



**AUGUST WILSON AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER
RECEIVES OVER \$1 MILLION IN SUPPORT FROM
RICHARD KING MELLON FOUNDATION**

**Generous funding includes \$350,000 for the creation of
artist resident program supporting local, emerging artists of color**

Pittsburgh, PA – April 22, 2021 – The **August Wilson African American Cultural Center (AWAACC)** today announced a generous \$1.35 million grant from the **Richard King Mellon Foundation** in support of the Center’s ongoing work. Earlier in the year, Richard King Mellon Foundation also awarded the Center \$350,000, directed towards its new **artist-in-residency program, B.U.I.L.D.** (Build, Utilize, Inform, Lead, and Develop). The program is dedicated to supporting Pittsburgh-based emerging artists of color and creating a platform for diverse artists and organizations that have historically received unequal access to funding and resources for the development of new work. AWAACC’s artists-in-residence will receive professional development along with access to the Center’s artistic team and state-of-the-art venue for the creation of a commissioned work. The inaugural artists for the two-year program include visual artist, photographer, and filmmaker **Emmai Alaquiva** and theater collective, **Demaskus**, who will develop new work during the residency that will premiere in the 2022 season. Performing arts producer, curator and consultant **Baraka Sele** serves as the program’s lead producer, creating the structure for the residency.

“The past year has amplified a prevailing fact—organizations managed by people of color and artists of color are disproportionally under-funded and under-resourced in the development of their work and in service to their communities,” said **AWAACC President and CEO Janis Burley Wilson**. “The Center has long been dedicated to celebrating Black culture and championing future innovators in the arts. I am incredibly grateful to the Richard King Mellon Foundation for their ongoing support of this project and the AWAACC. I look forward to building a new pipeline for creativity and sharing Emmai Alaquiva’s and Demaskus’ commissioned works with our community and with cultural organizations and partners across the country.”

“The Foundation is proud to support the August Wilson African American Cultural Center in all its important work,” said **Sam Reiman, Director of the Richard King Mellon Foundation**. “And we are particularly gratified to help provide Pittsburgh’s emerging Black and minority artists with a meaningful platform to share their art with the community and the world.”

AWAAC’s B.U.I.L.D initiative will:

- **BUILD** capacity and support for labor intensive work;
- **UTILIZE** AWAACC’s abilities and resources to develop collaborations and partnerships that benefit not only the Center but the city of Pittsburgh and beyond;
- **INFORM** other artists, audiences, communities, and performing arts organizations of the rich cultural legacy and current aesthetic and vibrancy of Pittsburgh-based artists;
- **LEAD** the professional development and support of future artists and arts administrators, including curators, producers, managers; and
- **DEVELOP** cross-cultural and cross-sector collaborations, including commissions and partnerships locally and nationally.

"I am deeply appreciative to work with one of America's prominent artistic institutions, the August Wilson African American Cultural Center, to create new work that is deeply rooted in the Pittsburgh community and that speaks to audiences around the country," said **Emmai Alaquiva**. "I look forward to working with Janis Burley Wilson and the rest of the Center's team as we begin to restructure the landscape of arts and culture in our country."

AWAACC is 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. The organization is a leader in presenting programming that reflects the diversity of Pittsburgh and the nation. In addition to the two-year B.U.I.L.D. residency, this fall, AWAACC will unveil *August Wilson: A Writer's Landscape*, the first-ever exhibition dedicated to the life and works of the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright. Spanning close to 4,000 square feet, the multisensory exhibition will explore Pittsburgh, where Wilson was born and raised, and which had a profound impact on shaping his worldview and inspiring his unprecedented 10-play American Century Cycle.

To learn more about the August Wilson African American Cultural Center, the B.U.I.L.D. residency, year-round activities, and *August Wilson: A Writer's Landscape*, please visit <https://aacc-awc.org/>.

ARTIST BIOS:

EMMAI ALAQUIVA is an Emmy Award-winning film director, composer, and mentor known for his impact across mixed-media art platforms. Multi-award decorated, Alaquiva is the CEO of Ya Momz House, Inc., co-founder of Hip-Hop On L.O.C.K. and curator of OpticVoices. Alaquiva holds a 2017 Emmy nomination for his international directorial debut of the film *Ghetto Steps* and was selected by the City of Pittsburgh to spearhead the Amazon Pitch Video for their second Headquarters. Moreover, Alaquiva is a national BMe Community Leader recognized by President Barack Obama, Pittsburgh Business Times, "Top CEO of the Year," and most recently was appointed by Governor Tom Wolf to serve on the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts for the state of Pennsylvania.

Demaskus Theater Collective is a Pittsburgh-based national service-oriented collective founded in 2005. Its artists and administrators produce theatrical projects that share stories of the marginalized. The vision is artistic freedom, space for imagination and the ability to take risks, provide abundant work opportunities, and compensation for creatives. The collective is fiscally sponsored by New Sun Rising, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but began as its own 501c3 in Pasadena, California in 2006. Since its inception, the Collective has produced extensively although not annually due to various constraints. Demaskus is a Black-led organization seeking to marry the history, passion, and soul of untold stories with high production values. The organization values the history of traditional theater in all forms and seeks to push those traditional boundaries through the development of unique and atypical stories as well as through the presentation of canonized works produced in creative ways. The collective will always aim to create tour-ready productions, develop multicultural curricula for educational purposes, assist affiliates with career development, and consult with churches, schools, and community groups in the writing and production of quality theatrical projects.

ABOUT AUGUST WILSON AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER

The August Wilson African American Cultural Center is a non-profit cultural organization 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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