

Meshell Ndegeocello Releasing James Baldwin Tribute Album



Credit: Andre Wagner

Meshell Ndegeocello has announced her next album, *No More Water: The Gospel Of James Baldwin*. The album originates in a 2016 concert at The Harlem Stage Gatehouse during their annual showcase honoring Baldwin. Ndegeocello had read Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* the previous year and found it "life-changing" and a "spiritual text." Her interaction with Baldwin's work came at an important time for her. She says, "It came when I was ready to look in the mirror. I've had to play *Plantation*

Lullabies at a few shows. Looking back, I had an interesting perspective, but the dialogue was limited. It was more like a cathartic experience for a young person of color, whereas now I'm going, 'How can I get us all to love each other? How can I get us all to see this for what it is?'" The music is modeled after the Black church with themes of Baptism, testimony, praise and resurrection. Ndegeocello co-produced the album with Chris Bruce and is working with frequent collaborators like Justin Hicks and Josh Johnson. Esteemed poet Staceyann Chin also appears on *No More Water*. "Travel" is the first single and Hicks takes over with his poetic answer to Baldwin's suicide motif. Chin's words in "Raise The Roof" holds racist murdering cops accountable and rants against a system that has devalued Black life for more than 400 years. The anger Baldwin had towards America for its treatment of Black people and his trenchant essays about the trauma of racism have a sonic counterpart in the honesty and fire of both singles.

No More Water is Ndegecello's second album for Blue Note. *The Omnichord Realbook* released in 2023 was her debut album for the storied jazz label. *No More Water* will be released on August 2, 2024, which would have been Baldwin's 100th birthday.