



**MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Treshea N. Wade  
Manager of Communications & E-marketing  
August Wilson Center for African American Culture  
Office 412.258.2692  
Cell 412.716.8961  
[twade@AugustWilsonCenter.org](mailto:twade@AugustWilsonCenter.org)

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **August Wilson Center Announces Inaugural Class of Fellows**

### ***Six local artists to benefit from generous, groundbreaking initiative***

**PITTSBURGH, PA—July 13, 2009—**The August Wilson Center for African American Culture today announced that it has selected its first class of August Wilson Center Fellows for the 2009/10 year.

The 2009/10 August Wilson Center Fellows are:

- **Vanessa German**, *performance artist*
- **Chris Ivey**, *filmmaker and videographer*
- **Anire Mosley**, *visual artist*
- **Greer Reed-Jones**, *performance artist*
- **Brett Williams**, *musician*
- **Jasiri X**, *performance artist*

The August Wilson Center Fellows Program is a one-of-a-kind opportunity designed to give local artists access to a broad range of support systems that will allow them to excel in their craft. The six Fellows selected will work on a self-identified project over a one-year period. The Center will provide each Fellow with a generous stipend of up to \$10,000 and both administrative and creative support.

“The August Wilson Center is very excited about this extraordinary group of artists and the range of practice they represent,” said the Center’s Vice President of Programs, Shay Wafer. “This inaugural class of fellows embodies the exceptional emerging artists in our community.”

“It is through this Fellows Program that we endeavor to help these outstanding artists to continue to pursue their professional careers and contribute to the cultural vitality of our city and region,” Wafer added. The program aims to provide such support at moments in artists’ careers when a concentration on artistic growth and exploration is most likely to have the greatest impact on their long-term professional development.

The fellowships are for a maximum of one year. Fellowships were competitively awarded from a pool of 42 applicants. The selections were made through a two-phase peer-review process involving preliminary and final selection panels. The stipends provide artists with an economic freedom that presents the opportunity to focus on their individual practices over the year – to explore, experiment and develop his or her work more fully.

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Fellowships may be awarded at any stage of their career, from early to mature. Eligible artists may work in any of the following disciplines: media arts, music composition and performance, performance-based arts or visual arts. Up to 6 fellowships are awarded annually.

The Fellows Program was made possible through the generous financial support of an anonymous donor, with an additional grant from the Multicultural Arts Initiative (MCAI), a funding and advocacy organization that supports, strengthens and celebrates culturally diverse arts programming with an emphasis on African American programs. For more information, visit [www.mcai-pittsburgh.org](http://www.mcai-pittsburgh.org).

Here is more information about each of the Fellows, and their self-identified projects they will work on throughout the year:

### **Vanessa German, *performance artist***

As a nationally recognized spoken word artist, Vanessa German invokes fire into her audience with her multi-faceted performances. She is also an accomplished sculptor. Recent original works include the Pittsburgh debuts of Nikki Allens' *Loud* (2003) and *Fire* (2005) presented by the Three River Arts Festival in Pittsburgh, *rise* presented at the Center's First Voice festival (2007) and *Testify*, her first solo evening-length performance piece. German's goal for her fellowship is to create a Spoken Word Opera. German strives to explore the possibility of layering voices and using sound as a three-dimensional landscape through performances, artifacts and sculptural poems. German also plans to create a Youth Spoken Word Festival, where young artists can come and display their talent through an evening venue at the Center

### **Chris Ivey, *filmmaker and videographer***

Imbued with a passion for documentary and experimental projects, works by this award-winning local artist include the "East of Liberty" series. Chronicling the affects of urban development on a Pittsburgh neighborhood that has gone through cyclical development over the past several decades, this series shows the displacement of residents and renewed promises of a bright future. Ivey aims to utilize the access and resources of his fellowship to complete and present the fourth installment of the five-part series about East Liberty. Entitled "Unlivable Times," the one-hour production will document changes to the community as they take place and their impact. Community-based collaborators will include: One Hood, the North Side-based One Vision/One Life, the Kingsley Association, the Union Project, Pittsburgh TASK (Youth Against Urban Violence), Peabody High School and the Youth Initiative at Mt. Ararat Baptist Church in Larimer, a neighborhood adjacent to East Liberty. His goal is to premiere the documentary at the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater in 2010.

### **Anire Mosley, *visual artist***

A son of influential Pittsburgh sculptor Thaddeus Mosley, Anire Mosley is committed to developing his artistic "voice," technique and talent by working in a variety of media and disciplines such as drawing, painting, photography and design. Mosley will utilize his fellowship to cultivate his own interdisciplinary style and develop new work. His community engagement project will be to organize exhibits and studio visits for school-aged children that provide insights to the creative process in the context of his social and interpersonal experiences, values and environment.

### **Greer Reed-Jones, *performance artist***

A performing artist since the age of three, Greer Reed-Jones has developed an intense passion to keep dance in the black tradition alive. Through this fellowship, Reed-Jones will create an August Wilson Center Dance Ensemble (AWCDE). The ensemble will bring together the multicultural dance community focusing on black dance traditions. Receiving awards such as the Josie and Onyx Awards, Reed-Jones has a passion to address the lack of pre-professional, high-quality dance training and performance opportunities to young, aspiring dancers. The AWCDE will allow the students to showcase their achievements in collaboration with various arts forms. The initial performance will be held at the Center, with additional performances at community festivals, churches, organizations, and other venues.

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### **Brett Williams, *musician***

Seventeen-year-old Brett Williams will be a senior at Hampton High School in Allison Park, north of Pittsburgh, while simultaneously participating as a Fellow. Regionally acclaimed as a pianist and percussionist, Williams aspires to work on developing his performance of traditional and contemporary jazz styles by working with his mentor world-class trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and composer/keyboardist/producer Jeff Lorber. His goal is to record a CD in 2010 at Manchester Craftsmen's Guild featuring a few acclaimed musicians. He plans to perform a concert at the August Wilson Center in 2010, integrating contemporary hip hop and jazz in a series of performances featuring local artists. The concert would benefit area schools in low-income neighborhoods.

### **Jasiri X, *performance artist***

Dedicated to influencing young people to make better decisions and influencing a change in the culture of the Black community, lyricist Jasiri Smith created "This Week with Jasiri X," and Internet-based hip hop news series. Through his fellowship, Smith hopes to inform the community about world news and events. Smith also strives to produce quality, positive and profane-free music for a primary market of youth and young adults. Smith has received numerous awards, including the Pittsburgh Hip Hop Award in 2008, the Nation Building Award and the Peace-It-Together Community Initiative Peace Partner Award. As an August Wilson Center Fellow, Smith will engage the community through a series of media literacy workshops and a Hip Hop Club, which would focus on educating youths on the nuances of hip hop.

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### **About the August Wilson Center for African American Culture**

Named for Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning playwright and Hill District native August Wilson, the August Wilson Center for African American Culture engages regional and national audiences in its mission of preserving, presenting, interpreting, celebrating and shaping the art, culture and history of African Americans in Western Pennsylvania and people of African descent throughout the world.

Located in Downtown Pittsburgh's Cultural District, the multidisciplinary August Wilson Center is reflective of all aspects of African American culture. The Center's striking, two-story, green building houses seven exhibition galleries, a 486-seat theater for performances in all disciplines, an education center, a café and gift shop, and multipurpose spaces for community programs and events. The Center is among a select few African American cultural institutions presenting visual and performing arts, the humanities and educational programs in a state-of-the-art venue.

More information is available on the Center's Web site at [AugustWilsonCenter.org](http://AugustWilsonCenter.org) and by calling 412.258.2700.