



MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION:

Diane Wuycheck
PR Consultant
August Wilson Center for African American Culture
412.471.4495/412.310.4151
wuycheck@wuycheck.com

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**August Wilson Center Announces
2011-2012 FELLOWS
Four local artists receive support to advance their work**

Left to right, Staycee Pearl, Erika Beras, Maryam Abdul-Qawiyy and Kelli Stevens Kane
Photo credit: Gail L. Manker

PITTSBURGH, PA – November 9, 2011—The August Wilson Center for African American Culture today announced its 2011- 2012 August Wilson Center Fellows. Established in 2009, the annual cash award support the needs of African American artists and artists of African descent living and working in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

This year's August Wilson Center Fellows are:

Staycee Pearl, Performance-based & Literary Arts
Erika Beras, Media Arts
Maryam Abdul-Qawiyy, Literary Artist
Kelli Stevens Kane, Performance-based & Literary Arts

Through the fellowships the local artists will have new venues to create and present their own works of art; pursue individualized career advancement; participate in collaborative creative and marketing projects; strengthen community connections; acquire financial services; and collect a regular stipend.

“The August Wilson Center seeks to do more than provide a physical platform for cultural expression in the arts. It also wants to ensure that creative people in Southwestern Pennsylvania have access to the soft-skills and other resources they need to further their craft and careers; enable them to devote more time to their work; and improve and emphasize the civic role of arts in this region,” the Center’s Vice President of Programming and Cultivation Shaunda Miles explains.

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The fellowships are awarded for a minimum of one year. The stipends provide artists with economic freedom to focus on their individual practices over the year to explore, experiment and develop their work more fully.

The Center's President and CEO Andre Kimo Stone Guess adds, "The Fellowships are also directly aligned with our goal to support local artists so that they can pursue vibrant careers right here in Pittsburgh."

Fellowships were competitively awarded from a pool of over fifty applicants. The selections were made through a two-phase peer review process involving preliminary and final selection panels comprised of regional arts professionals, active in various visual, performing and literary arts fields.

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

The AWC Fellows Program is made possible through the financial support of an anonymous donor, with an additional grant from The Pittsburgh Foundation, the Multicultural Arts Initiative, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Here are short biographies of the 2011-2012 Fellows and their self-identified projects.

Staycee Pearl, Performance-based and Literary Arts

Staycee R. Pearl initially trained at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, the Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey American Dance Center of New York City. She left New York to perform with CORE Performance Company of Atlanta, and returned after four years to pursue a career as a solo-performing artist. After relocating to Pittsburgh, Staycee began her six-year tenure as Artistic Director of Xpressions Contemporary Dance Company (XCDC), where she premiered numerous original works and worked with celebrated national choreographers such as Rennie Harris and Robert Battle. Staycee is responsible for the choreography in Nathan Davis' jazz-opera, "Just Above My Head," "Carmen Jones," and "Lost in the Stars," all produced by the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh. Staycee's experience includes a choreographic fellowship at Summer Stages Dance/Concord Academy, a scholarship to Urban Bush Women's Summer Institute/Place Matters, and a performance-art workshop with La Pocha Nostra. In 2009, she graduated with departmental honors in Studio Art and a minor in Africana Studies from the University of Pittsburgh. She has shown works at Space Gallery, Sweetwater Center for the Arts and the August Wilson Center for African American Culture. She continues to produce work with PearlArts: movement and sound, co-founded with husband Herman 'Soy Sos' Pearl. At the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater she served as curatorial advisor for NewMoves Contemporary Dance Festival, debuted her most recent endeavor, STAYCEE PEARL dance project (SPdp), in 2010, and was appointed the Theater's resident dance company.

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As an August Wilson Center Fellow, Staycee will remount and re-present "OCTAVIA," an evening-length dance performance with STAYCEE PEARL dance project. "OCTAVIA" explores the life writings of acclaimed science fiction writer Octavia Butler. Ms. Butler writes about human - alien interaction, then tells stories of shape shifters, immortals and mind readers. She uses broad themes of rebirth/transition, immortality, and symbiotic vs. parasitic relationships, creating an opportunity to meld interesting physical/living characteristics for performance. During her year-long fellowship, Staycee will create visual imagery, consisting primarily of a large mural backdrop and a sculptural set piece that will serve as a rich immersive environment for the remount of the performance piece.

Erika Beras, Media Arts

Erika Beras works as a behavioral health reporter and producer at Essential Public Radio. Her work has also aired on NPR, the BBC and other networks. She previously worked as a journalist at The Miami Herald and other daily and weekly publications. She has won local, state and national awards for her reporting, writing and production including The Rolling Stone College Journalism Award and an Associated Press Sports Editors Award. She is a graduate of Purchase College and Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and an alumna of The Academy for Alternative Journalism at Northwestern University.

During her Fellowship, Erika will conduct an extensive oral history project, primarily recording interviews with African Americans who came to Southwestern Pennsylvania during the Great Migration. She will archive them with existing national groups. From the audio she collects, she will write and produce one or more audio documentaries. Erika is interested in adding an interactive exhibition to the presentation of the audio recordings to be presented as part of FIRST VOICE FESTIVAL: A Pittsburgh International Black Arts festival that showcases the work of the Fellows in May 2012.

Maryam Abdul-Qawiyy, Literary Arts

Maryam Abdul-Qawiyy is an American-Belizean travel writer, who received a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing and Journalism from Hiram College in Ohio. She holds a Master's in Fine Arts from Chatham University with a double focus in Creative Nonfiction and Screenwriting.

A Los Angeles native, she spent most of her life in Belize. This engendered the importance of multicultural and interfaith relationships in her work. She currently freelances for the New Pittsburgh Courier and has published works in the "Coal Hill Review." A creative soul and artist, she is a member of the Pittsburgh Gospel Choir and Ensemble and Bella Sultana Middle Eastern Dance Troupe.

As an August Wilson Center Fellow, Maryam will work on and complete the first volume of her travel memoir and series "A Servant in the House of Many Gods." She plans to publish and continue

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working on the other volumes in the series, “A Princess Rebuilds Her Throne,” “Warrior on the Horizon” and “Paradise Lies at Her Feet.” She also plans to conduct a community engagement project to help promote the importance of literacy in the African American community. She will facilitate writing workshops, specifically for youth, at local libraries and at the August Wilson Center.

Kelli Stevens Kane, Performance-based and Literary Arts

Kelli Stevens Kane is a poet, playwright, and oral historian. Her poetry manuscript, “Hallelujah Science,” was selected as a finalist for the 2011 Four Way Books Levis Poetry Prize. Her poems appear in numerous journals including “The Mom Egg,” “Kweli Journal” and “Mythium Literary Journal.” She’s a Cave Canem Fellow, a Flight School Fellow, and the recipient of an Advancing Black Arts in Pittsburgh Grant. Kelli is an alumna of the Callaloo, VONA and Hurston/Wright poetry workshops. She is also the recipient of a merit-based scholarship to a playwrighting workshop at the Norman Mailer Center. Kelli performed the opening poem at the 2011 National Poetry Slam. She has also appeared on “Prosody,” NPR affiliate WYEP’s weekly show featuring the work of poets and writers.

The focus of Kelli’s fellowship is to transform her literary works -- a poetry manuscript, a play and an oral history manuscript -- into a series of live interactive events. In this series, discussion with the audience will alternate with readings from and performances of the literary works, which are connected by themes of family, community and culture. These themes are examined through a perspective on death and birth that is rooted in Pittsburgh’s Hill District.

Kelli believes that the fluidity of form in this series will allow her to combine her written work and performance training to create a profound and healing experience for an audience diverse in age, geography and ethnicity.

The August Wilson Center Fellows Program has been supported over the past four years by an anonymous donor, the Multicultural Arts Initiative, The Pittsburgh Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Applications for the August Wilson Center Fellowships are accepted in the spring of each year, with recipients announced in the fall. For additional information, contact smiles@augustwilsoncenter.org.

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MEDIA: Please contact Diane Wuycheck, PR Consultant at 412.471.4495/412.310.4151, or wuycheck@wuycheck.com for any image or interview requests.

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ABOUT AUGUST WILSON CENTER FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE

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 utilizing the rich history, legacy and culture of African Americans from Western Pennsylvania as a foundation. The Center presents a year-round program of dance, music and theatre along with special visual arts exhibitions and cultivation activities for all ages and backgrounds in its state-of-the-art venue in the heart of Pittsburgh's Cultural District and throughout the region.

More information is available on The Center's website at www.augustwilsoncenter.org and by calling 412.258.2700.

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