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KST Presents Seventh Annual Suite Life: A Billy Strayhorn Birthday Bash

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Billy Strayhorn's Birthday Celebration Features Tribute Concert and Strayhorn Legacy Award Ceremony

For one night only, jazz drummer **Roger Humphries** leads a 10-piece instrumental and vocal ensemble in tribute to internationally acclaimed jazz legend Billy Strayhorn on **Saturday, November 29 at 8 p.m. at Kelly Strayhorn Theater (KST)**. The seventh annual **Suite Life: A Billy Strayhorn Birthday Bash** features a fantastic evening of classic Strayhorn compositions and birthday cake for all.

Suite Life celebrates the life and legacy of pianist, composer, and KST namesake Billy Strayhorn. Strayhorn grew up in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood and began studying music at an early age. As a teenager, he joined a musical trio that played daily on a local radio station and began writing musicals before finding his way into the realm of jazz. He joined Duke Ellington's band at the age of 22 and — over the course of three decades — collaborated with Ellington on such famous hits as *Lush Life* and *Take the 'A' Train*. Strayhorn, who would have turned 99 this year, is now considered one of the greatest composers in the history of American music.

Janera Solomon, executive director of KST, is excited to celebrate Billy Strayhorn's birthday. "Strayhorn is a monumental musician for Pittsburgh and the world," she says. "As an openly gay black man, he transcended social stigmas to achieve worldwide recognition."

Headlining Suite Life this year is another Pittsburgh jazz great, Roger Humphries. Humphries performs with his band, RH Factor, and guest vocalist Spanky Wilson. Like Strayhorn, Humphries showed great musical talent as a young child, beginning to play professionally at age 14. Over the course of his career Humphries has performed with musical greats like Ray Charles, Billy Preston, Dizzy Gillespie, Richard "Groove" Holmes, George Benson, Bill Doggett, and others.

As a Billy Strayhorn tribute, Suite Life tips its hat to a by-gone era of American music, but in true KST fashion, the evening also looks to the future. **C Street Brass** — a youthful brass quintet currently in residence at Carnegie Mellon University — has been busy building a reputation all around Pittsburgh and will open the show for RH Factor. C Street Brass connects lovers of the arts from all walks of life with a unique and innovative concert experience. The group prides itself on being equally as comfortable in the sound world of baroque music as it is in dubstep.

The concert begins at 8 p.m. Doors open at 7 p.m. for a pre-show mixer with complimentary drinks and light refreshments. Tickets are \$15 for students and artists, \$20 for residents of ZIP code 15206, and \$25 general admission.



Billy Strayhorn



The concert and mixer are preceded by the **Count Off** VIP reception. For \$75 per person, Count Off attendees will be treated to hors d'oeuvres, a champagne toast, and additional live performances. Count Off begins at 6 p.m. Cocktail attire requested.

Proceeds from Suite Life benefit the Strayhorn Legacy Fund, supporting youth and family programming at KST.

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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