

KST PRESENTS

MUSIC | PERFORMANCE

MICHELLE JOHNSON

MUSIC FROM THE HEART: A DIANA ROSS TRIBUTE

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2-3 8:00PM

KST PRESENTS | THE SOUL OF EAST LIBERTY



Let me tell ya what I've got / That nobody's gonna take away / I got my tongue, I got my chin / I got my heart, I got my soul / I got my back, I got my sex / Got life, I got my life.

— Nina Simone, Ain't Got No, I Got Life

After the **High Priestess of Soul** belts a long list of what she ain't got in *Ain't Got No, I Got Life*, she ends with adamant ownership of what she does — her entire body and soul. Throughout her career, Nina Simone unapologetically wielded what she had through her music in order to shift and shape the future. Like the work of artists who reflect the times, **the spaces where we create**, **share experiences with**, **and care for one another hold the soul of our community**. They lift up what we value and express new possibilities for our collective futures.

The Fall '22 KST Presents season celebrates **The Soul of East Liberty** by exploring what communities need to thrive — control over our stories, our bodies, and our futures. We are overjoyed to support artists **who unapologetically claim their right to possess their stories and own their futures**, and look toward a future in which we're all thriving where we live.

This September marks the debut of **BOOM Gallery**, a new partnership through which BOOM! Concepts curates visual art for the gallery at Kelly Strayhorn Theater with work from **J. Thomas Agnew**, **DS Kinsel**, and **J.L. Mallis**. On Saturday, September 17 we present *Fully Expressed*, a concert of local emcees curated by and featuring **Adam "FRH" Golden**. The following week we welcome California and Brooklyn-based **7NMS | Marjani Forté-Saunders and Everett Saunders** back home to KST with *PROPHET: The Order of the Lyricist*, a new dance-theater work tracking the journey of the Emcee as a literary figure. **The Alloy School** is also back in September with an 8-week session of classes including **Hip Hop**, **West African**, **Jazz Ballet**, **Creative Play** and **DanceFit**. Learn more at the *Orientation for Participants and Caretakers* on September 17.

October kicks off with a Freshworks showing from **Alyssa Velazquez**. Join us at KST on Saturday, October 29 for our family-focused **Halloween Mayhem**, then get ready for a packed November featuring world premieres on November 11 – 12 from **Fail-Safe**. The month continues with Boston-based **The Theater Offensive's Gow of a Rosde** on November 18 – 19. November's creative momentum peaks at Suite Life, KST's annual celebration of our namesakes Billy Strayhorn and Gene Kelly. Finally, in December we welcome Freshworks artist **Michelle Johnson** to close out the season.

It is more vital now than ever that Kelly Strayhorn Theater stoke creative experimentation, community dialogue, and collective action rooted in the liberation of Black and queer people. This fall, join us in celebrating The Soul of East Liberty and owning what we've got.

Joseph D. Hall JOSEPH HALL

JUSEPH HALL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



ABOUT KELLY STRAYHORN THEATER

Kelly Strayhorn Theater is a non-profit community performing arts center in East Liberty, with two venues running along historic Penn Avenue. KST's Alloy Studios is a cultural hub in the heart of East Liberty, and the historic Kelly Strayhorn Theater is located in the thriving business district. More than 20 years after its founding, KST is a home for creative experimentation, community dialogue, and collective action rooted in the liberation of Black and queer people.

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MUSIC | PERFORMANCE

MICHELLE JOHNSON

MUSIC FROM THE HEART: A DIANA ROSS TRIBUTE

ABOUT THE SHOW

Music From the Heart: A Diana Ross Tribute is the second presentation from KST's Fall 2022 Freshworks series. The performance honors the songs that keep us in motion, and is dedicated to Pittsburgh and to the generations of inspiring Black women in director and performer **Michelle Johnson**'s life. Paying respect to Diana Ross's work ethic and star power, Music From the Heart tells a story of learning, love, and living life from the heart. When asked about the genesis of her showcase, Michelle explains:

"I have my grandmother to blame! From a very young age, she turned on the 1979 concert, Diana Ross: Live at Caesar's Palace, and I was hooked. I remember going over the whole concert, and since that very first concert, I was amazed. I was able to continue studying Ross's work, I did school reports about her, and I've always wanted to perform with her."

Michelle Johnson

CREDITS

Michelle Johnson, Director & Featured Vocalist **The BGVs:**

Carmen Miller, Vocalist Delana Flowers, Vocalist Katy Cotten, Vocalist Martel Brown, Dancer Jordan Robinson, Vocalist Kari Wabash, Lighting Parker Stevens, Camera Op Britt Pierce, AV

RUN OF SHOW

- · Welcome Video
- "Love Child"
- "It's My House"
- "Love Hangover"
- Supremes Medley
- "Baby Love"
- "Where Did Our Love Go"
- "Stop! In The Name Of Love"
- "You Can't Hurry Love"
- Mish says a few words
- "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"
- Closing Video
- Encore: "The Boss"

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Michelle Johnson (director, featured vocalist) is a vocalist, songwriter and choreographer whose heart belongs to her hometown, Pittsburgh, PA. The C.A.P.A Middle/High School graduate has taken audiences through a storm of song and style at venues including the Pittsburgh Hard Rock Cafe, The Rex Theater, and The Greer Theater. Mish's classically trained, soulful vocals



incorporate stylistic elements from Aretha Franklin to Beyonce, earning her the moniker, "The Velveteen Voice of Pittsburgh." Whether she is covering Aretha Franklin classics or original selections, she is at ease in any vocal capacity. Johnson played the role of Motormouth Maybelle in the 2014 CCAC South and 2019 Stage 62 production of *Hairspray*, and has performed with the renowned Pittsburgh Opera company in *Aida*. She has opened for pop superstars Nick Jonas (2015) and Ke\$ha (2018). In 2019 and 2022 Johnson was a featured singer for *Broadway Meets Motown* at The Strand Theater. Mish shows involve extraordinary live vocals, vivacious hand-made, red carpet worthy costumes. Most recently, Johnson appears as the dynamic, hilarious, host and producer of her homegrown local TV talk show *'The Mish Connection'* on Pittsburgh's PCTV.

The BGV's (background vocalists) are amazing background and lead vocalists with astounding versatility, tight harmony, and beautiful clarity. Composed of Katy Cotton, Carmen Miller, and Delana Flowers, an Aretha Franklin tribute brought them together over a decade ago. Since then they have graced stages all over Pittsburgh and beyond. These ladies have been heard singing everything from R and B to gospel,



from jazz to country, from pop to rock, originals and A Capella. If 3's a crowd, you'll want to hear this one again and again.

Delana Flowers (vocalist) is a dynamic vocalist with a unique sound. Her energy and eclecticism fill every space of any room as she sings from her heart and soul to yours. Miss Flowers is also a songwriter, actress, writer, model, content creator, and a teaching artist. Inspiring and uplifting are words commonly used to describe her art, in whichever form you find yourself immersed in. She is grateful to God for her amany gifts and she is honored to share them with you.



Carmen Miller (vocalist) is a Pittsburgh native and vocalist is known for her unique and powerful vocal range and a' capella abilities. Carmen Miller began her musical journey as an instrumentalist, participating in the CCAC Jazz Band as a flautist. As her passion for singing grew, she shifted her focus from instrumental to vocal

performance. Carmen has performed throughout the City of Pittsburgh as a



a former lead vocalist for the Recover Band. As a solo artist, Carmen has performed in events and on stages including the African American Heritage Day parade, the Hillman Center for Performing Arts, the Kelly Strayhorn Theater, the August Wilson Center and PNC Park. Carmen currently sings with her group, BGVS, a.k.a. Background Vocals, as well as lead vocals for various events across the Greater Pittsburgh Region and has offered vocal support to artists including Teresa Hawthorne, J'Aira Pryor, Shawnee Lining, Charelle Unique, Kenny Stockard and Will Manker. Additionally, Carmen sings with the praise team at her church home, Greater Works Outreach. Carmen is excited to participate in Music of the Heart: A Diana Ross Tribute and looks forward to future opportunities to share her gifts.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Willa Catherine Cotten (vocalist),

affectionately called "Katy", is a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From 1997 through 2001 she toured several parts of Europe with a small gospel group named The Gospel Family directed by Keith Moncrief. In 1997 she was named soprano of the year by the late renowned gospel artist Rev. James Moore during the recording of his album It's Not Over Till God



gSays It's Over. It was there that she ministered in song with Minister Trini L. Massie and Love Outreach and continues to perform with several gospel choruses. Her travels with Love Outreach have taken her up and down the east coast of the United States, and with this group she has sung with and opened for such artists as Yolanda Adams, John P. Kee, God's Property, Vanessa Bell Armstrong, Bobby Jones, Dorothy Norwood, Lucrecia Campbell, Richard Smallwood, Karen Clark Sheard, Michael McDonald and many more. Most recently Katy's gifts in music have taken her to Stockholm, Sweden where she was invited to sing with The New Millennium Gospel Singers at the annual Gospelkor Festival. She also experienced her first Pittsburgh Playwrights Black and White festival in a lead role in 2014. She does not take her gift lightly as she studied music as a voice major at the High School for Creative and Performing Arts in Pittsburgh and has actively participated in the arts most of her life. She is currently working in the healthcare industry and is a recent graduate of Duquesne University with a BSN in Nursing while maintaining a position of Minister of Worship and Fine Arts at the Greater Allen A.M.E. Church. She feels that singing is simply telling a short story inside a melody. But singing the gospel renews, restores, rejuvenates and revives us. It makes the heart listen.

Jordan 'JAE' Robinson (vocalist), Spiritual Metaphysician & Mixed Media Communications Artist, is no stranger to the stage – She's lived there for what feels like an eternity & infuses it into her life 24/7/365! As a child she found it difficult navigating the physical natures of reality because her mind & thoughts were usually in the abstract, artistic or spiritual philosophical realms. Being highly attuned



hto the dramatic and theatrical elements of life as a highly sensitive empath herself, she has always viewed the world as a stage, and herself and others as actors (whether actively or passively engaged). Jordan's debut into sensational performance artistry began with studying ballet and jazz with the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater. Jordan has sang publicly throughout her 20's with Mish at The Rex Theater, The Hard Rock Cafe & on her PCTV show The Mish Connection. She also sang publicly in a Valentine's themed showcase with EKC Productions, as a backup singer for singer-songwriter Mychole Starr & as lead & back up with her dad's former band Network 602 (where she first met Mish!) Additionally, she's also danced with the Steel City Angels under Jerry Chiappinelli from 2009-2012 and has won awards for her poetry & song lyrics, having been compared to Pink's style of creative visceral expression.

Martel Brown (dancer)

THANK YOU! FROM MICHELLE JOHNSON

I give thanks and honor to GOD for his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

To the KST Alloy Studios family! I appreciate the opportunity to share my story. To express my love for music, family and new connections. To honor one of my favorite artists, Diana Ross. Thank you for everything you do for this community. KST staff has made me feel so at home. So kind and supportive welcoming me with open arms. I'm touched beyond words.

Thank you, Chanel Blanchett! I loved working with you. Your help and support is greatly appreciated. My heart just keeps thanking you and thanking you. Thank you for listening. I look forward to working with you again.

Thank you, Liz Rudnick! I loved working with you. Sometimes the simplest things mean the most. It was my pleasure filming with you. You were always willing help with any questions I had. Thank you for listening.

Thank you, J.R. Shaw! I loved working with you. I sincerely appreciate your assistance. ALWAYS WILLING TO HELP. Your thoughtfulness is a gift I will always treasure. Thank you for listening.

Thank you, Bianca-Leann Berdeguer! I love you my dear friend. I am so happy we got to work on a project together again. Thank you for being you. I am blessed to have you in my life.

Thank you, Ben Pryor! We were deeply touched by your warmth and hospitality during our visit. I am forever grateful for your support!

Thank you, Joseph Hall! For all the ways you've helped. From your hard work behind the scenes to your beautiful smile you greet me with. I am forever grateful!

To the cast of Music From The Heart: A Diana Ross Tribute

Thank you for sharing the stage with me. Sharing your talents with the world. I enjoyed every moment I spent with all of you in this residency. It has been a wonderful experience. Thank you for your time, effort, and perseverance throughout your tenure with the team. May we grow and achieve more success together in the coming days.

Thanks so much for all your help when I know you're already so busy.

Thank you, Delana Flowers! Thank you for going the extra mile. I simply couldn't be more grateful. Thank you for your friendly, dependable support for this project. What a blessing you've been.

Thank you, Carmen Flowers! For all you do—and for the kind, thoughtful way you do it. I thank you.

Thank you, Katy Cotten! I could never take for granted the hard work you do. Even with an injury! I see it, and I appreciate you. I thank you.

Thank you, Jordan Robinson! I am blessed to have a friend like you. My deepest gratitude for all your help! You always make me feel just like family. I hold you close to my heart as a sister. I thank you.

Thank you, Martel Brown! You have no idea how much your help means to me. Thank you for sharing your talents. I always look forward to sharing the stage with you. Thank you for all your support.

THANK YOU! FROM MICHELLE JOHNSON

Special Thanks

To my mother and grandmother! I admire you for permitting me to be me. You will never realize how much I am delighted and wish I could have that adolescence back with you. Thank you.

Thank you, Glenora! My grandmother. You've taught me how to live a life of fun, kindness, and happiness. For all the things you do, both big and small, I want to thank you. I know how much you love me, too. I wish you good health. May Lord bless you more day by day. This show is dedicated to you!

Thank you, Charlene! My mother. You give me a hug when I can't find my voice. You wipe away the tears that the world makes me weep. One of the most beautiful thing in this world is to see your parents smiling, and knowing that you are the reason behind that smile. I can never thank you enough for being there for me without a doubt. I can never tell you enough how much I love you, mom. But that will not stop me from trying. This show is dedicated to you!

Thank you, Wayne Glover! You're a blessing to me. All I can say is wow! (And, of course, that I'm grateful.) This thank you note does not do any justice for the beautiful gift you gave me. Your time, attention and sharing your craft. I am grateful you are in my life.

- Michelle Johnson

THANK YOU!

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