama so much, Freud came back from the dead just to study your sorry ass. You love your mama so much, when she died, our mamas died, too. Some of our favorite aunties caught strays. I miss you so much I don't even use the word hello anymore. Now I greet everyone with goodbye. I miss you so much, sometimes I go to strangers' funerals and eulogize your ghost. Your ghost cries so loud, our ancestors keep haunting me to complain about the noise. Your ghost cries so loud, I took my black ass to a Klan rally for some candle lit peace and quiet."

She gets it, she gets it, she knows. Okay, so this is the last poem I'll read tonight. Thank you so much. I'm so excited to talk. Thank you for coming along with me. I hope this has resonated. I hope that I've been able to perhaps give you some frameworks or some ideas that are useful, you know? That's all I wanna be is a, well, I wanna be fine, and hot, and rich, but I also wanna be useful. There's also that, there's also that. This is "A Spell to Banish Grief." The thing about grief that is that it's twin is love, right? You grieve in direct proportion to how much you loved. That pain is a testament to how much what you've lost mattered to you. And so it's important to think about that paradox. I would never want my grief taken away because to take it away would also mean taking away the memory of my mother. And I would never want to do that. And so I wanted to write a useless spell to acknowledge this.

"A Spell to Banish Grief." "Only when you wake to a fist full of pulled hair on the floor beside your bed, and from a glance can guess its weight. When you study the dried tear streaks on your cheeks like a farmer figuring out where the season went wrong. When a friend calls out your name three or four times before you know your name is yours. When your name fits like clothes you've suddenly outgrown.

When there was too much of you, too few of you, too you of you, and the mirrors wish all of you, would just look away. When the clocks can't feel their hands and the calendars begin to doubt themselves. When you begin to agree with the glares from mirrors, but your reflection follows you around the house anyway. When you catch yourself drunk on memory, candles lit, eyes closed, your head tilted in the direction of cemetery grass, yellow and balding above what's left of the body that birthed you. And you tried to remember the sound of laughter in her throat and fail. Only then, orphan, will I take all my selves, and leave."

Thank you. Please welcome, Columbus legend, Maggie Smith. The first thing she said was some nerve.

Maggie Smith: Some nerve. Hi y'all. I can't see any of you because I can just see light, but I know you're there. I'm Maggie Smith. For the benefit of those of you who cannot see me, I am a middle-aged white woman, with longish, straight, brown hair and black glasses, and a sort of black and white dress that unintentionally matches. We saw each other arriving here today and said, oh no.

Saeed Jones: Before, after. [gestures to Maggie's outfit, then his own.]

Maggie Smith: Yeah, we decided that the print gets a little crazy.

Saeed Jones: Yeah, I was like, girl, it's the end of the world. You better put on some sneakers.

Maggie Smith: No, I had to wear my hot pinks shoes for the book.

Saeed Jones: Which I love, I love.

Maggie Jones: Goodness, I needed that. Did we need that?

Saeed Jones: Thank you.

Maggie Smith: I needed that. I'm really glad you read "The Dead Dozens." I know it's a wild poem, but I was thinking, you know, Saeed's a really funny person, which you know, even talking about the hard stuff, and I was thinking about the last two books, we've got, *How We Fight for Our Lives*, and *Alive at the End of the World*, and what do they have in common? Lives, alive, right? Survival, how do we get there? And I think one of the reasons I wanna focus on that first word in the title of this book and the sort of joy despite the shit.

Saeed Jones: Yeah, big mood, yep.

Maggie Smith: Right, I mean because it's there, it's in this book. I mean, granted, it's dark, right? It has to be.

Saeed Jones: It's like mad humor, I think of it like Mad Hatter humor.

Maggie Smith: So, I guess what I'm wondering is what enabled you, in this book, to access that? Because I don't see it as much in the first two books, and is it the chaos, that allowed you to sort of access that sense of humor, as sly and dark as it is, and even the sense of joy? You know, I'm thinking about the Toi Derricotte line that I lean on constantly, which is what, "Joy is an act of resistance." So how important that is in spite of it.

Saeed Jones: I mean, you know, my mom picked the name Saeed because it means happy and fortunate in Arabic, and so I think, as a student of Toni Morrison, I'm interested in names as prophesy, names as a prayer, or even a tension. I think what I hope in all, I'm proud of all of my books, like this summer I recorded the audio books for *Alive at the End of the World*, and *Prelude to Bruise*, and it was a joy to, you know, in two days right next to each other, like see that experience. I think if to be happy, and to be grateful for the fortune in my life, is also to be myself. I think then as a writer, it occurred to me that that humor and that laughter, those different notes of laughter, are a part of who I am, and that perhaps like as I'm a better writer, I think I'm more effective in finding ways to bring that humor into the writing. When I was a greener writer, I think I leaned on a lot of Western tropes and a lot of like architecture to be like, I'm serious, you know what I mean? And so I think I'm like more confident now, and I think I realized that just as, you know, my understanding of gender, and sexuality, and how I am liberated, that one of the best things that ever happened to me was being born a queer person, humor is like a really important part of my relationship to my identity as an African American person, and I wanted to bring that into my art.

Maggie Smith: I love that.

Saeed Jones: Thanks, also it's fun. I mean oh my gosh, to hear y'all laugh. Y'all are naughty, oh my God. Filthy, how dare you, how dare you.

Maggie Smith: But also, there's joy in the world that we're fighting to save, right? I mean, it's like, if we didn't care about it.

Saeed Jones: Yes.

Maggie Smith: It wouldn't be so infuriating to see it unraveling.

Saeed Jones: It's such a human response. I mean both joy, the dance, it's almost, you know, like I love poetry because it's, I think, useful in that when nothing else is working, you know what I mean? Like, you've studied the data, you've read the articles, you've read the, you know, and it's just like nothing. You've listened to all the podcast and you're like I still don't, like something's missing. You know, poetry I think exist to kind of color those emotional experiences where you're kind of pushed beyond like the norms, and I think, you know, humor or the blues, dance, sex, sensuality, these exist so that we can access them when we're pushed beyond like the normal. You know, even my therapist, like he acknowledged that in therapy he was like right before or right after you say something really devastating, that maybe you know it or you don't.

Maggie Smith: You laugh. I do the same thing.

Saeed Jones: He says either you burst into a bright smile or you start laughing.

Maggie Smith: Same.

Saeed Jones: And I was like, oh wow, I want that in the book.

Maggie Smith: Same.

Saeed Jones: Laughing or crying 'cause you don't know what else to do? That feels like a lot of what we do.

Maggie Smith: Yeah, hard same. Yeah, our therapists would have a good time together.

Saeed Jones: Yeah, I'm sure, they probably know each other.

Maggie Smith: Yeah, they probably do. They're probably comparing notes. Yeah, well okay, so I'm gonna geek out and sort of ask a form question, because, I mean, obviously, you just kind of opened it up for me 'cause you said non-fiction poem. And I'm like, okay, you've been working back and forth now across two genres and trying to sort of formalize this feeling of chaos in this book. We see it with the repetition, we see it with the loop of the video, we see it with the four title poems that kind of come back. We get that sense of sort of a breadcrumb trail that kind of keeps looping. I'm wondering if is that the sort of ongoing-ness of the apocalypse? Like how did you sit down and kind of wrap your head around structuring this experience in poetry after coming off of a book of prose?

Saeed Jones: Right, I think, *How We Fight for Our Lives*, the memoir, had to be more linear. It's mission was like to draw those lines to show how the tension builds into both identity, it's like coming into self, but also coming into mistakes. One of which I barely survive in the book. And so it was important to show so, you know, when I open the book and in an early chapter you meet this neighborhood boy named Cody, I'm writing about Cody because he is an early iteration of someone who's going to violently come into my life, you know, more than a decade later. And so, to me, I felt like it was important to keep that clear. And then the ethics, I mean, we could talk about it all night, the ethics of memoir. Both just writing about yourself, you know, as a narrator, because it is a work of fiction, and so you have to take, you know, dialogue. Like how much dialogue do you include, you know? I traveled a lot so that when I would like fact check different details and stuff, but you do it at some point, take liberty. So I felt with my memoir, based on what I was trying to do, I wanted to kind of be straightforward because it was taking so much energy to navigate all of those ethics in addition to realizing I was writing about my mother who had passed away. And so like, what are the ethics about writing about private experiences where we're like, we were the only two people in the room, and now she's not here to acknowledge or challenge. Like, how do you do that? With this, you know, I'm here, we're here, y'all know, you know. You know, it's like police brutality. You're not like, what's that? I hope. You know, I hope you have like some sense of like shared acknowledgement of what's going on. When I mention climate, you know, I take reasonable readers into consideration.

Maggie Smith: The rest of y'all know.

Saeed Jones: That was an impressively bitchy sentence on my part. I take reasonable readers. But yeah, and so I felt liberated because you get it, you know, like I talk about mass shooting. I didn't need to. And that's why, you know, the poem, like the way I do, I'm not going into details. I'm not, you know, just like shoving it in. You know and I don't want to traumatize you while trying to work through an idea, so I think form was an opportunity for me, knowing that we've got a lot in common because we are alive at the end of the world. You know, I could kind of use form to

focus on repetition because I don't know, I just think that like, that's the first thing where I was like, oh, it feels crazy making. When you're like, didn't that just happen? You know, like that's such a scary, lonely feeling when you feel like basic facts are beginning to betray you I'm like that's apocalyptic.

Maggie Smith: I'm like, oh which one?

Maggie Smith: Oh, which shooting? Oh, which unarmed child?

Saeed Jones: Yeah, or you're just like minding your own business, and you're like scrolling on your phone, and then you could see a video of someone dying, and you're not sure who that someone is because that video could be about like all kinds of people. That is wow, wow. You know, I've been thinking about, like I was reading what? Yesterday, like there's been like a court decision in the state of Ohio that's changing the 16th ban which is allowing a clinic in Dayton, I think, to stay open a little bit, but it's so confusing. And I was just thinking like, okay, so that if you are someone with a uterus trying to make these healthcare decisions, how are you keeping up with all of this? It's not fair. And I think that's obviously intentional, right? In that example, the chaos is designed to confuse you and to make you feel like you don't have options. And so yeah, talking about all of that felt like, not just interesting, but actually kind of political.

Maggie Smith: Well, I think it's embodied in the form of the book too, because you don't let things go.

Saeed Jones: Also, I don't let things go. As my boyfriend can tell you, I don't let things go.

Maggie Smith: He doesn't let things go.

Saeed Jones: I'm like, and another thing this reminds me, ya know, yeah.

Maggie Smith: It comes back, it comes back, it comes back, it comes back. We were talking yesterday about the sort of idea of we carry with us our personal trauma, and yet it's almost like a nesting doll. But we're inside like the local trauma that we're seeing on our local news, and reading in our local paper, and then we're in this sort of national trauma, and then there's the global trauma, and it's sort of everywhere, and we're just sort of carrying it all with us, and I'm wondering if sort of all of that is what inspired you to bring other voices into this book? Because

it's really important that you're not the only person we hear from, as opposed to in a memoir, right? You're not the only narrator here.

Saeed Jones: Yeah, so there's a poem titled, "All I Gotta Do is Stay Black and Die," which again, if you know, you know, where that statement comes from. People are like huh? I was like, oh, this is fine. This is our business. This is black people's business. You're eavesdropping. But in that poem, which starts with Paul Mooney passing away last summer, I invoke, you know, people like Whitney Houston, Aretha Franklin, Diane Carroll, Little Richard, Luther Vandross, and you know, these black artists who are really important to me, who I both was like leaning on, just as a person, making it through the pandemic, listening to their music, watching their movies, you know? But also, yeah, it occurred to me that I was like, oh, we need to go out. That's the thing when you're like, nothing's working, you know, one strategy is to come together as a community, and to go to your art institutions, and find occasions where you can learn, and process, and grieve, and laugh together.

Another way to do that is to go into history. You know, like tap the humor, and like why am I laughing? This feels crazy. Like, "The Dead Dozens," I was like let's look at the tradition of black humor. Let's look at how black people have been experiencing an apocalypse since our ancestors were brought here. Like it's always been the end of the world if you think of that lens, and so looking at how the blues tradition, which I think the blues uses repetition. And then like, "The Dead Dozens," like the Yo Mama, I set up the terms, and then I create a situation where we can have this experience together that depends on repetition. And so that knowledge is coming from going out into history. Either, what was Diane Carroll going through when she was having to perform this very respectable character, Julia, that she hated? She said it made her physically ill to perform that character. And that was interesting. You know, or just to see like how humor has been used, throughout particularly the 20th century and 21st Century.

Maggie Smith: Can we talk about the notes?

Saeed Jones: Yeah, I love a good note. I was too enthusiastic for that one, I'm sorry.

Maggie Smith: Yes, we can talk about notes.

Saeed Jones: Part of what I realized in that moment is like some of my first poems in high school were like notes that I was like sharing with friends in class when I was bored, so I was really excited.

Maggie Smith: I mean, the notes are really important in this book, and I think sometimes we think, especially in poetry books, like, ugh, there's notes, there's an index.

Saeed Jones: 'Cause often it's the etymology of an obscure word and you're like, I know what nostalgia means, dude.

Maggie Smith: Right, I get it.

Saeed Jones: [unintelligible] oh good for you.

Maggie Smith: It's fine, it's fine. But you're doing something else in these notes and I'm thinking about the Little Richard note. In particular.

Saeed Jones: I'll read it, I'll read it.

Maggie Smith: Would you?

Saeed Jones: So, a great podcast that is helpful for me is called *Death, Sex, and Money*, with Anna Sale, and she interviewed the actor Andre De Shields, and he said that the definition of entertain is to hold until you're able to impart the information. And so in the context of this book, and thinking the apocalypse, and that it's like it's not up to me when I get to stop crying, that kinda thing? It occurred to me that there was an opportunity with the notes, when you think you're safe, and you're like, okay, Saeed isn't going to make me like cry or text my therapist anymore today. You know, I'm good, I'm in the clear. And then you turn to the notes and you're like, ugh, ugh, so lemme find Little Richard. Where are you Little Richard? So this is the note about the, and then should I read the poem? Is this what you're setting me up for?

I Maggie Smith: would love for you to read the note and the poem.

Saeed Jones: You're very sneaky, okay. Very sneaky. Okay, so I'll read the note first, because I can.

"Little Richard listens to Pat Boone sing 'Tutti Frutti.'" That's the title. "Was inspired by the rage behind Little Richard's iconic screams. In America, one way to suffer a death before you die, is to mean so much, to so many people, for so many different reasons. It's not just that we could hear James Brown's shouts and Little Richard screams, or see Prince's ass, and Little Richard's curves. It's that Bob Dylan wrote in his high school yearbook, that's his life's ambition, was to quote, 'Join Little Richard.' It's that Pat Boone watered down and added bleach to 'Tutti Frutti,' and it was a bigger hit than Little Richard's original version. It's that Pat Boone did it again with 'Long Tall Sally.' It's that because of a shitty contract Little Richard signed, He only made half a cent for every record of 'Tutti Frutti' that sold. It's that for

Little Richard selling more than half a million copies of 'Tutti Frutti' amounted to a mere \$25,000 in his bank account. It's that when Little Richard said quote, 'If Elvis is the king of rock and roll, I'm the queen,' he wasn't being cute or sassy. He was correcting the historical record and demanding equity that he never received. In America, one way to suffer a death before you die is for people to applaud you even as they steal from you. In America, one way to suffer a death before you die is to be an inspiration to white male rock stars. There should be catacombs under the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Little Richard alone would account for at least a dozen tombs."

Maggie Smith: And y'all, that's the note.

Saeed Jones: That's the note. That's the note.

Maggie Smith: The note is a poem in itself.

Saeed Jones: Okay, we're all adults here, right?

"Little Richard Listens to Pat Boone Sing Tutti Frutti." "If I could, and I bet I could, hell, I know I could, write a song that killed anyone who tried to wrap their throat around it. I'm writing the first verse right now, riding the rhythm like your mama, straddling the preacher while your daddy looks on with a mouthful of every moan he can't have. Ain't that what you really want? A stadium full of white people screaming your stage name and a smashed guitar where your dick used to be. Ain't that what you deserve? God is the only reason I haven't already held you down and spat the hook into your mouth like a poison that will kill us both."

Maggie Smith: This is why my children are not in this room. I left the babies at home. I wanna make sure that we have plenty of time for audience questions and for people to. There is a hotline which I find incredible, its 614-813-3416. I feel like I'm on like the Jerry Lewis Telethon.

Saeed Jones: Text anytime! Text tomorrow over lunch!

Maggie Smith: Text a question. There will be microphones coming around to ask questions and that way I won't monopolize the conversation and I can just ask Saeed a bunch of questions next time we get drinks.

Speaker: If you have any questions feel free to raise your hands and we'll come around with some mics.

Saeed Jones: In the meantime, can we thank Maggie, too. Thank you, thank you. Oh, I left my fan in my purse.

Audience Member: Hello, thank you. Hi. This question is dependent upon if you've seen the new Elvis movie on Netflix.

Saeed Jones: I haven't, but I feel like I watch enough TikTok that I got the tea. You know what I mean? It gets me knowing.

Audience Member: I'm thinking about this idea of this kind of slow apocalypse that we're kind of a part of, and this erasure, and thinking about where do you see those kinds of narratives of people we, as a culture, idolize like Elvis who kind of rode the back of Big Mama Thornton and things like that. Like how would you say creativity might be playing a part in that type of apocalyptic erasure?

Saeed Jones: Yeah, I think, whoo, whoo-hoo-hoo-hoo, okay. You know, I think that's an excellent example. And also there's another Elvis movie coming. There's an Elvis and Priscilla movie coming, you know? Which part of that's like oh my gosh. Let's see, I mean, I think it's an example of the powers that be in our culture's like half-assed approach to what they would say is like doing things differently? Like I think like Hollywood, and the executives who write the checks, they understand that something's changing, or something needs to change, but I would argue it's significant that we still see, you know, creative projects and it's not just movies, but like, you know, *The Green Mile*, but also *The Green Book*, this Elvis film, you can think of other examples, *Orange is the New Black*, the television show, which is to say, they're like, well yes, there's a white main character, but they're a Trojan horse, that really allows us to look at all the other characters, and I'm like you could just start with the other. Like Big Mama Thornton was an incredible person. She was an incredible artist. I think I would be interested to see, like, literally just flip the plot of that film.

Like you ain't nothing but a "Hound Dog," being the best thing that ever happened to her, and then along comes this, you know, white guy and it becomes like the most painful thing that ever happened to you. That to me is a compelling film. You know, I don't need a Trojan horse. It's almost like, you see this, right? It's like institutions, cultures, governments, whatever. You know, I look at you're like the nesting doll. Like wherever power is in that nesting doll, you see a phenomenon where people are like, okay, we're gonna do things differently. Right? You know, it's like that bounce, you're like, all right, word? But they still want their hands on the reins of power. They still can't let go. They'll appoint a committee as opposed to just like, give up your position. You know what I mean?

And I love Adele, I do, I do, I do. Hear me, I love Billie Eilish. Her last album was perfect. Billie Eilish's last album literally all hits, no skips. But both of them, I think it's really interesting, these like young white pop singers win awards that they get on stage and say they feel like they don't deserve. Oh Beyonce, you should. Give her the award. You know what I mean? Like, so I think it's just this interesting moment where we're here now where people don't, and you know, they make excuses and they'll say, and I'm saying to white people here in this space, in this room, they will justify centering Elvis, instead of Big Mama Thornton, because they say you won't want to come out and see a movie that doesn't center him. You know what I mean? And so I think you need to say, yes, I will, I can't wait, yeah.

And so to me, the true reset is when it's just fully, fully flipped, you know? I mean, again, it was a good film. I'm not talking about like the art, but like *Judas and the Black Messiah*? Excellent film. If you watched it though, don't you realize that the movies probably should have just been about the black women in the Black Panthers? Just them. You know, it's like that thing where you're like watching something, and something right on the edge, and you're kind of like, wait, what's that? What's that? Yeah, so I think you have to be willing to like let go of the reins. Sometimes change means you actually just leave the room, not hold the mic to someone else's, you know what I mean?

Speaker: Any other question? Nothing else.

Saeed Jones: That actor though, who plays Elvis, he was good on that elf show. Not the new one, but there was one on MTV that I quite enjoyed.

Maggie Smith: Did you say elf?

Saeed Jones: Yeah, he played a hot elf. Y'all know what I'm talking, someone nod if you know what I. Okay, no one's nodding but. Okay, thank you, he was hot, elf show. It's a whole thing. There were black elves on that one, too, if I recall.

Maggie Smith: Takes notes... Hot elf show.

Audience Member: Well, thank you, Saeed.

Saeed Jones: There you are, hi.

Audience Member: Thank you, Saeed, for your work this evening. I was thinking about what you mentioned in your poetry, this irony of being applauded while being stolen from, and I couldn't

help but think about the irony as a person who reads, and performs, and is on stages, and before people who are willing to listen to poetry on a Friday night.

Saeed Jones: Thank you, hey, hey.

Audience Member: But also this interesting thing that can happen when, for some, you're living out loud as a black queer man, as a poet, as a performer, also becomes this thing that people turn into a kind of representative icon rather than Saeed Jones the person, not simply the ideal on stage. So I'm interested in how you sort of deal with that knowledge and understanding that how some may want to engage or consume your work as it were, or even consume an idea of you, pushes against or even informs the work that you're creating.

Saeed Jones: Oh my God, so many answers. That's a beautiful question, thank you, thank you. I mean, you know, there's no time to read it but there's a short story that laces the book, I encourage you to read, where I finished doing a reading and someone in the audience says like, do you think you need your pain in order to write? And I'm like ugh, and I like try to write it off, and then I get home, and a doppelganger of me, made of my pain's, waiting for me. So I tried actually, and it's introduced at the end of the first section of the book, to literally work it out over the course of the book, this reckoning, because it's like, yeah, I wanna do the work and go there. I love accidentally telling the truth kind of, you know. But then what are the boundaries that I need in order for this work to be sustainable? Sustainable. Because I wanna be able to keep writing. I wanna be able to live. I wanna be able to like go have dinner with my friends and be fully present and not just be so, you know what I mean? Yeah, so I mean part of it is like, hi, Wexner, this is such a wonderful evening. Thank you so much for letting me be a part of the Lambert Lecture. Please do not use the fact that you had Saeed Jones, a gay black poet as your Lambert lecturer, as an excuse not to continue to do the work, you know? Like I try to as best I can. Thank you, thank you. I hope that I can look back, you know, a few years from now and see the following Lambert lecturers and see like this lineage that I'm just so honored to be a part of, because it's so multifaceted, and I, in fact, was the most conservative choice. You know what I mean?

So I think part of it is like, in the book, like literally as you're reading it, I'm like, hello, hi, I have thoughts about how you might be perceiving me and then, you know, on stage, I try my best to bring my people with me, and to speak as candidly as I can from this position of temporary power I've been given, to acknowledge the institutions so that I'm not weaponized. Yeah, 'cause that's what more than any, you know, I have a therapist. I can work out like the personal stuff, microaggressions and stuff, but what will haunt you is moments where you realize weeks, months, years too late, that you've been weaponized by an institution against people that you're like, oh my gosh, I never wanted that. You know what I mean? And so I think it's important. That hasn't happened. It's been great, it's been you know? It's been great. Even the accessibility, you know? Like everyone doesn't feel safe coming to in person events yet. And so, like, being able to have it live streamed, having people from home able to ask questions, is really

important, you know? So thank you, Wexner, for these different thoughts. But that's how I try. I try and I pay attention to what other people are doing.

Speaker: Speaking of folks at home.

Saeed Jones: Hey.

Speaker: We got a question from the hotline.

Saeed Jones: That Drake song stuck in my head for the rest of the day.

Speaker: They asked if you're familiar with journalist Isabel Wilkerson's work?

Saeed Jones: Yes.

Speaker: And if you might reflect on the book, *Caste*?

Saeed Jones: *Caste*, yes, yes, yes. Oh yeah, let's shout out Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, which is about the Great Migration, that was her first book. I would say it's easily like my top five, probably most important books in my life. If I could just force you to read a book, that isn't mine, read mine, obviously, you know, but like, if I could force you, and someone you love, to read a book together, it would probably be *The Warmth of Other Suns*. Because she writes about the Great Migration in a way that I hadn't seen it before, which was as a refugee crisis. She's like, black people fleeing the violence of the Jim Crow South were refugees. And like so then *Caste*, she writes, again, like a way that it's funny, like you hear or read like Martin Luther King Jr.'s writing and he uses the language of *Caste*, and she talks about the influence of his trip to India. But I don't know, for a lot of Americans, if it's at the forefront of our mind when we think of these structures.

So, yeah, and also Saidiya Hartman, just on the side. Like *The Afterlife of Grief*, is a nod to her writing about the afterlife of enslavement, so she's incredible. Yeah, I just think Isabel Wilkerson is an incredible mind because she's doing something I really like, which is giving us like those tools, those frameworks, you know, like the way Maggie was like, yeah, oh, personal grief, and there's local experiences, like something like police violence, and then you go to the kinda national, okay, let's talk about like Supreme Court decisions that are taken away, and then we go to. That image, I was like, oh that's it. You know, and the way you feel like it's easier for you to breathe in the moment. I think Saidiya Hartman and her

ideas are like that, like making it easier for us to breathe by giving us language, images, and data to help us understand what we're enduring. Yeah, really great.

Maggie Smith: Making it easier for us to breathe makes me think of the end of that Ross Gay poem about Eric Garner.

Saeed Jones: Oh Ross Gay, yeah.

Maggie Smith: "Joy" and he has a new book coming out soon that I'm excited to read.

Saeed Jones: He does.

Speaker: So I think we have time for one last question.

Audience Member: Hi there. Thank you guys for talking with us, Saeed and Maggie.

Saeed Jones: Thank you.

Audience Member: So I think a lot of good writing and poetry is obviously a really good example of this forces us to think about institutions and systemic problems in a different way. But at what point should, and I'm just curious what you think about this, at what point does poetry actually affect that change? Like how are people supposed to take, and I'm not putting this all on you, but just how are people supposed to take.

Saeed Jones: Don't worry.

Audience Member: How are people supposed to take this kind of genre and make demonstrable change? Because I always find that to be the hardest. Like, you feel really energized, but then, you know, Monday happens and the next piece of bullshit happens, and so how do you take what we've learned tonight and use it in our own lives?

Saeed Jones: Yeah, yeah, it's like being in an evil, it's been a long time since I've been to a waterpark, but like an evil tide pool, and it's like the wave. My God, stop, stop, someone like that. That's really what it feels like. You can't catch your breath and you're like, the water's up your nose, and it actually, goes from being like funny, messy to scary very quickly. You know what I mean? Ahhhhhh, you know, and it's only three feet deep. You're like, well, it doesn't feel like it. I mean, you've heard me mention Saidiya Hartman, Isabel Wilkerson, Frank B. Wilderson, who I'd mention like Afro-pessimism a great deal in the book. TikTok, different forms of media, very pointedly bringing someone whose work has helped me breathe, has helped me understand, is my way of acknowledging that no one thing is gonna be the thing.

And none of us can do it alone. From my part, I think we are carrying a great, it's like there's a dam in our chest, you know? Or like, you know, when you haven't gotten a massage or you've never gotten a massage or whatever, and like how much it hurts to be touched, and you're like, actually stop. You know what I mean? But then if you're able to do the work and endure, you're like, oh, how long does it last that I can do this? I think my work exists hopefully in a space where it's like, you know what I mean? Breaking it up a little bit, you know what I mean? I want you to wake up feeling a little lighter tomorrow. And I think that's part of how we are currently underserved. We're waking up tired, right? That's how I feel. I just like awake and you're like trying to, you can't even remember why, you're just waking up, 'cause it's what am I trying to say? Multiplied. It's multiplied and it just won't stop. And so I hope, in these little moments, and it'll be different for everyone, even if it's just a line, or like a framework, where you just, you go I hope that hoo, or that whoo, or that laugh during "The Dead Dozens," I hope all of those moments is like a little bit of that burden leaving your body.

Because whether you are a healthcare worker, a unionizer, a teacher, a museum person, you know, an activist, you can't do your work if you're just so exhausted that even if you get out of bed, only the most cynical options are available to you. You know what I mean? And I think unfortunately, we're seeing that manifest a lot. Like our lives online are so unpleasant. We can't even read any like Twitter. The reason Twitter's so unpleasant is because it's like so cynical. We can't engage, with good reason, we can't engage anything in good faith. We don't even know what we're talking about anymore. Everything is like the original title for "After the School Board," was "The Proxy Wars." You know, when you're like just so ugh, but you still gotta go 'cause capitalism's like, get out there and make that money anyway, then everything becomes this proxy war and we're not really talking or listening. So, you know, though the poems are certainly like intense and everything, I hope it's something like keep moving, that sense of like Ya know, I needed that. I needed that. And I don't know where that takes you, but I hope it just makes whatever you do next a little easier and more sustainable. Thank you.

Maggie Smith: I needed that. I needed that. I think that is all the time we have. Thank you all for coming.

Saeed Jones: Thank you so much.

Maggie Smith: Thank you so much for the good questions. Thank you to those of you watching at home. Thank you to the Wexner Center for putting this on. Thank you to Emily and Dionne. Thank you to Matt Reber who couldn't be here. Thank you, special thanks, to Bill and Sheila Lambert.

Saeed Jones: Thank you.

Maggie Smith: Thank you so much. And big, big thanks.

Saeed Jones: Hi, thank you thank you.

Maggie Smith: And big, big, big, big, big, big, big thanks to Saeed.

Saeed Jones: I mean, you know, like. You all could have reasonably like been at home learning how to tie a good knot or start a fire or you know? Shit's real out there, so thank you, on a Friday night for joining me for poems, thank you.