

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: KST Freshworks Artist Andraya Rand-Mathis Reflects Healing Journeys in *Diving Within*, A New Performance in Process**

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**EAST LIBERTY, PA** — Kelly Strayhorn Theater's **Freshworks: New Performance In Process** artist-in-residence, **Andraya Rand-Mathis**, is set to bring her **original** performance ***Diving Within*** to the stage on **Friday and Saturday, December 1 and 2**, for the first time. This 30-minute showing commences at 7:30pm at KST's Alloy Studios, followed by an engaging Q&A session with the audience.

As a **proud Black trans woman**, Rand-Mathis draws inspiration from her personal recovery process after her **gender transition**, as well as the painful yet beautiful **healing journeys** of other people of color. Through **dance, music, drag, performative storytelling**, and **audio from first-person interviews**, Rand-Mathis breathes life into her impactful performance, *Diving Within*, and reflects on **self-discovery** and **recovery from negative experiences**.

Rand-Mathis is a choreographer, dancer, and educator born and raised in Pittsburgh. When she began her gender transition, she decided to let go of social expectations. Her transition goes beyond her physicality, breaking through gender stereotypes cast on her free spirit. She uses dance as a powerful expression to convey her resistance.

“As a transgender woman still early in her process, I find myself questioning and reflecting on life on a daily basis, trying to understand the roots of my actions, habits, and perspective of life. I’ve spent years conforming and showing up in the ways that others expected me and told me to, but now I’m reclaiming my authentic self,” said Rand-Mathis.

Her past internal conflicts have informed her compassionate worldview and provided the origin point for Rand-Mathis’ latest work, *Diving Within*. The performance in progress revolves around a symbolic character’s life struggle, delving into their deep interiority and unveiling their innermost doubts, fears, anxieties, and pain.

Rand-Mathis further expands the narrative by incorporating the voices of her interviews with five open-minded and forthright people of color sharing their lived experiences. These individuals share their burdens — healing from substance abuse, parental loss, misaligned gender identities, and single parenthood. *Diving Within* uses these interviews as a foundation, explores universal healing experiences, and embraces inclusivity that goes beyond her personal gender transition.

According to Rand-Mathis, “Hopefully their stories [in the performance] can encourage a warm, welcoming space free of judgment and open to vulnerability.”

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

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**Andraya Rand-Mathis** is a choreographer, dancer, and educator who was born and raised in the city of Pittsburgh. She has choreographed several musical productions, which have won Gene Kelly Awards for Best Choreography. Even though Andraya started their dance training at a late age, she is a force to be reckoned with for her generation and future generations to come. Since hitting the dance scene a little over 8 years ago, Draya has had the opportunity to work with some amazing artists such as Greer Reed, Staycee Pearl, Kontara Morphis, and Anthony Williams.



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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.

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## ABOUT FRESHWORKS

**Freshworks** is KST's **creative residency for artists and collaborators** based in the greater Pittsburgh region. Freshworks made its debut in 2013 and supports playful exploration in performance through interdisciplinary work in contemporary dance, theater, music, and multimedia. The program provides artists with planning support and guidance, studio space, production staff, lighting and sound design and encouragement for creative risk taking. Artists are invited to apply either as an individual or as a collaborative group.

Freshworks artists are provided a \$1,000 honorarium and \$1,500 resource budget during the residency. This is to help offset the costs of creating new work. Each residency will take place over a two-month period. During these two months, **artists will develop a 30-minute live showing that is a first draft of an original artistic project.** The first month is intended for planning; this includes what form the project will take, securing collaborators, and brainstorming design. During this time, artists will meet weekly with KST Programming and Production Staff to chart out production and scheduling needs as well as utilize their outside perspectives. The intention is that KST Staff is present to pose questions that can help the artist think through various aspects of ideas.

The second month is focused on in-studio rehearsal and creation of a 30-minute draft of their project. Weekly meetings with KST Staff continue and shift focus towards actualizing production needs. The goal of the residency is for the artist to experiment and explore early iterations of ideas and share a draft of these concepts in front of an audience. At the end of the process, they will have valuable insight into further developing their project.

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PC: Courtesy Andraya Rand-Mathis