



AUGUST WILSON AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER ANNOUNCES BLACK HISTORY MONTH PROGRAMMING

Pittsburgh's Black Art Scene: Past, Present & Future, a retrospective on Pittsburgh's role in the cultural lexicon and a celebration of the city's historic arts scene presented as part of the month-long offerings

February 1, 2021 – Pittsburgh, PA – The August Wilson African American Cultural Center (AWAACC), one of the largest non-profit cultural organizations in the country focused exclusively on the African American experience and the arts of the African diaspora, announced today a monthlong series of events in celebration of Black History Month. AWAACC will present ***Pittsburgh's Black Art Scene: Past, Present & Future***, a retrospective on Pittsburgh's role in the cultural lexicon and the artforms and artists that have contributed to the city's historic Black arts scene, along with special editions of ongoing programs. Through three special events, historians, artists and scholars will examine three distinct phases of Pittsburgh's cultural evolution, including a special tribute to the remarkable history of the **National Negro Opera House**; an interview with **Mark Clayton Southers**, the founder and producing artistic director of the Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company; and a special performance by the funk-jazz collective, **Funky Fly Project**.

AWAACC celebrates Black History Month with seven events spanning film, music, writing, photography, and more, that advance Wilson's legacy, honor Black culture, and inspire future arts innovators. Kicking off the month, AWAACC will present a special installment of their virtual music series **AW Studio Sessions**, featuring jazz and soul legends **Gerald Veasley** and **Carol Riddick** in *I Got Life, the music of Nina Simone*. The presentation, recorded in studio this past fall, moves through four styles of Ms. Simone's songbook: quest, passion, fury and hope. AWAACC will also continue its popular **Lit Fridays** program with a special edition featuring photographer **Ming Smith**, who created a photography series in the Hill District of Pittsburgh in honor of August Wilson in the 1990s. The **Black Bottom Film Festival**, which illuminates African American cinema and African American filmmaking pioneers of recent decades, will expand in February with an offering to engage film audiences year round. The program will present the first screening in its virtual film series, **Melissa Haizlip's** *Mr. Soul!*. Film curator Joe Lewis and literary curator Jessica Lanay will be in conversation with Melissa Haizlip and Executive Producer **Blair Underwood** ahead of the screening. In the months ahead, the series will continue to feature films that focus on the themes of spirituality, race, family conflict, honor, duty and working-class struggle, themes ever-present in August Wilson's The Pittsburgh Cycle plays. The Center will also offer a free information session about the next iteration of its **Youth Writers Camp**, a monthly program designed for middle and high school students to explore and develop their own unique writing voices through interactive readings, thought-provoking writing exercises and constructive discussions.

"Pittsburgh is the birthplace of some of the country's most acclaimed talent and it continues to be home to a vibrant local arts scene and an incubator of exciting new voices. The August Wilson African American Cultural Center is proud to celebrate the city's legacy in creation of Black art, and I'm thrilled to partner with an array of artists and scholars over the month of February to share our city's talents with people all over the world," **Janis Burley Wilson, President and CEO of August Wilson African American Cultural Center**. "From our Black History Month programming to the creation of the forthcoming exhibition *August Wilson: A Writer's Landscape*, and our continued work championing dynamic artists of all disciplines, the Center is dedicated to honoring the trailblazers of Pittsburgh's arts scene while serving as a steward of its present and future creators."

Black History Month program details:

AW Studio Sessions: Gerald Veasey and Carol Riddick February 4 at 8pm EST

I Got Life: The Music of Nina Simone pairs two legends of jazz and soul music to celebrate an iconic artist. Riddick (vocals) and Veasey (bass) share a deep appreciation for Ms. Simone, who wrote renowned civil rights song “Mississippi Goddam and who marched at Selma. Her music and desire for social justice still resonate today. *I Got Life*, consists of vocals from Carol Riddick, Gerald Veasey (bass), Aaron Graves (keyboards) and Tim Hutson (drums). Tickets for all AW Studio Sessions are \$12. For more information and to purchase tickets, please visit <https://aacc-awc.org/events/>.

BHM: Past with Jonnet Solomon February 12 at 6pm

BHM: Past will premiere on AWAACC’s Facebook page and YouTube channel, featuring a 15-minute video showcasing the remarkable history of the National Negro Opera House in a conversation with Jonnet Solomon.

Black Bottom Film Festival February 15 at 7pm EST

AWAACC’s Black Bottom Film Festival (BBFF) will present the first screening in its virtual film series, Melissa Haizlip’s *Mr. Soul!*. BBFF curator Joe Lewis and Literary Curator Jessica Lanay will be in conversation with Melissa Haizlip and Executive Producer Blair Underwood ahead of the screening. The other films to be shown in the series are *Coded Bias* (March 15) and *Philly D.A.*(April 19). This series is presented in partnership with PBS’s Independent Lens, which is dedicated to giving voice to the voiceless and celebrating diversity.

Youth Writers Camp Informational Session February 18 at 6pm EST

AWAACC’s Youth Writers Camp dives into August Wilson’s four major artistic influences and helps the participants discover their unique writing voice. Open to middle schoolers and high schoolers, the Youth Writers Camp began in 2018 for young people interested in poetry, plays, short stories and more. To learn more about this opportunity, all are welcome to this hourlong informational session.

BHM: Present with Mark Clayton Southers February 19 at 6pm EST

BHM: Present will premiere on AWAACC’s Facebook page and YouTube channel, featuring a 15-minute interview with award-winning playwright and director Mark Clayton Southers. Southers resides in Pittsburgh and is an active member of the Pittsburgh arts community. He is the founder and producing artistic director of the Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company.

BHM: Future with Funky Fly Project and Lit Fridays with Ming Smith February 26 at 6pm EST

This special edition of the Center’s literary focused virtual salon will feature photographer Ming Smith, who created a series in the Hill District of Pittsburgh in honor of August Wilson in the 1990s. Moderated

by AWAACC Literary Curator Jessica Lanay, the conversation will center on her August Wilson series, her connection to Pittsburgh, and the future of Black creation. Lit Fridays happen live on Facebook Live and on Zoom. Immediately following Lit Friday, *BHM: Future* will premiere on AWAACC's Facebook page and YouTube channel, featuring a performance by the young virtuosos of the funk-jazz collective, Funky Fly Project.

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About August Wilson African American Cultural Center

The August Wilson African American Cultural Center is a non-profit cultural arts center located in Pittsburgh's cultural district that generates artistic, educational, and community initiatives that advance the legacy of Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson. One of the largest cultural centers in the country focused exclusively on the African American experience and the celebration of Black culture and the African diaspora, the non-profit organization welcomes more than 119,000 visitors locally and nationally. Through year-round programming across multiple genres, such as the annual Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival, Black Bottom Film Festival, AWCommunity Days, TRUTHSayers speaker series, and rotating art exhibits in its galleries, the Center provides a platform for established and emerging artists of color whose work reflects the universal issues of identity that Wilson tackled and which still resonate today.

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