

KST PRESENTS

BENEFIT | MUSIC | FUNDRAISER

SUITE LIFE

**A CELEBRATION OF BILLY STRAYHORN
& GENE KELLY**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29

6:00PM VIP SOUNDCHECK RECEPTION

7:30PM CONCERT



KST PRESENTS
FALL 2025

25 YEARS: JOY & RESISTANCE

**"Joy is an act of resistance."
— Toi Derricotte**

For a quarter of a century, Kelly Strayhorn Theater has stood as a beacon in Pittsburgh's East End, a place where generations have come together to imagine, build, and celebrate. We've watched babies become leaders, artists blossom into innovators, and communities unite in the face of change.

We've danced in the streets for marriage equality, marched for Black lives, demanded reproductive justice, and celebrated the election of our first Black President. Through joy and upheaval, we have fortified one another.

As we mark **the milestone of 25 years** in service to our community, we are charged to continue to challenge forces that are a direct threat to our basic rights, our bodies, our futures, especially for Black, queer, and historically resilient folks. KST is a **community in motion** that **embodies joy and resilience beyond the walls of our institution**, showing the way to a future that is abundantly bright with possibility.

Toi Derricotte reminds us: "Joy is an act of resistance." Every laugh, every song, every step on our stage is a refusal to let fear win.

As we look to the coming decades, **we recommit to being a home for creative experimentation, community dialogue, and collective liberation.** Whether you identify as Black, queer or someone who believes in art's power to transform, *you are home with us.*

Our Fall 2025 season is a celebration. Join us and together we can radiate the message: **We are here. We are many. We are joyful.**

With Optimism,

JOSEPH HALL
CO- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MELANIE PAGLIA
CO- 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.

STAFF

Piper Clemente, Co-Production Manager

Sarah Gilmer, Programming Manager

Rachel Gunning, Finance & Operations Manager

Joseph Hall, Co-Executive Director

Melike Konur, Director of Advancement

Mingsi Ma, Marketing Specialist

Melanie Paglia, Co-Executive Director

Ben Pryor, Programming Director

J.R. Shaw, Co-Production Manager

Kiearra Williams, Marketing Coordinator

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alyssa P. Lyon, Board Chair

Melinda Maloney, Board Vice Chair

Jennifer E. Altman, Secretary

Joe Decker, Treasurer

Adam Sukhia

Ariell Antonio

Cephas Claude Vidzro

Cynthia Valenta Oliver

Dana Bishop-Root

Erika Turner

Kyle Crawford

Martell Covington

Sharonda L. Whatley

Yvonne Campos

DIRECTORS EMERITI

Deborah Acklin

Stephanie Flom

Deborah Powell

Jamee Todd

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

We'd like to invite you to consider donating an amount equal to or above your ticket price. Your gift makes *Suite Life* possible! Ticket sales cover only a portion of the true cost of bringing this production to life, and your generosity keeps our doors open to all.



BENEFIT | MUSIC | PARTY

SUITE LIFE

A CELEBRATION OF BILLY STRAYHORN & GENE KELLY

ABOUT THE SHOW

Billy Strayhorn (1915–1967) was an influential American jazz composer, pianist, and arranger. Born in Homewood Strayhorn began studying classical music at the Pittsburgh Music Institute at the age of 19. Despite facing racial barriers in a segregated society, Strayhorn's talent won him recognition, and in 1938, he met Duke Ellington, who became both a mentor and collaborator. Over the next 25 years, Strayhorn contributed numerous compositions to the Ellington orchestra, including timeless jazz standards like "Take the A Train" (the band's theme song) and the sophisticated ballad "Lush Life."

Gene Kelly (1912–1996), a native of East Liberty, was a groundbreaking dancer, choreographer, and actor who became one of Hollywood's most beloved stars. Kelly's early exposure to dance came from his family's dance studios in Squirrel Hill and Johnstown, where he honed his skills before embarking on a career that would redefine the art of film dancing. After choreographing the Broadway production *Hold Your Hats* at the Pittsburgh Playhouse in 1938, Kelly's career took off. He is best known for his iconic role in *Singin' in the Rain*, where his innovative choreography and charismatic performance left an indelible mark on the Hollywood musical genre.

Even amidst the turbulence of the world around us, we gather to celebrate 25 years of KST and the 17th annual Suite Life. Supported by our generous vendors, sponsors, and funders, tonight's program fills the theater with the electrifying musical direction of Hugo Cruz and an extraordinary roster of guest artists. Together, they guide us through a reimagined Strayhorn songbook, enriched by Latin cultural traditions.

CREDITS

Hugo Cruz, Musical Direction & Percussion

Pria Dahiya, Director & Media Designer

E. Lieu Wolhardt, Lighting Designer

Craig Davis, Piano

Chantal Joseph, Vocals

Noel Quintana, Percussion

Brian Stahurski, Bass

Mike Tomaro, Sax

J.D Chaisson, Trumpet

Frank Cohen, Trombone

Michele Betts, Stage Manager

Graham Audio, Sound

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SUITE LIFE

A CELEBRATION OF BILLY STRAYHORN & GENE KELLY

EVENING SCHEDULE

6:00 PM

Lobby opens for VIP guests. Enjoy early seating, signature drinks, and hot bites.

6:15 PM

Welcome from Melike Konur, Director of Advancement

6:30 PM

Opening remarks with co-executive director, Melanie Paglia, followed by an introduction of Musical Director Hugo Cruz by Board Member Joe Decker.

6:30 PM

Remarks from Hugo Cruz and VIP soundcheck performance.

6:45 PM

Board tributes from Dana Bishop-Root and Sharonda Whatley, followed by remarks by Paul Ellington.

6:55 PM

VIP Reception concludes.

7:00 PM

Doors open for General Admission.

7:30 PM

Curtain remarks by Joseph Hall and Mrs. Thelma Lovette Morris.

7:45 PM

Let the music begin!

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

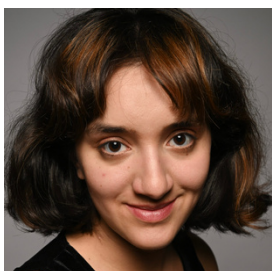
Hugo Cruz (Musical Director & Percussion)

is a Cuban-born, award-winning, internationally renowned drummer and composer who has performed in South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Mexico, Chile, and Venezuela. Hugo is the leader of Caminos, who fuses rhythms and melodies of Afro-Cuban, Cuban, American jazz, and funk styles. Caminos released their first original album, Punto de Partida in 2022 and have made appearances at Fábrica de Artes in Havana, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, and the Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival, among others.



Pria Dahiya (Director, Media Designer)

is a director, visual artist and writer exploring internet culture through literary adaptation, movement and media design. With a passion for exploring the intersection of technology and humanity, Pria's work transcends the boundaries of traditional art forms, seamlessly blending literary adaptation, movement, and media design.



E. Lieu Wolhardt (Lighting Designer)

is a multi-cultural /multi-media/ multi-disciplinary artist, as well as a lighting and projection designer. a child of globalization, their work addresses themes of violence, non-bodies, exilic spaces, self obsession, self repulsion, and the existential nature of being everything & nothing at all.



Chantal Joseph (Vocals) is a dynamic and versatile musician and educator based in Pittsburgh, PA. Originally from Cape Cod, Chantal has played at the Newport Jazz Festival and with renowned ensembles such as the Boston Pops and Cape Symphony. She continues to perform with New York based Perry Rossi Orchestras. Since relocating to Pittsburgh, she has continued to captivate audiences and was even named Best R&B Performer by the Pittsburgh City Paper.



J.D. Chaisson (Trumpet) is a Pittsburgh-based trumpet player and a Duquesne University alumnus. He's toured with many local and national artists as well as spent years on the road with the New Orleans-based funk band Dumpstaphunk. In Pittsburgh, J.D. performs regularly and teaches trumpet at Duquesne University.



Frank Cohen (Trombone), a Pittsburgh native, moved to New York City at 18 to attend the Manhattan School of Music on full scholarship. A multi-GRAMMY and Latin-GRAMMY-winning trombonist, he's known for his versatility across genres. Frank performs with Arturo O'Farrill's Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Willie Colon, and others. As a freelancer e's worked with icons like Jay Z, Aretha Franklin and Yo-Yo Ma. Outside of music, he enjoys martial arts, travel, hockey, and discovering new restaurants.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Mike Tomaro (Sax) is a saxophonist, composer, arranger and jazz educator. He is the Jazz Studies Program Director at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. Mike is a Yamaha Performing Artist and Vandoren Diamond Artist. He has many credits to his name on nationally-released CDs, including 5 of his own and over 200 published compositions and arrangements. Mike is co-author of the textbook, "Instrumental Jazz Arranging: A Comprehensive and Practical Guide"



Brian Stahurski (Bass) received his formal education at Duquesne University, earning a bachelor's degree in Jazz Performance in 1989 while studying with Jeffrey Mangone, and a Master's degree in Performance in 1992 while studying with Anthony Bianco. Since then he has performed with the Pittsburgh Ballet Orchestra, major Broadway touring productions, the Wheeling Symphony, WQED's "Live from Studio A" on PBS television and various Jazz, Blues, Salsa, Pop and Rock artists around Pittsburgh.



Craig Davis (Piano) is a seasoned jazz pianist with over 30 years of experience as a performer and educator. A Pittsburgh native, he studied under drummer Roger Humphries and earned degrees from Indiana University and Manhattan School of Music. He has performed with the Artie Shaw Orchestra and Sean Jones' quintet, nd debuted as a leader at NYC's Kitano. His album *Tone Paintings* (MCG Jazz) earned 4½ stars in *DownBeat* and featured John Clayton and Jeff Hamilton.



Noel Quintana (Percussion), aka "Mr. Conga," is a Latin music percussionist, bandleader, and historian with over 30 years of experience. He studied Afro-Caribbean styles in New York, performed with legends like Tito Puente, and led bands in both NYC and Ohio. Now based in Pittsburgh, he tours with his band, teaches Latin percussion, and hosts a radio show on Latin Jazz and Salsa. His band, The Latin Crew, performs regularly across the region.



SPECIAL THANKS

Mrs. Thelma Lovette Morris, the Billy Strayhorn Family Legacy.

Paul Ellington, Conductor and Bandleader for the Duke Ellington Orchestra and the Ellington Family Legacy.

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