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**NEWS RELEASE**

**JOURNEY OF THE HEART**  
A Celebration of Works by  
**DONALD McKAYLE**  
*with*  
**UCI Etude Ensemble**



**June 13, 2017 FREE admission** - Dress/Tech Rehearsal  
**June 14, 2017 FREE admission** - Premiere Performance  
**RESERVATIONS ARE RECOMMENDED**

**JOURNEY OF THE HEART** - (IRVINE, CA) – A celebratory tribute and dedication to the extraordinary career with works by legendary dancer, choreographer, teacher and humanitarian, **Professor Donald McKayle**. McKayle, unquestionably one of America’s greatest choreographers, is presented by the University of California (UCI), Irvine Dance Department at the Claire Trevor Theatre on the UCI Campus.

Through McKayle’s long relationship with UCI’s **Lisa Naugle**, Chair at University of California, Irvine Dance Department, this celebration of masterworks will be danced by UCI Etude Ensemble. The UCI Etude Ensemble was initiated by McKayle in 1995 as outcome of his RAINBOW ETUDES, a work given to the Dance Community of the world as a gift. It is an outlet for UCI dancers to experience the creation of new works and performing. Auditions are held yearly for this class and all students receive credit for participating and performing in the Ensemble.

McKayle, has spent his entire life devoted to his art with works that have reached into nearly every topic in the human experience numbering over 250 and span 65 years. He has for his entire career been in the forefront as a major leader in dance and all entertainment media. For the past 27 years, McKayle has created works on the UCI Etude Ensemble bringing dance education to new heights in training with every new creation. Dancers from across the United States and throughout the world have rallied and competed for positions to work with McKayle, “one of America’s Irreplaceable Dance Treasures: the first 100.”

Consistent with McKayle’s multicultural world view and global affairs that affect all people, three distinct works of great significance make this program unique. They reflect McKayle’s uncanny ability to connect with his environment. McKayle forever a humanitarian, concerns us with the folklore of America’s indigenous people, the plight of the current immigrant situation worldwide and the joy’s that life offers.



**DEATH AND EROS** is the initial entry in Donald McKayle's "Story Dance Theatre" evening. The Lula Washington Dance Theatre premiered it on February 11, 2000. The work is immersed in the lore of indigenous peoples. The dance is a movement illumination of the legend of the "Skeleton Woman," an Inuit tale passed down in the oral tradition from generation to generation.

A father casts his daughter into the sea for committing an act of unforgivable effrontery to communal mores and sacred beliefs. Beneath the waters her flesh is eaten away leaving only her bare skeleton and her spirit that remains alive. A hungry fisherman, far away from his home, comes to the cove of the Skeleton Woman, a place believed hunted by the local fisherman and therefore avoided. The fisherman get lost in a great

storm and arrives in the forbidden cove, casts his line into the waters. He hooks the skeleton woman tossing in the currents below and pulls her upward to his kayak. He retreats in fear from the horrific sight that he beholds, dragging the caught skeleton woman with him. In a macabre dance, she seems to trip across the surface of the water. He reaches land and races across the frozen tundra; with the skeleton woman latched to him, in a constant pursuit. He reaches his hut and dives inside in the darkness. Trembling with hunger and fear, he lights a fire. In the flickering glow of the flames, he perceives the skeleton woman lying in an entangled heap. In this vulnerable state, she is no longer frightening or dangerous. Something is awakened within him; he approaches her, rearranges her bones, and decides to bury her properly the next morning.

As he sleeps tears seep from his eyes. The skeleton woman crawls over to him and drinks the salty liquid. Flesh returns to her bones and hair grows lushly upon her head. She awakens the sleeping fisherman, pounding his heart like a drum with a sacred and lustful rhythm to awaken her own heart. They join together in a communion of body and spirit.

Whenever the northern lights are seen, they are there, ever present as two piercing dots of light within the Aurora Borealis. Their love is eternal and stronger than death.



**CROSSING THE RUBICON**, *Passing the Point of No Return*, had its world premiere on February 23, 2017 danced by UCI Etude Ensemble. In McKayle's own words, "it follows the current plight of refugees and their experiences, struggles and fears. It is meant to remind us that even as these people flee from crimes against humanity they remain human beings; aching from loss, fearing the unknown, finding tender moments in the chaos of fleeing, and banding together as a collective to help one another."

Donald McKayle's newest work, **CROSSING THE RUBICON** is yet another masterpiece in his long and illustrious career of over 250 works. At once, the tone is set for this very serious,

poignant and relevant work of art. The entrance and the groupings of the ensemble throughout the work suggest the long and arduous journey to find peace and freedom. Human beings migrating to a new, frightening unknown land are an all too familiar tragedy today. McKayle address the matter with poignant accuracy. He dares to ask his dancers to perform mostly in unison to powerful effect as if everyone were experiencing the same life-threatening situation. Rarely does a choreographer get away with this kind of staging. McKayle is a master handling the bitter truth and current plight of immigrants who have suffered and are suffering in the world today with the deepest respect. Wrenching honesty and truth is this works hallmark. It is a work that touches the soul and pierces our hearts.

**Douglas R. Nielsen**, Professor of Dance says, "Some dances you watch, and some dances you feel. I just can't stop remembering the 'feeling' I had after experiencing the premiere of Donald McKayle's stunning **CROSSING the RUBICON: PASSING the POINT of no RETURN**. I was moved to tears by the soul of the work – plus the social relevance embedded in the choreography. Not just steps – it suggested a ritual that was meaningful, and utterly human."

**JOURNEY OF THE HEART**, Donald McKayle shows emotional and evocative dances that reveal the heart of humanity. For this setting, he has taken a selection of dances from his **HEARTBEATS**, a work that had its premiere on February 14, 1997 with the José Limón Dance Company in San Jose, California. For **JOURNEY OF THE HEART**, McKayle chose dances that celebrate through their movements; songs that flow from the deep regions of the heart; that sing eternal lyrics; songs that cross the boundaries of language and culture; songs that, whether vernacular or noble, resonate with the rawness and veracity of universal human emotions. It can be viewed as a *Journey of the world*.



Chiaki Takebayashi, *Angelitos Negros*

Donald McKayle has also selected dances for **JOURNEY OF THE HEART** from his earlier work, **SONGS OF THE DISINHERITED** which, are some of McKayle's heritage masterworks. It examines and speaks deeply of varied aspects of the Black Diaspora in the New World. **SONGS OF THE DISINHERITED** was choreographed in 1972 for the Inner City Repertory Company of Los Angeles and since then has entered the repertoires of the Lula Washington Dance Theatre and the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble among others. The solo *Angelitos Negros* has been performed by **Elizabeth Roxas** of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, **Roxane D'Orleans Juste** of the José Limón Dance Company, **Melissa Young** and **Nycole Merritt** of Dallas Black Dance Theatre, and is a signature performance piece for the dance soloists **Stephanie Powell** and **Nejla Yatkin**. It has also been danced by many students at UCI and is a favorite among solo women dancers.

Included in **JOURNEY OF THE HEART**, "**Angelitos Negros**" is a study in black majesty, is a towering depiction of female strength. The final movement, "**Shaker Life**" is an urban gospel that dispels doubt and celebrates life. The audience always up out of their seats, everyone dancing and celebrating all that is good in life...



**SHAKER LIFE**, UCI Etude Ensemble

McKAYLE honored at BESSIES

Donald McKayle received The Bessies award in 2016 in New York City for his presentation of his American Modern Classic, RAINBOW 'ROUND MY SHOULDER

It was performed at the Koch Theater Lincoln Center, danced by the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and presented during the summer season by Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance. The Bessies is considered one of live theater's most coveted honors and is known to be the Academy Awards of dance.

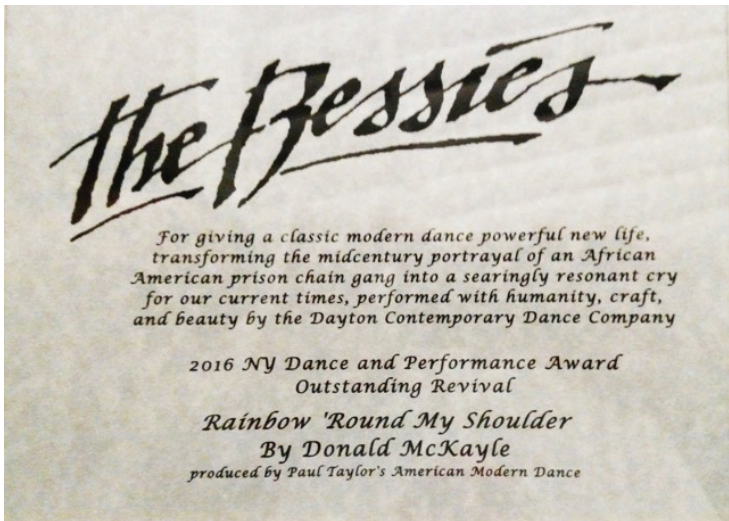
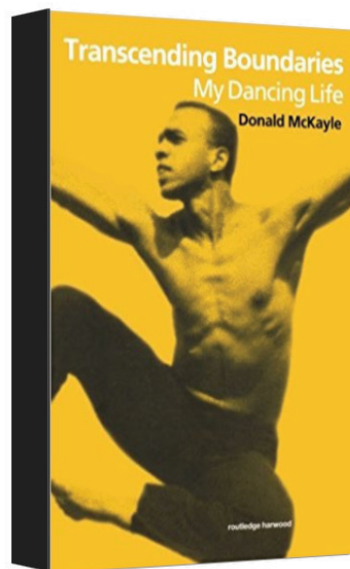


Photo: Rose Eichenbaum and ©UC Regents



CROSSING THE RUBICON: Passing the Point of No Return, UCI Etude Ensemble



For more essential reading: **Transcending Boundaries** by Donald McKayle found on line

Photo: Christopher Smith, Glen Koenig, Los Angeles Times

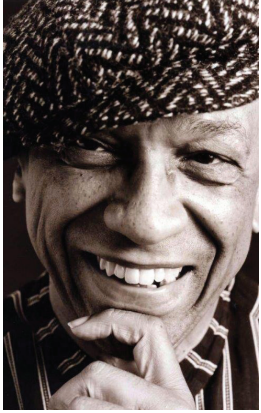


Donald McKayle in rehearsal, Inner City Repertory Company of Los Angeles 2010

## Biographies:

### DONALD McKAYLE

*Choreographer*



**Donald McKayle**, recipient of honors and awards in every aspect of his illustrious career, has been named by the Dance Heritage Coalition “one of America’s Irreplaceable Dance Treasures: the first 100.” His choreographic masterworks, considered modern dance classics, *GAMES*, *RAINBOW ‘ROUND MY SHOULDER*, *DISTRICT STORYVILLE*, and *SONGS OF THE DISINHERITED* are performed around the world. He has choreographed over the hundreds of works for dance companies in the United States, Canada, Israel, Europe, and South America. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, Cleveland Ballet, Ballet San Jose Silicon Valley, the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, and the Lula Washington Dance Theatre serve as repositories for his works. He is Artistic Mentor for the José Limón Dance Company. Ten retrospectives have honored his choreography. In April 2005, Donald McKayle was honored at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and presented with a medal

as a Master of African American Choreography.

In 2001, he choreographed the monumental ten-hour production of *TANTALUS*, produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company in collaboration with the Denver Center Theatre Company. Five Tony Nominations and Tony Awards have honored his choreography for Broadway musical theater: *SOPHISTICATED LADIES*, *DOCTOR JAZZ*, *A TIME FOR SINGING*, *GOLDEN BOY*, and for *RAISIN*, which garnered the Tony Award as Best Musical, and for which he received Tony nominations for both direction and choreography. For *SOPHISTICATED LADIES* he was also honored with an Outer Critics Circle Award and the NAACP Image Award. His most recent choreography for Broadway was showcased in *IT AIN’T NOTHING’ BUT THE BLUES*, which earned a Tony nomination for Best Musical. He received an Emmy nomination for the TV Special, *FREE TO BE YOU AND ME*. His work for film includes Disney’s *BEDKNOBS AND BROOMSTICKS*, *THE GREAT WHITE HOPE*, and *THE JAZZ SINGER*. His other media awards include a Los Angeles Drama-Logue Award for *EVOLUTION OF THE BLUES* and a Golden Eagle Award for *ON THE SOUND*.

In dance he has received the Capezio Award, the Samuel H. Scripps/American Dance Festival Award, the American Dance Guild Award, a Living Legend Award from the National Black Arts Festival, the Heritage Award from the California Dance Educators Association, two Choreographer’s Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Dance/USA Honors, an Irvine Fellowship in Dance, the Martha Hill Lifetime Achievement Award, the Annual Award from the Dance Masters of America, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Dance Under the Stars Choreography Festival, the Black College Dance Exchange Honors, the Dance Magazine Award, and the American Dance Legacy Institute’s Distinguished and Innovative Leadership Award, among others.

For his work in education, he has earned the Balasaraswati/Joy Ann Dewey Beinecke Endowed Chair for Distinguished Teaching, UCI’s Distinguished Faculty Lectureship Award for Research, and he is a recipient of the UCI Medal, the highest honor given by the University of California, Irvine. At the University of California, Irvine he has also been awarded the title of Claire Trevor Professor in Dance, an endowed chair, and is a Bren Fellow. Mr. McKayle has served on the faculties of numerous international forums and many prestigious national institutions including the Juilliard School, Bennington College, Bard College, Sarah Lawrence College, the American Dance Festival, Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival, and was Dean of the School of Dance at the California Institute of the Arts.

His autobiography, *Transcending Boundaries: My Dancing Life*, published by Routledge was honored with the Society of Dance History Scholar’s De La Torre Bueno Prize. A television documentary on his life and work, *Heartbeats of a Dance Maker*, was aired on PBS stations throughout the United States.

Donald McKayle has created over 250 concert works and Television, Film and theater works throughout the world. He holds the honorary title of Distinguish Professor of Dance at University of California, Irvine for 27 years. *UPROOTED: PERO REPLANTADO* in 2015 is testaments of his ever-increasing innovation in the art of dance. In 2016 he created *BITTERSWEET FAREWELL* to the memory of the many friends he has lost and, in 2017, with his latest work *CROSSING THE RUBICON: Passing the Point of No Return*, McKayle digs deeply in the suffering and tragedy of millions of people around the world who must migrate from their homes. McKayle currently serves at UCI as Professor/Choreographer/Teacher and mentor to his most beloved students.

**BRET YAMANAKA**

*Rehearsal Director to Donald McKayle*



**Bret Yamanaka** is a Lecturer in Dance at University of California, Irvine and currently is **Donald McKayle's** Rehearsal Director and Choreographic Assistant for the Etude Ensemble. He graduated from UC Irvine with his BFA in Dance Performance and Dance Choreography in 2015. Prior to his appointment as Lecturer at UC Irvine he was invited as both a Guest Performing Artist and Guest Lecturer, performing and restaging Donald McKayle's historic repertory. During his time as an undergraduate Bret was a member of Donald McKayle's UCI Etude Ensemble wherein he performed in a number of his classic works such as *MINSTREL MAN*, *RAINBOW 'ROUND MY SHOULDER*, *SONGS OF THE DISINHERITED*, and *HOUSE OF TEARS*, as well as originating a number of roles in McKayle's more recent works. His mentors include former and current faculty such as **Jodie Gates, Loretta Livingston, Tong Wang, Shaun Boyle, Diane Diefenderfer, and Lisa Naugle**. While studying he was awarded the Glorja Kaufman Scholarship and Sylvia

Reines Scholarship for Dance Choreography, the Medici Fellowship for Dance Research, the William Gillespie Scholarship for Dance Performance, and the Claire Trevor School of the Arts 2015 award for Excellence in Dance Choreography.



Donald McKayle in rehearsal with UCI Etude Ensemble

**JOSHUA D. ESSTRADA-ROMERO**

*Teaching Assistant to Mr. McKayle*



**Joshua D. Estrada-Romero** began his dance training at Cal State University, Fullerton. While at Cal State University, Fullerton he performed and choreographed for the annual fall and spring concerts. He was also a member of CSUF's Dance Repertory Theatre and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Dance in fall of 2008. His extensive experience in dance, music, and arts evolved through his dance memberships and trainings with Palindrome Dance Company, RhetOracle Dance Company, BARE Dance Company, Nickerson-Rossi Dance Company and De Fore Dance Center. He also worked with very well known artists of José Limón Dance Company, Erick Hawkins Dance Company, and choreographer **Victor Kabaniev**. Joshua is the founder and artistic director of FUSE Dance Company based in Orange, CA, whose mission is to support and foster the growth and development of the performing arts in Southern California through performances, dance

education, and dance community collaboration programs. FUSE has participated in many Southern California dance festivals and events including the Vox Dance Theatre Showcase in Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Dance Festival, Nebula's HHII Dance Festival in Santa Barbara, Raw Orange County Showcase, MixMatch Dance Festival and twice for the Palm Desert Choreographer Dance Festival. For five consecutive years FUSE has performed for the Lineage Dance Festival in Pasadena and The SoCal Dance Invitational produced by Nannette Brodie, FUSE has also had the privilege in performing in Boston MA, Austin TX, NYC, and Seattle WA. Joshua currently shares his passion as an instructor/choreographer to all dance students of Maple Conservatory of Dance, Orange County School of the Arts, and Claylees Dance Academy. Joshua has begun the Masters in Dance program at University of California, Irvine and will be completed in spring of 2017.

**KENNETH L. KEITH**

*Lighting Designer / Technical Director*



**Kenneth L. Keith's** career spans 47 years and three continents. Audiences for ballet, modern dance, opera, theater, musical theater, and concerts have enjoyed his designs.

Mr. Keith's design venues include Edinburgh Festival Fringe, American Dance Festival, Montreal's Just for Laughs Festival and New York's Riverside and Lincoln Center Dance Festivals. Lighting design credits for Artistic Director **Dennis Nahat's** Ballet San Jose include THE NUTCRACKER, COPPÉLIA, BLUE SUEDE SHOES, CELEBRATIONS AND ODE, MIDDLE KINGDOM-ANCIENT CHINA and A POLOVTSIAN TALE and dozens of others.

He was responsible for an unprecedented 8-city tour to major cities in China as Technical Director and Lighting Designer for Ballet San Jose in 2008 lighting CARMINA BURANA, THE FIREBIRD, MENDELSSOHN SYMPHONY SWAN LAKE, and ON-TOGENY. He was also responsible for **George Balanchine's** THEME AND VARIATIONS

and APOLLO, **Martha Graham's** APPALACHIAN SPRING, **Roland Petit's** CARMEN, **Flemming Flindt's** RED SHOES or LEGS OF FIRE and MIRACULOUS MANDARIN, **Daryl Gray's** PIRATES OF PENZANCE and CINEMA SOUNDTRACKS, **Michael Smuin's** STRAVINSKY PIANO PIECES, THE TEMPEST and SHINJU. A long time lighting designer of the **Donald McKayle** repertory among them, DEATH & EROS, DISTRICT STORYVILLE, GAMES and RAINBOW 'ROUND MY SHOULDER, HOUSE OF TEARS, BITTERSWEET FAREWELL, UPROOTED: pero REPLANTADO, and CROSSING THE RUBICON-*Passing the Point of No Return*. **Lynn Taylor-Corbett's** DIARY, **Ulysses Dove's** VESPER, **Mary Giannoe's** AUTUMN, and many of the great 19th century classics. Mr. Keith works out of his studios in Lexington, Michigan, overlooking Lake Huron.



**JOHN GERBETZ**

*Photographer / Stage Imaging / Videographer*



**John Gerbetz**, a native Clevelander, now hailing from San Jose, California, attended Cleveland State University (CSU) and received B.A. degree with major in Mass Media Communication.

As a youth he was an industrious home film maker, beginning with neighborhood features, then school projects, culminating in full-length presentations to high school faculty and student body. Thus from an early age he began developing a pattern for public presentation. He took private piano lessons in childhood and to this day maintains a strong interest in serious music with a library of over 2000 works, consequentially holding a deep and cross-disciplined respect and appreciation for the fine arts and performing arts in general. His knowledge and practical skill follow through a variety of avocations including photography, writing, broadcasting and performance in Modern Dance theater and television broadcasting. He is a self-taught technician in color and black and white photography laboratory work and has used this both for personal and professional application over a span of nearly five decades.

He was a dancer with CSU Modern Dance Company and founding President of the CSU Dance Committee, which promoted student involvement in dance. He served as Publicity Director for the Festival of Modern Dance and produced original audio-visual material for Cleveland State University Dance tours back in the day.

Gerbetz established media connection to Cleveland Museum of Art and a wide variety of dance exhibitions and performances, conducting radio interviews with international luminaries, always including local artists and performers as well.

Mr. Gerbetz was the official in-house photographer and music technical editor at Cleveland Ballet, Ballet San Jose Silicon Valley and Ballet San Jose. His skills as music editor extend deep into the repertory editing numerous works for the stage with the Chinese Performance Arts of America, the USA Jackson Mississippi Ballet Competitions, Menlo Ballet, Company C. His latest work is seen in **Donald McKayle's** CROSSING THE RUBICON: *Passing the Point of No Return*. Currently, Gerbetz is writing the script for a new film.

BY JAZLEY FAITH

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

Nothing will stop Donald McKayle from choreographing dance. Not even the wheelchair parked at the front of a dance studio at UC Irvine. The 86-years-strong, American modern dance legend watches rehearsal intently, ready to instruct his troop of dancers.



Photo: Nicholas Iverson

"When I got very involved in choreography, I just stopped dancing, more or less," McKayle says. "I just figured, 'Well, I guess it's time to do this other that I love to do.' I think, for most dancers, if you took dance away from them, you would cut out a piece of their heart, but I'm not that way."

Professional dancers and companies have taught and performed his works throughout the United States for more than half a century. McKayle's oeuvre is rooted in the histories and struggles of oppressed minorities, especially the African-American diaspora, and political troubles in Argentina (inspired by his time there decades ago, which he describes as vibrant). He finds these stories tender, humane and honest—qualities

he incorporates into movement for the stage. In February, McKayle debuted *Crossing the Rubicon: Passing the Point of No Return*, which portrays Syrian refugees escaping via water.

Born in New York City, McKayle grew up in East Harlem in the 1930s. The second child of Jamaican activist parents, McKayle experienced racism and segregation firsthand from the African-American, Puerto Rican and Jewish immigrants in his neighborhood. His mother arranged for him to attend public schools outside Harlem, exposing him to other parts of society that awakened and heightened his sense of injustice and inequality.

Despite having no formal dance training, McKayle earned a scholarship for the New Dance Group when he was 17. He trained in ballet, tap, modern, Afro-Caribbean, Hindu and Haitian dance styles; his work ethic led him to learn directly from Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Sophie Maslow and other dance titans. From there, he worked in Broadway, television and film. Highlights of his career include choreography for Disney's *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*; a 1974 Tony Award for direction and choreography of the Broadway version of *A Raisin In the Sun*; and a PBS documentary about his life, *Heartbeats of a Dance Maker*. Currently, McKayle works with his hand-selected *Etude Ensemble* at UCI.

McKayle likes to create pieces that last up to 30 minutes, every second filled with movement by multiple bodies. His *répétiteur*, Bret Yamanaka, assists with formations, production and teaching choreography, but McKayle is fully in charge. "You become his instrument; you become his body," Yamanaka explains.

Back in the studio, everything and everyone moves around McKayle. Rehearsals are spent running choreography, exchanging feedback and trying it again. It's up to the dancers to make it happen.

"Sometimes I think I can get up when I can't," McKayle confesses. "It's frustrating when I think I can do something that I can't. But I'm old enough to take everything that comes to me and say, 'Okay.' There's a time for everything."

After rehearsal is over, dancers cluster in front of him, taking their turn to say, "Thank you, Mr. McKayle!" He smiles and nods in acknowledgement of each one until the space is empty, but movement is still running through his mind. "I have no reason to stop."



# JOURNEY OF THE HEART

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*with*

UCI ETUDE ENSEMBLE

DONALD MCKAYLE

*Free Admission, Reservations Recommended*

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PREMIERE

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