

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

### Kelly Strayhorn Theater Presents: Sunstar Festival: Women & Music

2023 Artists Announced: Toshi Reagon, Lola Cole, DJ FEMI, Diarra Imani, & Casaundra  
Curated in Partnership with The SCALE Fellowship Program

#### MEDIA CONTACT

Liz Rudnick, Marketing Manager

[lizrudnick@kelly-strayhorn.org](mailto:lizrudnick@kelly-strayhorn.org)

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**EAST LIBERTY, PA — Kelly Strayhorn Theater and The SCALE Fellowship Program** (a project of the **Equity | Impact Center**) are thrilled to announce the spring lineup for the 2023 **Sunstar Festival: Women & Music**. On March 18, 2023 at 8:00pm, KST will host performances from **Toshi Reagon, Lola Cole, DJ FEMI**, and **Casaundra** with host **Diarra Imani**. The women represent a broad spectrum of musical genres and influences, illustrating the multivalent talent of Black Women in the local scene and beyond.

Since its 2009 inception, KST's annual **Sunstar Festival: Women & Music** has celebrated the power and creativity of Black women by creating a platform for local performers to share the stage with national acts in a neighborhood theater setting. Dedicated to creating a dialogue between emerging and established artists, Sunstar showcases a variety of performers including dancers, spoken word poets, musicians, singer/songwriters, and more. Past programs have featured Grammy Award-winning group the **Carolina Chocolate Drops**, author **Rebecca Walker**, New York composer **Samita Sinha**, visual/spoken word artist **Vanessa German**, Pittsburgh artists and leaders: **Tania Grubbs, Staycee Pearl, Anqwenique Wingfield, Girls Running Sh\*\*, INEZ, Clara Kent, Brittney Chantele, Chandra Rhyme, Geña y Peña, Dejah Monea, Najj Andrea, ICY PISCES, Nairobi, Chantal Braziel, Candace Burgess, Jenifer Rose Weber**, and many more.

This year's festival is co-curated by the SCALE Fellowship Program, whose mission is to promote the advancement of Black Women in music. A project of the **Equity | Impact Center**, SCALE was designed by **Leigh Solomon Pugliano** with the intent of developing a comprehensive, collaborative program that provides both immediate and ongoing support to artists along with concrete opportunities for growth and advancement. The SCALE Fellowship aims to “**create an affirmative space for Black women in music to connect, share, learn, and grow.** SCALE provides financial support, a platform to produce and present work, entrepreneurial skill-building, and resources to Black women in music while affecting the development of an equity-centered, inclusive, and elevating ecosystem for emerging artists.”

—Leigh Solomon Pugliano

Audiences will be able to witness the fruits of their collaboration as the program culminates in two events at Kelly Strayhorn Theater on Saturday, March 18. Before the performers take the stage at 8:00pm, **we host an artist discussion and lunch at 1:00pm in the KST lobby.** Moderated by SCALE Fellowship founder Leigh Solomon Pugliano, this roundtable discussion invites artists and audience members alike to share their experiences navigating the music industry in order to **reveal new opportunities and create networks of support.** Then, at 8:00pm, the women of Sunstar 2023 will bring the audience on a journey across the genres of Mississippi Blues, Atlanta Soul, folk, funk, jazz, rock, R&B, and more.

Join KST and the artists for Sunstar Festival: Women & Music on Saturday, March 18 at 1:00pm and 8:00pm at Kelly Strayhorn Theater, 5941 Penn Ave. Tickets are Pay What Moves You, \$25 - \$40. For full season details, KST COVID policy updates, and tickets, go to [kelly-strayhorn.org](https://kelly-strayhorn.org).

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## ABOUT THE ARTISTS AND CURATOR

**Toshi Reagon** (Singer, Composer, Musician, Curator, Producer) is an award-winning multi-talented and versatile singer, composer, musician, with a profound ear for sonic Americana—from folk to funk, from blues to rock. While her expansive career has landed her at Carnegie Hall, the Paris Opera House and Madison Square Garden, you can just as easily find Toshi turning out at a music festival, intimate venue or local club. Inspired by the visionary and prescient story telling of Octavia E. Butler, Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon created the opera Octavia E. Butler's Parable of the Sower, which premiered in 2017 at NYUAD Arts Center in Abu Dhabi and to date, has been performed on four continents. The opera will be presented at Pittsburgh Playhouse March 30 - April 2, 2023. Toshi resides in Brooklyn NY. From there she continues to tour as a solo artist and with her band Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely.



Based in Studio City, CA, **Lola Cole** combines her Mississippi Blues roots with her Native Atlanta Soul to give voice to God and Freedom. She has been considered a hybrid artist; singing and writing with a conscious/activist mindset from a spiritual viewpoint. With a deep appreciation for jazz and the history of music culture, Lola calls her sound cultural art. It is a blend of her ingenious, black, southern, music roots.



Born and raised on the East Side of Pittsburgh, **DJ FEMI** strives to be a beacon of light in the night life and a prime example that women can be great DJs, business women, and entrepreneurs. In recent years, FEMI has been set up with some amazing opportunities, like performing with the legendary Sheila E. at Stage AE and opening up for Pi'erre Bourne at The Roxian Theatre



**Casaundra** is a R&B/Soul singer, songwriter and composer from Pittsburgh, PA. Her "Motivation Music," is very intentional in its goal to address self-care, awareness and healing. Casaundra has performed at the Oaks Theater with the likes of Etta Cox for "Ladies of Jazz" in 2018. She has also shared the stage with phenomenal Pittsburgh singers, Anita Levels and Tereasa Hawthorne, in "Pittsburgh's Divine Divas". Her short-term goals include putting out singles and curating music-related events for Pittsburgh's immediate neighborhoods and surrounding communities.



Whether it be a song, poetry, or painting, **Diarra Imani** is a Pittsburgh-based artist that is dedicated to truth-telling in her work. She believes her role as an artist is to present authenticity to her listeners, to her comrades, and to the folks who are witnessing her without her knowing. Diarra's artistry is multidimensional, using paint to illuminate a vision, poetry to evoke feeling, and song to reflect and create moments in time.



**Leigh Solomon Pugliano** (President & CEO, Equity Impact Center) is an entrepreneur, educator, and experienced strategist who has helped to scale established businesses, creative small businesses, entrepreneurs, and nonprofit organizations. Leigh provides organizational development support through consulting, strategic planning, and the development and implementation of initiatives specifically designed for organizations to increase their impact and move toward sustainability.



For over a decade, Leigh served as Principal Consultant at Straightforward Consulting, a firm she founded in 2011. Leigh is also the Founder and Director of Barrels to Beethoven, and Co-Founder of Limelight Creative. Leigh has received several awards and recognition for her work, including Pittsburgh Courier Fab 40, Women in Business, The World Affairs Council Illuminate Award, and the YWCA Equity Award for Bridge Builder. In her newest role as CEO of the Equity | Impact Center, Leigh intends to advance the work of social justice organizations and drive equitable systems change throughout the U.S. with a specific focus on the Pittsburgh region. Leigh is originally from Guyana, South America, and currently lives in Pittsburgh, PA with her husband and three daughters.

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## ABOUT KELLY STRAYHORN THEATER

Named after 20th century entertainment legends **Gene Kelly** and **Billy Strayhorn**, both natives of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, **Kelly Strayhorn Theater** (KST) is reflective of the passion that its founders had for the arts. Today, Kelly Strayhorn Theater carries on the legacy of its founders by fostering bold and innovative artistry with a global perspective. **KST celebrates diversity in voice, thought, and expression**, and upholds a firm commitment to inclusion. Furthermore, KST provides a safe and welcome space for dialogue and artistic expression for all who enter.

Kelly Strayhorn Theater has a dynamic footprint in Pittsburgh, with two venues running along 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 the founding of the theater, **KST continues to use its broad reach to impact the contemporary arts and the community.**

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## ABOUT THE SCALE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The **SCALE Fellowship Program** provides individualized artist development, entrepreneurial skill-building curriculum, and intentional opportunities for Black women in music to connect, share, learn, grow, and collaborate. Each cohort accepts up to 8 participants for the **8-month residency program** and provides Fellows with a financial award for acceptance into the program along with additional funds for: equipment, technology, business development, recording, branding, and legal support. SCALE supports Black women in music who are artist entrepreneurs in designing their business structures by facilitating the space to create work and perfect their craft. The program provides resources (knowledge, network, financial, space) as well as structural and **the strategic support needed to develop a sustainable career path and overcome the challenges that exist for Black artists in Pittsburgh and the nation.**

The SCALE Fellowship Program is a project of the Equity | Impact Center in collaboration with Limelight Creative and support from the Hillman Foundation and Advancing Black Arts, a program of Heinz Endowments and the Pittsburgh Foundation.

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