



Media Contact:

Diane Wuycheck

412-471-4495/412-310-4151

wuycheck@wuycheck.com

**August Wilson Center Dance Ensemble's new work
features the music of Grammy awardee Bill Withers**

Pittsburgh, PA – Jan. 4, 2012-- Few stirred emotions of love, yearning and heartbreak like the great R&B soul singer William Harrison "Bill" Withers. His popular songs "Lean on Me," "Ain't No Sunshine," "Use Me," "Lovely Day," and "Grandma's Hands" inspired the August Wilson Center Dance Ensemble's "Suite Bill." These new works, choreographed by the ensemble, will be performed on Saturday, January 21, at 8 p.m. , at the August Wilson Center, 980 Liberty Avenue, downtown Pittsburgh.

Withers, an African American vocalist and songwriter who performed and recorded from 1970 until 1985, won three Grammy awards and was nominated for five others. Artists that have recorded his music cover genres such as pop, jazz, country and western, classical, rhythm and blues, gospel, and hip-hop and include Barbra Streisand, Michael Jackson, Liza Minnelli, Aretha Franklin, Tom Jones, Joe Cocker, Johnny Mathis, Mick Jagger, Sting, Crystal Gale, Nancy Wilson, Carmen McCrae, Diana Ross, Grover Washington, Jr., Luther Vandross, Rick Braun, Jimmy Buffett, and Boney James to name a few.

Withers' songs depict Affrilachia (af-ruh-LAY-shuh), a term describing African Americans born in and/or living in the Appalachian region, the theme for the Center's 2011-12 Continuum, a series of programs tied to a specific theme, says Greer Reed, the Center's Artistic Director for Dance and the August Wilson Center Dance Ensemble (AWCDE).

"As I did my research on Bill Withers as part of the Affrilachia theme, I realized there were so many great songs that I actually did not realize were his music. As "Suite Bill" develops there is a thread that will link everything together but in the beginning stages I just chose songs that touched me in one way or another. Songs like "Lovely Day," "Ain't No Sunshine," and "Lean On Me" were a given in paying tribute to him. There are some others that are not as popular but absolutely reflect his genius."

The AWCDE is a versatile dance company made up of not only talented dancers but also up and coming dynamic choreographers. In line with the August Wilson Center's mission, one of the many purposes of the company is to be a springboard for emerging choreographers works to be presented here.

“Because we are a repertory company, the dancers on a daily basis hone their skills to perform an array of styles, appreciate others’ ideas and adapt quickly to various choreographic processes. For this one night, Bill's honesty, sensitivity and genuine folksy style will come alive in captivating dance and reverie,” explains Ms. Reed.

The performance will be presented in the Center’s dance studio giving it a more intimate feel. “I think it works perfectly for this particular performance,” Ms. Reed adds. Vanessa German of the August Wilson Center Theatre Ensemble will add a touch of Bill Withers history during the show.

Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased online at www.culturaldistrict.org, by phone at 412.456.6666 or 412.338.874 (groups of 10 or more: 412.471.6930), or at the Box Office at Theater Square, 665 Penn Avenue, or at The August Wilson Center.

##

The August Wilson Center extends grateful appreciation to the following contributors of major support during the 2011-12 season: Allegheny Regional Asset District, The Buhl Foundation and Henry C. Frick Education Fund, The Heinz Endowments, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Richard King Mellon Foundation, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts and The Pittsburgh Foundation.

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 AugustWilsonCenter.org and by calling 412.258.2700

For more about William Harrison “Bill” Withers:

<http://www.songwritershalloffame.org/exhibits/bio/C342>