

No images? [Click here](#)



This email is a newsletter from the University of Pittsburgh Library System (ULS) sharing news, event information, collection updates, and more from the August Wilson Archive and Black arts and culture collections.

The August Wilson Archive Weaves Its Way into Winchester-Thurston Upper School

LaVerne Kemp is a talented local artist known for her fabric art and textiles work. She is among the first recipients of the August Wilson Archive Community-Artist Scholar Award, an opportunity the Archives and Special Collections Department of the University of Pittsburgh Library System (ULS) offers. Grant funding from the Heinz Endowment and the Hillman Family Foundation allows local artists to learn from the Wilson Archive and receive support in creating a new artistic piece.

Kemp chose to work with students, and her teacher friend Mary Martin gave her that chance. The two are members of the artist's group Women of Visions, a local arts collective of Black women artists from Pittsburgh that recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. Martin taught art for 20 years and now serves as an administrator at Winchester Thurston's Upper School. The school has many clubs where students can express themselves, including the Fabric Art Club.

Kemp seized the opportunity to work with the high school students and traveled nearly an hour away to

Finleyville for supplies from a unique fabric store. Recounting her experience in the Wilson Archive gathering materials for students, Kent said, "I was overwhelmed with the archive at first, but thought, I'll teach what I do. And so, I picked colorful playbills and the artwork, and they were drawn to that."

Beginning in January 2024, the group met for 45 minutes during school hours once a week for ten weeks. "They would run in and drop everything and get right to it. Sometimes very quiet and meditative; August kept coming up in discussion, though." The club grew in popularity and some teachers joined the students in their creative projects.

After months of meeting, stitching the fabric art pieces, and discussing August Wilson, Kemp strung all 17 of the group's creations together on a vine. Playbill covers, photos, and references to Wilson's plays are stitched in detail to honor his theatrical legacy.



The artwork was displayed during FusionFest, Pittsburgh's city-sponsored Juneteenth celebration. It is currently in Winchester-Thurston Upper School but will move to the August Wilson House in late 2024.

Brenden Peifer is Pittwire's One to Watch

Brenden Peifer, August Wilson Archive Outreach & Engagement Coordinator, was featured last month in Pittwire's *Ones to Watch*. Since February 2024, Peifer has served the ULS as the August Wilson Outreach and Engagement Coordinator in Archives & Special Collections. Along with support from a staff assistant,

he primarily promotes opportunities for high school students, their teachers, and community artists to utilize the August Wilson Archive and create an exhibition, lesson plan, or new creative work of expression. Peifer also speaks to various community audiences, inviting them to visit and explore the archive independently or as a group.

Read more about Brenden Peifer [here](#).

Vernell Lillie Papers Available for Research

The papers of University of Pittsburgh professor and Kuntu Repertoire Theatre co-founder Vernell Lillie are now open for research. View the finding aid to the Lillie Papers [here](#). Processing of the collection was completed thanks to a [Historical & Archival Records Care Grant award](#) from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Lillie earned her masters and doctorate degrees in English from Carnegie Mellon University. She was a faculty member of the University of Pittsburgh's Black Studies/African Studies department from 1971-2006. Lillie taught a variety of courses at Pitt, including classes on psychodrama, black theatre, black drama, and literature. In 1974, Lillie founded the Kuntu Repertory Theatre with Rob Penny and she directed the majority of their over 100 productions. She received numerous honors for her work, including the University of Pittsburgh Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award and was named a Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania.

The collection primarily documents Lillie's teaching and professional activities through correspondence with theatre colleagues and organizations and course syllabi and class-related materials. Additionally, Lillie's papers document the history of Pitt's Africana Studies Program during her time as a member of its faculty. Along with the records of [Kuntu Repertory Theatre](#) and the papers of contemporaries [August Wilson](#), [Rob Penny](#), and [Bob Johnson](#), this collection further illustrates the national impact of African American theatre based in Western Pennsylvania.



Spotlight on Black Artists: Records from Archives & Special Collections in the Gallery at Hillman Library (January-September 2024)

In honor of 2024's National U.S. Black History Month theme, "African Americans and the Arts," Archives & Special Collections highlighted the work and life of Black artists connected to Pittsburgh in the exhibit gallery. Selections have inspired visitors to learn more about these individuals and collectives, whose lives stretched from the latter part of the 19th century to the present.

Many of the featured artists used a multitude of media and artistic genres. The display was arranged into four overall categories: visual artists, including arts educators, painters, and fiber artists; musicians, including gospel and jazz composers, performers, and publishers; authors, including those who write fiction, horror, and poetry; and theatre workers and dancers including choreographers, performers, playwrights, directors, and more.

Items on display included first or rare editions of novels by Bebe Moore Campbell and John Edgar Wideman, correspondence and drafts of work by Albert French and Lynda Addison, poetry by Sonia Sanchez and August Wilson, theatre programs and posters documenting Kuntu Repertory Theatre and

Pittsburgh Black Theatre Dance Ensemble, and records of Women of Visions. See photographs and learn more about the display [here](#).

The Archives & Special Collections Gallery in Hillman is free and open to the public.



Upcoming Events

Join the ULS for a selection of free public events highlighting Black artists and arts. Registration is recommended.

Thursday, September 26 - **Visible/Invisible: The Global Impact of Indigenous Maasai Women** @ 5:30 p.m.

Join the **University of Pittsburgh Center for African Studies, Library System, and Studio Arts Department** for a discussion on the global impact of Indigenous women focusing on the craft, culture, and community of Maasai with **Olorgesailie Maasai Women Artisans of Kenya** and **IdiaDega**. This decades-long collaboration of eco-design and sustainability has shown work internationally in Nairobi, Paris, Copenhagen, Netherlands, New York, and Pittsburgh at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Frick Museum, and August Wilson African American Cultural Center.



[Register and learn more](#)



Thursday, October 17 - **A Celebration of the Hightower Photograph Collections: Through the Lens of the Father (Frank Russell) and the Son (Frank Floyd) @ 4:30 p.m.**

Join us for a celebration of the **Frank Russell Hightower** and **Frank Floyd Hightower Photograph Collections**, documenting eight decades of the African American community in Pittsburgh. We will be joined in conversation by Frank Floyd Hightower with Miriam Meislik, Archives & Special Collections Media Curator, and Dr. Larry Glasco, Associate Professor of History.

In partnership with the **Department of History**.

[Register and learn more](#)



Monday, October 28 - **Reflections on Sam Rivers: Jazz Musician, Master Improviser, Composer and Friend** @ 4:00 p.m.

Join us for a discussion with national musicians who performed with Sam Rivers' Rivbea Orchestra, providing insight into what it was like to know Sam Rivers as a musician and friend. Participants will include Joseph Daley (tuba) and Steve Coleman (saxophone), both of whom worked with Rivers in New York during the early days of Studio Rivbea and beyond, and Doug Mathews (bass & clarinet) and Craig Harris (trombone) who worked with Rivers during his years in Orlando.

In partnership with the **Department of Music Jazz Studies** as part of the **54th Annual Pitt Jazz Seminar and Concert**.

[Register and learn more](#)



Tuesday, October 29 - **Sam Rivers Concert**
@ 7:00 p.m.

Join us for a concert of Sam Rivers music, part of the **54th Annual Pitt Jazz Seminar and Concert**. Performers include Joseph Daley (tuba) and Steve Coleman (saxophone), both of whom worked with Sam in New York during the early days of Studio Rivbea and beyond; Doug Mathews (bass & clarinet) and Craig Harris (trombone) who worked with Sam during his years in Orlando.

Hosted by the **ULS, Department of Music Jazz Studies**, and the **Community Engagement Center Hill District**; and the **Ebenezer Baptist Church**.

[Register and learn more](#)

Wednesday, October 30 - **The Italian *Jitney*:
From the Hill District to the International
Stage** @ 4:30 p.m.

Join us for a conversation with Italian director Renzo Carbonera as we explore the research and work in producing and directing the first-ever Italian translation and stage performance of an August Wilson play, *Jitney*, which premiered in early 2023 in Vincenza. The discussion will be illustrated by excerpts from a recorded production of the play.

Hosted by the **ULS, European Studies Center**, and **French & Italian Department** in partnership with the **August Wilson House**.

[Register and learn more](#)

Follow Us on Social Media



Forward this newsletter



Subscribe to this newsletter

This message was sent by
Archives & Special Collections, University Library System
320 Hillman Library
University of Pittsburgh
3960 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

You are receiving this email because you signed up for the Black Arts & Culture in the Archives newsletter using our online form or at an event.

[Unsubscribe](#)