

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Toronto's longest running Black Futures Month celebration, KUUMBA, makes a triumphant return to live, in-person concerts, conversations, screenings and more!

Toronto, ON (January 10, 2023) – For nearly thirty years, Harbourfront Centre's **KUUMBA** festival has been a vital platform for celebrating Black futures. This year, KUUMBA brings more than 20 artists to the stage including icons such as Sean Jones and Hubert Davis. An exciting mix of free and ticketed programming, KUUMBA runs for the month of February at Harbourfront Centre.

Harbourfront Centre's commitment to supporting Black artists is a programmatic mandate all year long. During Black Futures month, **KUUMBA** (meaning "creativity" in Swahili) further amplifies the heritage, culture, art and traditions of Black Canadians with a festival full of compelling multidisciplinary programming.

Highlights of this year's festival include:

- JUNO award-winning musician, and former In Essence alum, **Sean Jones'** first-ever performance at Harbourfront Centre will be a Valentine's Day weekend special featuring notable guest performers.
- **Dwayne Morgan** brings *When Sisters Speak*, North America's largest and longest-running showcase of Black, female spoken word artists, including up-and-coming poet **Desiree Mckenzie** and returning favourite **MasterPiece**.
- A free screening of the documentary film *Black Ice*, directed by Oscar and Emmy nominee **Hubert Davis (Hardwood)** and executive produced by **LeBron James** and **Drake**.
- **Hollywood Jade Presents: DIVA**, a celebration of the quintessential foundation of classic drag impersonation hosted by icon choreographer and guest judge on *Canada's Drag Race*, Hollywood Jade Anderson.
- Presented in collaboration with **JAYU**, *Letters to My Future Self* is a free poetry performance highlighting Black futures and all their possibilities, featuring ten unique artists including Jadyne Hardie-Bardy, Althea Knight and Jesse June-Jack (whose work can be seen on CBC's *Dreams in Vantablack*).

Curated by Diana Webley, Manager of Cultural Engagement, KUUMBA 2023 highlights important conversations and champions contemporary artists from the African diaspora. The festival will offer music, poetry, spoken word, drag and film events designed to spark exchange and uplift conversation around the creative and intellectual achievements and contributions of Black individuals.

"Harbourfront Centre has always prided itself on inspiring audiences with bold experiences that create needed discourse and dialogue around our understanding and misconceptions of the world around us," says Webley. "KUUMBA festival is a way to not only reflect on the Black experience in Canada, but it's also an essential platform in celebrating the extraordinary art, culture and creative excellence born within the community too."

KUUMBA takes place at Harbourfront Centre from February 3–11. Register now for free events and purchase tickets at harbourfrontcentre.com, in-person or by calling the Harbourfront Centre Box Office at (416) 973-4000. Tickets starting at \$20 are on sale now. Additional programming will be announced later this month, including surprise special guest appearances. For more information and programming updates, visit harbourfrontcentre.com/kuumba.

KUUMBA Highlights:

FREE PROGRAMMING

- **FILM:** *Black Ice*
February 3 7:30-11pm (FREE)
Winner of the Toronto International Film Festival's prestigious 2022 People's Choice Documentary Award, Black Ice is an incisive, urgent documentary that examines the history of anti-Black racism in hockey, from the segregated leagues of the 19th century to professional leagues today, where Black athletes continue to struggle against bigotry, despite their contributions to the history of the development of the sport. Black Ice also examines the role of Black players in Canadian hockey, from pre-NHL contributions to today's game. Black Ice is a sobering survey of systemic marginalization within one of the world's most beloved team sports. It provides a sense of hope for a more inclusive future.
- **POETRY:** *Letters to My Future Self*
February 5 3-5pm (FREE)
Presented by Kuumba and JAYU, Letters to My Future Self is a prompt dedicated to highlighting Black futures and all their possibilities. So often during Black History Month, we focus on the trauma Black folks have experienced, losing sight of the stories we have yet to write. In each letter, ten artists will explore their questions, hopes, dreams, aspirations and, most of all, where they are going. With stories filled with excitement or uncertainty and knowing their history, what can they believe about the future? What will they want their future selves to know? No matter the answer, Letters to my Future Self holds space for all their dreams and ones unrealized. Audiences can expect a diverse range of stories told by ten artists as they write letters to their future selves.

TICKETED PROGRAMMING

- **MUSIC:** *The Love. Affair. + Afterparty ft BELLOSOUND*
Friday February 10 7:30-10pm (\$25)
Sean Jones' first performance at Harbourfront Centre will be a Valentine's Day weekend special! Alongside several notable guest performers and backed by his stellar ten-piece band, Jones will deliver a night of both classic and original songs that will leave the audience romantically inspired. For the Afterparty Affair, you are invited to an exclusive party at the Harbourfront Centre Theatre. With Toronto's top DJ crew, BELLOSOUND curating the musical vibes for the night, and drop-in style live performances from local artists, the afterparty is poised to be a unique and exhilarating end to a love-filled evening! Guest performers will include Billboard-charting artist Avery Raquel, JUNO nominee Gary Beals and legendary blues singer Jackie Richardson.
- **SPOKEN WORD:** *When Sisters Speak*
Saturday February 11 7:30-11pm (\$25)
When Sisters Speak is North America's largest and longest-running showcase of Black, female spoken word artists. Beautifully raw and uncensored, When Sisters Speak is a celebration of the experiences of

Black women, featuring Canadian and American poets sharing the stage and their stories. Founded in 2000, When Sisters Speak continues to be curated, produced and hosted by Scarborough Walk of Fame inductee Dwayne Morgan.

- **DRAG: Hollywood Jade Presents: DIVA**
Saturday February 4 7:30-9:30pm (\$20)
DIVA is a celebration of the quintessential foundation of classic drag: a fully curated and choreographed show of outstanding drag artists, including Vitality Black, Jada Hudson, Hand Awnya and Manny Dingo, who embody the lyrics, likeness, mannerisms, costumes, hair and makeup of the classic DIVAS they are impersonating. The Divas (or Divos) portrayed are legends (including Whitney Houston, Prince and more) with recognizable and enjoyable anthems that appeal to a broad audience that transports fans to the first time they discovered the icons we know and love to this day.

About Harbourfront Centre

Harbourfront Centre is an international centre for contemporary arts, culture and ideas, and a registered, charitable not-for-profit cultural organization operating a 10-acre campus on Toronto's central waterfront. Harbourfront Centre provides year-round programming 52 weeks a year, seven days a week, supporting a wide range of artists and communities. We inspire audiences and visitors with a breadth of bold, ambitious and engaging experiences. We champion contemporary Canadian artists throughout their careers, presenting them alongside international artists and fostering national and international artistic exchange between disciplines and cultures.

#Kuumba

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