

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: KST Presents Suite Life, A Theatrical Jazz Benefit Concert Celebrating Icons Billy Strayhorn and Gene Kelly**

**MEDIA CONTACT**

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**EAST LIBERTY, PA, October 18, 2023** — Kelly Strayhorn Theater (KST) invites you to celebrate our namesakes with the music of composer **Billy Strayhorn** and the imagery of performer **Gene Kelly** at our unforgettable **theatrical jazz benefit concert *Suite Life*** on **Saturday, November 25, 2023, at 7:30pm at Kelly Strayhorn Theater (5941 Penn Ave.)**. Starting two hours before *Suite Life*, we hold our **VIP Reception** at our generous sponsor **Duolingo's East Liberty Headquarters (5900 Penn Ave.) at 5:30pm**. The reception features specially crafted cocktails, sumptuous hors d'oeuvres, and meaningful opportunities to connect with Pittsburgh's leading jazz enthusiasts.

We warmly welcome music director and pianist **Dr. Alton Merrell**, as well as band members: **Dwayne Dolphin** (bass), **James Johnson III** (drums), and **Colter Harper** (guitar). The concert features jazz singer and Billy Strayhorn aficionado **Joshua Banbury**, along with *Suite Life* veterans **Kelsey Jumper** and **Treasure Treasure**. KST reunites our friends, media artist **Scott Andrew**, and lighting designer **Madeleine Steineck** for a dazzling visual experience.

"Strayhorn has inspired me to bring theatrics into jazz," classically trained jazz singer and opera librettist Joshua Banbury explains, "in recent years, I have attempted to get very close to Strayhorn and his work. Being near his work, his story has greatly impacted my own. I've also fallen in love with his music because his ballads in particular are so akin to arias and art songs. To be able to sing his music in a theater dedicated to him is so special to me".

This year's event marks KST's 16th annual celebration of Gene Kelly's energetic and athletic dance style and Billy Strayhorn's longing and artful tones. Billy Strayhorn, born in 1915, lived in the Homewood section of Pittsburgh while Gene Kelly, born in 1912, grew up in East Liberty.

"While there is no written record showing the two ever met, it is documented that they both attended shows at Pittsburgh venues like the Stanley Theatre, where Strayhorn met Duke Ellington in 1938. Through the mixing of music and visuals, *Suite Life* imagines how their lives might have crossed paths right here, at Kelly Strayhorn Theater, back when it was the Regent Theatre," according to Joseph Hall, KST's Executive Director. We commemorate the duo's artistic and social legacies while cheering the communal and creative spirit embedded in our locality.

*Suite Life* travels back in time and delivers an immersive visual and sonic experience with dance, live music, monologue, and storytelling. "This will be my third year performing in *Suite Life*, and I've loved witnessing the shift from pure concert format to a dramaturgically grounded production," said vocalist and dancer Kelsey Jumper. The theater lighting and multimedia projection create a lush atmosphere. As media artist Scott Andrew comments, "This event is a fun chance to generate live visuals that complement the work of the musicians, offering a vibrant backdrop to the performance."

Let's dress for jazz and "sing in the rain," immersing ourselves in the shower of rich and lush harmonies.

For full details on Kelly Strayhorn Theater's upcoming Fall 2023 programming, click [HERE](#).

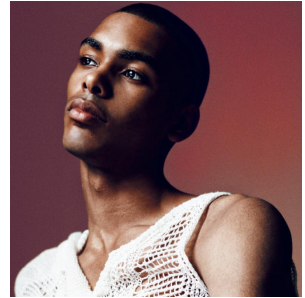
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## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Scott Andrew (media artist)** is a queer multimedia video, installation, performance artist, media designer, educator, and curator. His works have been exhibited at Ballroom Marfa (Marfa, TX), The Hammer Museum (LA), The J. Paul Getty Museum (LA), Whitechapel (London, UK), among others. Media Design and VFX projects include 'Show Queen', a collaboration with Jesse Factor, 'Suite Life' and 'House Party' (KST), and the documentary 'Workhorse Queen' by Angela Washko. Scott is a Visiting Lecturer in Studio Arts at the University of Pittsburgh, an Adjunct Professor in the School of Art at Carnegie Mellon University, and co-curates TQ Live! (CMoA). [www.scottandrew.com/](http://www.scottandrew.com/)



**Joshua Banbury (vocalist)** is a classically trained jazz singer and opera librettist with Texas roots. At twenty-eight, his collaborations include solo performances with many of the most respected musical organizations in the country, including The Apollo Theatre, The Phillips Collection, The New York Philharmonic, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Jazz at The Ballroom, National Sawdust, and The National Black Theatre. In 2022, Joshua also served as Librettist in Residence with the American Lyric Theatre, considered to be one of the country's premier mentorship initiatives for promising operatic writers. His work has been commissioned and presented by The Kennedy Center, Los Angeles Opera, Washington National Opera, and Fort Worth Opera. Joshua is a graduate of The New School and The Austin School for Performing and Visual Arts.



**Dwayne Dolphin (bass)** is a Pittsburgh-born bassist, bandleader, and educator who has been an essential member of the jazz scene and a major artistic force for many years. He is a world-class acoustic and electric bassist, and in the late 1990s Dwayne began playing the electric piccolo bass. His piccolo band played strictly in an R&B funk setting for years, and now Off Minor features Dwayne playing his electric piccolo bass in a straight ahead, acoustic jazz setting. Something he's never done before! Repertoire includes music from the jazz and American songbook catalog, and a few surprises.



**Colter Harper (guitar)** is a guitarist and ethnomusicologist whose creative and scholarly work explores jazz, American nightlife, and the music of West Africa. Harper served as a Fulbright Scholar in the University of Ghana from 2018 to 2020 and has performed as a guitarist, including with the rock band Rusted Root. His forthcoming book *Jazz in the Hill: Nightlife and Narratives of a Pittsburgh Neighborhood* (University Press of Mississippi, 2024) delves into the intersections of jazz, entrepreneurialism, placemaking, labor organizing, and critical listening in Pittsburgh's Hill District from 1920 to 1970.



**James Johnson III (drums)** adapts comfortably to various genres, excelling in Jazz. He began his musical journey playing drums at five years old. His father, Dr. James Johnson Jr., a nationally known pianist and educator sparked his passion for music. Prior to his worldwide career, he attended Pittsburgh's High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), where he was mentored by jazz great Roger Humphries. This laid the foundation for a stellar career that has included performing as a regular member with legendary jazz pianist Ahmad



Jamal. His musical adventures have led him to play in prestigious venues and with respected artists worldwide.

**kelsey jumper (vocalist, dancer)** is a Brooklyn-born, rustbelt-reared performance artist. She's joined celebrated PGH theater companies including The Public, Quantum, Pittsburgh CLO and Carnegie Mellon Drama in musical storytelling, as well as local bands Afro Yaqui Music Collective, Bindley Hardware Co. and Ames Harding & the Mirage. She's been honored to perform at favorite local venues as well as internationally acclaimed stages including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, The Kennedy Center, The Studio Museum of Harlem, MoMA and The Shed. Her duo with Treasure Treasure, The Cookie Table, is currently in residency at The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh and is honored to return for another year of *Suite Life*.



**Dr. Alton Merrell (musical director, piano)** is a world-class pianist, Hammond B-3 organist, composer, author and educator. He has performed and taught throughout the United States, Europe, Asia and parts of the Caribbean. Merrell's musical artistry is a unique blend of lyrical melodies, rich harmonies, and fluid technique that spans multiple music genres including jazz, gospel, classical, pop, and rhythm and blues. Merrell's musical interpretations take listeners on spirit-filled excursions that deeply touch the soul. Currently the Professor of Jazz Piano at West Virginia University, Merrell has taught students all over the world and continues to train musicians worldwide through his online school Minstrel School of Music.

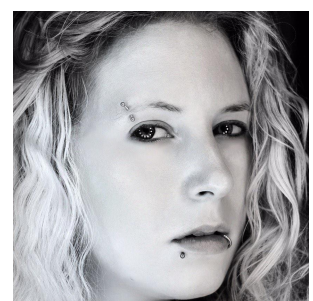


[www.altonmerrell.com](http://www.altonmerrell.com) / [www.minstrelschool.com](http://www.minstrelschool.com)

**Treasure Treasure (vocalist, dancer)** (she/her) is a performing artist, comic, composer, and multi-instrumentalist. She recently starred as the title role in *Hamlet* with Quantum Theatre. Other appearances: Broadway, Lincoln Center, The Kennedy Center, Carnegie Museum of Art, Atlantic Theater Company, PCLO, PICT, Hangar Theater, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, Squonk Opera. Treasure's original score for *The Tempest* made its premiere with Southwest Shakespeare Company and her debut EP, *Hypnerotomachia*, is available on all platforms. Instagram: @beingtreasure



**Madeleine Steineck (lighting designer)** has been working as a lighting designer and master electrician in western Pennsylvania since 2011. Companies she has designed for include: Mercyhurst University's MIAC and Theatre Programs, MCG Jazz, Pittsburgh Festival Opera, off the WALL Productions, the New Hazlett's CSA Program, Texture



Contemporary Ballet, fireWALL dance theatre, Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company, and various local schools. She also works as a stagehand for IATSE Local 3. Her design for PPTCO's production of *Miss Julie, Clarissa, and John* was seen at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2017. She has also toured with Philadelphia artist and choreographer, Raphael Xavier.

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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 namesakes had for the arts. Today, KST carries their legacy 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.

KST 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 Friendship, and the historic **Kelly Strayhorn Theater** is located in the thriving business district of East Liberty. 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.

PC: Heidi Wiren Bartlett, Courtesy of the Artists