the 51st (dream) state is nationally acclaimed poet, Sekou Sundiata’s contemplation of America's national identity, of its power in the world, and of its guiding mythologies. The work, which Sundiata imagines as his poetic and personal “state of the American Soul Address,” explores how America defines itself in a new era characterized by unprecedented global influence and power. It is about an adventure, a quest to find a vision of what it means to be both a citizen and an individual in a deeply complex, hyper-kinetic society. Some of the implied questions are: What does "pursuit of happiness" mean in a society that places so much emphasis on tangible outcomes for most endeavors? Given the multilingual reality of daily life in much of the U.S, what is the American language? Can the old, central myths about such things as beauty, power, and destiny sustain the nation? What does a public imagination steeped in violence say about who we are? What are the prospects for love, compassion and human solidarity?

the 51st (dream) state features a cycle of songs, poems and monologues supported by still and moving projected images. The creative team includes director Christopher McElroen, projections designer Sage Marie Carter, composers/songwriters Graham Haynes and Ani DiFranco, vocal arranger Richard Harper, lighting designer Rick Murray, costume designer Liz Prince and set designer Troy Hourie. Sekou Sundiata will perform with an all-star ensemble of singers and musicians, including keyboards, trumpet, drums, bass and guitar. The work is being developed through community dialogues throughout the country. Activities include “community sings,” which are public events featuring cast members and community members singing and discussing their relationships to a variety of American folk, popular, traditional and patriotic songs. Community sings and similarly structured “poetry circles” along with community dinners, workshops and discussion forums will continue to be offered as the 51st (dream) state tours.

the 51st (dream) state offers opportunities to join art and civic dialogue. It can be used to initiate and illuminate public discussions related to the questions outlined above, among others. Not only are these questions timely, they are at the center of the work that Sekou Sundiata has been doing throughout his career. They also shape many of the passions of our "life and times."

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