

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2023 – Rosenberg/Strange Fruit Project

**Twilight Theatre Company in
association with New Jersey
Repertory Company presents a
powerful journey through a
family's legacy and America's
history of injustice.**

This summer, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe will witness the premiere of *The Rosenberg/Strange Fruit Project*, a play by American playwright John Jiler, accompanied by jazz musician Lee Odom. The play delves into the life of Robert Meeropol, the younger son of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, an American couple executed for espionage in 1953. Robert was adopted at the age of six by Abel Meeropol, the composer of the iconic protest song *Strange Fruit*, made famous by Billie Holiday.

The *Rosenberg/Strange Fruit Project* is a gripping series of monologues that explore the themes of the Rosenberg trial, communism, and Robert's legal career, as well as his involvement with social movements. Jiler plays various roles, accompanied by the live jazz of Lee Odom, guiding the audience through American politics from the 1950s to the present day.

In this one-man performance, Jiler portrays Robert Meeropol's journey from heartbroken child to a middle-aged man fighting

for the same ideals as his birth parents. Jiler also brings to life the stories of Judge Irving Kaufman, who presided over the Rosenberg trial (now known as Donald Trump's mentor); Julius and Ethel Rosenberg; Abel Meeropol, Robert's adoptive father; civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois; and legendary jazz singer Billie Holiday.

Strange Fruit, a haunting depiction of the violence faced by African Americans, stands as one of the earliest American protest songs. Abel Meeropol, Robert's adoptive father, also composed the anti-prejudice song *The House I Live In*, made famous by Frank Sinatra. After Abel's death in 1987, Robert used royalties from *Strange Fruit* to establish the Abel Meeropol Social Justice Writing Awards.

"As we approach 19 June, marking the 70th anniversary of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg's execution – the first civilians in American history to be executed for espionage – and Juneteenth, commemorating the end of slavery in the United States, the lasting impact of the Rosenberg case remains relevant," said John Jiler. "Their younger son, Robert Meeropol, dedicated his life to exposing injustice, a remarkable triumph given his traumatic childhood. Our play, The Rosenberg/Strange Fruit Project, seeks to honor that legacy."

Directed by Fringe First winner Margaret Perry, *The Rosenberg/Strange Fruit Project* rekindles debates surrounding Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. The injustices of post-war America persist today, from police brutality against African Americans to the murders of women in the UK by serving or former police officers.

Robert Meeropol's older brother, Michael, has expressed his disappointment that *Strange Fruit* has regained relevance in the era of Black Lives Matter, as artists such as Kanye West sample the song and millions stream it.

As the 2024 US presidential campaign approaches, with candidates who have a long history of racism and political maneuvering, *The Rosenberg/Strange Fruit Project* serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing struggle for justice and equality, highlighting the powerful influence of the Meeropol family on American history.

The Rosenberg/Strange Fruit Project

Assembly, Front Room

15:30, 03-26 AUG 2023, £13.50-£7.50

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TWILIGHT THEATRE COMPANY in association with
NEW JERSEY REPERTORY COMPANY present

**THE ROSENBERG/
STRANGE FRUIT
PROJECT**

Written and Performed by
JOHN JILER

Clarinet
LEE ODOM

Directed by Fringe First Award Winner
MARGARETT PERRY

15:30
03 - 26 AUG

ASSEMBLY ROOMS
FRONT ROOM

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