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NEWS RELEASE AUGUST 22, 2014

KST PRESENTS: Dance Icon Carmen de Lavallade Reflects on Life and Legacy with Pittsburgh Premiere of *As I Remember It*, Part of Limited US Tour

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Kelly Strayhorn Theater kicks off its 2014 Fall Season with *As I Remember It* — an intimate memoir of the life and legacy of **Carmen de Lavallade**, the legendary dancer, actress, and choreographer. Performances begins at 8 p.m. on Friday, September 12 and Saturday, September 13 at Kelly Strayhorn Theater in East Liberty. The performances are part of a limited engagement tour, which will visit only nine cities.

As I Remember It was written by Carmen de Lavallade and playwright/dramaturg Talvin Wilks, and is directed by Joe Grifasi. It premiered this past June at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. *As I Remember It* combines dance with storytelling and video, tracing de Lavallade's extraordinary career through more than six decades.

An aspiring dancer from a young age, Carmen de Lavallade (now 83) was greatly influenced by her cousin Janet Collins, who became the first African American prima ballerina for the Metropolitan Opera in the early 1950s. After graduating high school, Ms. de Lavallade received a scholarship to study dance with Lester Horton and was a member of Lester Horton Dance Theater before moving to New York City in 1954. Two years later, de Lavallade succeeded Collins as prima ballerina at the Metropolitan Opera.

In high school, de Lavallade was friends with now dance icon Alvin Ailey. It was de Lavallade who introduced Ailey to the world of dance and encouraged him to take his first dance class. They later danced together as part of Lester Horton Dance Theater. Ailey went on to found what is arguably the most successful dance company in the United States — Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Like Collins, de Lavallade struggled with racial discrimination during her career. In the early 1960s, de Lavallade was set to dance with Glen Tetley, a white dancer, on *The Ed Sullivan Show* but was denied the performance because interracial dancing on television was not permitted.

"In an era where we did not have a lot of African American artists in film, we see Carmen appear and how she overcame," says Anna Glass Coquillot, creative producer of *As I Remember It*. "She struggled because of her race and she shares some of those stories in her performance."

As I Remember It brings those stories to life through projections of never-before-seen film projected on translucent streamers. De Lavallade interacts with these images, weaving in and out of memories before the audience.

"The piece is visually quite stunning to see some of her memories come to life and to hear her reflections on those poignant moments — the things that she learned, the things that she was challenged



Photo courtesy of Julieta Cervantes



by, the things that excited her," says Coquillot. "We get to see a side of Carmen that most people don't know. Most people think of her solely as a dance artist or they recognize her as having come out of the Alvin Ailey family but what you learn is that she brought Alvin to dance, and we get to see those moments on film."

De Lavallade's performance also honors the people who influenced who she is as an artist today. "*As I Remember It* is my personal tribute to the phenomenal artists I have had the great pleasure of working with," says Ms. de Lavallade. "I created this piece as a way to say thank you to all of those people who contributed so much to me. Having the opportunity to share my stories with audiences across the country is a wonderful added bonus."

As I Remember It kicks off Kelly Strayhorn Theater's fall season, just ahead of the theater's centennial celebration. "Carmen de Lavallade's *As I Remember It* is the perfect season opener for our fall programming," says Janera Solomon, executive director. "Her perseverance and dedication to the arts is a great reflection of the resilience of our theater and neighborhood."

Following Friday's performance, Carmen de Lavallade, dramaturg Talvin Wilks, and director Joe Grifasi participate in a post-show discussion.

Tickets are available at kelly-strayhorn.org

Artist/Students - \$15 15206 Resident - \$20 Gen. Admission - \$25
Groups of 10+ call for group rate 412.363.3000 x318

Additional Events

A free screening of the documentary ***Carmen & Geoffrey*** will be held at KST's Alloy Studios on Wednesday, September 10 at 7 p.m., followed by a discussion with Carmen de Lavallade. Seating is limited to 70 places. Registration is required.

In addition to the performance and screening, Ms. de Lavallade will lead a **Master Class** featuring the work of Lester Horton on Wednesday, September 10 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at The Alloy Studios. Admission is \$5. A free artist lunch will follow from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The class is limited to 25 students. Registration is required.

The presentation of As I Remember It was made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

This engagement of Carmen de Lavallade is made possible through the ArtsCONNECT program of Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

About the Kelly Strayhorn Theater

As the last of nine theaters from the 1950s heyday of East Liberty, the Kelly Strayhorn Theater uses the arts as a catalyst for continuing community revitalization. The theater, in its 12th season, continues to play a key role in the transformation of Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood. An intimate, professionally equipped, 349-seat multiple-use performance venue, the theater demonstrates its commitment to Pittsburgh artists and audiences. The KST is a favorite venue of emerging local artists, regional artists and arts organizations who take risks and present new work. Noted Pittsburghers Gene Kelly and Billy Strayhorn, the namesakes, are among the 80 area artists honored on the theater's Gallery of Stars. The building, opening in 1914, is the former Regent Theatre, which served the East End as a movie house for eight decades.

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