



ENTERTAINMENT

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## 'There's a power in music that can be so much more powerful than a gun'

BY CONNIE OGLE

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Can a hip hop musical stop gun violence? Maybe not. But "Trigger" is going to try to help us understand it.

The evolving hip hop oratorio — as the show is called by its creators — arrives Friday at Miami Dade College's North Campus, only its second stop after making its premiere at Virginia Tech University last month. Ten years ago on April 16, 32 people were killed and 17 injured at the college, prompting composer Byron Au Yong and lyricist Aaron Jafferis to wonder why and tackle the subject the best way they knew how — through music.

"There's a power in music that can be so much more powerful than a gun," Au Yong says. "Music goes places to calm as well as agitate."

"Trigger" combines "Hamilton" hip-hop sensibilities and more traditional choral music to confront the issues surrounding gun violence. The performance piece is part of "(Be)longing," a series of events questioning how people recover from violence and how they — let's make that "we" — can prevent it from happening again.

These questions are personal for Au Yong, who with Jafferis interviewed family members of Virginia Tech victims as well as law enforcement officials and others in Blacksburg.

"Part of 'Trigger' is me not understanding that idea of turning to guns as a source of power," Au Yong says. "The show was to figure out why people go to guns and why it's such a contentious issue. ... There are so many different views on this."

Because they wanted the stories to encompass many points of view, Au Yong and Jafferis made "Trigger" adaptable. Everywhere the show is performed, local participants are enlisted to contribute their own stories. Miami Dade College's version will include about a third of the original songs from "(Be)longing," Au Yong says, with the rest being the original work of local performers from Miami.

"The people in it will make it topical," he says. "Certain cast members have firsthand experience with gun violence, and we wanted to include that."

Kathryn Garcia, executive director of MDC Live Arts, which is presenting the show, says Miami is the perfect spot for "Trigger." She sees it as a sort of town hall meeting on a national problem.

"It's a community-driven approach to attempting to ask and answer some of the questions that occur around violence related to guns," says Garcia.

The performance has been prefaced with a series of related events, including a silent march, an open mic night, a flash mob and a one-act play. "I thought it would be great to open up the conversation in Miami, especially here at North Campus. So many students here come from communities directly affected by issues of gun violence ... . It's a real serious crisis in some areas of Miami."

But can art truly make a difference? Co-author Jafferis believes it can (he's author of such lyrics as "The city's skin is thin here:/you can see all of the blood underneath the blacks and the blues/The crisis team arrives and tries to gather in the bruise").

“Art is in many ways the opposite of violence,” he says. “If we’re trying to shift the culture in this country away from violence, I think art is the best way to do that. By its very nature, it’s creative and generative, which in a way is the opposite of destruction, the opposite of death.”

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**IF YOU GO**

**What:** “Trigger”

**When:** 7 p.m. April 21

**Where:** Lehman Theater, Miami Dade College North Campus, 11380 NW 27th Ave., Bldg 5000, Miami

**Cost:** Free

**Info:** [www.mdclivearts.org/shows/trigger](http://www.mdclivearts.org/shows/trigger)



Composer Byron Au Yong and lyricist Aaron Jafferis at rehearsal for ‘Trigger’ at Virginia Tech University. **Richard Mallory Allnutt**

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