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Bathhouse ‘Dutchman’ Heads to Chicago

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Kevyn States and Tori Ernst in the steamy rooms of the Russian and Turkish Baths in last year's East Village production of "Dutchman." Credit Joshua Bright for The New York Times

The artist Rashid Johnson's production of "Dutchman," which was staged last year as part of the Performa 13 Biennial in a true hothouse environment – the Russian and Turkish Baths on 10th Street in the East Village – is heading out on the road to another storied urban bathhouse.

From Sept. 16 through Sept. 21, the Obie-award-winning play by LeRoi Jones (later to become Amiri Baraka) – an incendiary allegory about race and assimilation, first performed in 1964 – will be produced at Chicago's Red Square Russian and Turkish Baths. Known for decades as the Division Street baths, they served as a men-only clubhouse for generations of Chicago power brokers and cultural figures like Jesse Jackson and Studs Terkel.

Mr. Johnson grew up in Chicago and was inspired to create the bathhouse staging of the play, a Performa commission, by childhood visits with his father and other relatives to the Division Street baths, which he saw as a makeshift but ideal political forum. "People are exposed to a degree that they never are in public, and so it's a place for really honest negotiations," he has said. "I think of it as a very even playing field."

The new production will take place as part of "Performa 10 Years," a celebration of the 2004 founding of the performance-art biennial and a decade of its commissions and performances, and will be presented with the help of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Monique Meloche Gallery.

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