

For the Ancestors: Literary Conduit of the Divine

Number: T199

Date/Time: 1:45pm - 3:00pm on Thursday March 24, 2022

Location: 120AB, Pennsylvania Convention Center, 100 Level

Moderator/Panelist:



Natasha Herring (She/Her/Hers):

Natasha Herring, BFA, MBA, MFA is the Site Manager for Storycorps' Mobile Tour, a Peabody Award-winning archival organization. She is an ArtBridge fellow, *Bridging the Divide*, an artist residency at NYCHA where her mural/story quilt *For the Ancestors: El Barrio Es La Familia* is exhibited in Woodbridge, Queens. She is also a VONA and Kimbilio recipient, genre-busting writer, mixed-media griot with recent publications that include, *PressPlayFastForward*, *Oye Drum*, *i found god in myself/i loved her*, *Operating System*, *Bringing Sexy Back*, *Middle-Pause*. Her completed speculative memoir *Reigning Sunshine* is forthcoming. Her works in progress include a novel *Flight of the Fireflies* and poetry collection *America: An Unrequited Love Story*. She's currently studying narrative medicine as part of Columbia University's certificate of professional achievement. Her coaching/training platform *Own Your Story*, where she helps storypreneurs remove creative blocks through healing-writing practices, is premiering this summer 2022. She has taught creative writing, composition, and the research paper as an adjunct assistant professor at the City College of New York, Laguardia Community College & currently resides in Harlem with her 2 sons, a grandson and cat in-between travels and her digital nomadic life.

Panelists:



Robert Gibbons:

Robert Anthony Gibbons, a native Floridian, came to New York City in 2007 in search of his muse Langston Hughes and found a vibrant contemporary poetry community. His poetry explores spirituality, ancestor worship, and community. He uses the poetic form of chant and folklore in his poems.

His publications include *Close to the Tree* (Three Rooms Press, 2012), *Flight* (Poets Wear Prada, 2019), *You Almost Home, boy* with Brooklyn based artist, Amy Williams (Harlequin Creatures, 2019), *Some Little Words* (440 Gallery, Brooklyn, 2021) His most recent manuscript, *Whom the Higher Gods Forgot* will be out early 2022.



Virginia Vasquez:

Virginia Vasquez is a writer, multidisciplinary artist, and educator. She was a professor of creative writing at the City College of New York, where she earned her MFA in Creative Writing with a focus on hybrid and experimental poetics.

In 2014, she collaborated with director Jonathan Vandenberg on *The Crossing of the Visible*, a performance inspired by Francisco Goya's etching *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, presented by the Center for Performance Research in New York.

Her work has been published in numerous publications, and was included in the Latinx anthology, *What They Behind*. She is currently working on her hybrid poetic manuscript, *El Llanto: A Puerto Rican Lament*.



Starr Davis:

Starr Davis is a poet and essayist whose work has been featured in multiple literary venues such as the Kenyon Review, Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day, the Rumpus, So to Speak and Transition. She is a 2021–2022 PEN America Writing for Justice Fellow and the creative nonfiction editor for TriQuarterly. She holds an MFA in creative writing from the City College of New York and a BA in journalism and creative writing from the University of Akron. She has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize in poetry and creative nonfiction, Best of the Net and Best American Essays. She currently lives and works as a poetry mentor and

workshop facilitator in Ohio.



Morgan-Peters Mwalim:

Mwalim “DaPhunkee Professor” (Morgan James Peters) is a multi-award-winning storyteller/spoken word artist, playwright, oral historian, singer, songwriter, music producer, filmmaker, and educator. His plays, solo performance pieces, and experimental films have been presented throughout the USA and Canada as well as the Caribbean and U.K. As an iconic part of the east coast underground art and music scenes for over 30 years, his stages have included theaters, schools, street corners, libraries, galleries, museums, festivals, powwows, jails, nightclubs, temples, community centers, and colleges throughout the

country. Mwalim is a two-time recipient of the Yen Fellowship, several New England Urban Music Awards for jazz, the Osborne Fellowship, a three-time recipient of the Ira Aldridge Theatre Fellowship, and numerous other grants and fellowships. He is a tenured Associate Professor of English & Communications and Black Studies at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth as well as the owner and Head of Production for Polyphonic Studios in Bourne, MA. Mwalim earned his BA in Music and MS in Film from Boston University, and his MFA in Writing from Goddard College. He received his formal training in theater arts and arts education from New African Company in Boston.

- **Moderator Welcome:** Introduction to panel discussion and panelists (10 mins)
- **Invocation:** Calling in the ancestors ceremony (5 minutes)
- **Panelist Discussion:** Moderator asks questions to each of the panelists that lead to cross-conversations about inspiration, craft/creative process. Each panelist will speak for about 5-10 minutes (discuss literary research, share excerpts of literary ancestors (poets and writers), and their own work).
 - Who are your literary ancestors and why?
 - How have they influenced your work? Can you give an example?
 - How do you believe as an artist you are a conduit of the divine? Does this influence your process? If so, how?
 - How has ancestral trauma, resistance or joy influenced your work?
 - How is chanting a conduit when our literary ancestors move outside the traditional?
 - Do you consider your work as a historical footprint and transference of your ancestral history?
 - As a descendant of your ancestors, do you believe that you, your ancestors, creative work are meant to exist?

- Is your work an intentional disruption of structural erasure, racism, and oppression?
 - How do you document your process?
 - Fill In the Blank: I AM the _____, who _____.
- Audience Q&A (10-15 mins)
- **Convocation:** Honoring the ancestors (5 minutes)