**Event Title:** Communing with James Baldwin: A Centennial Celebration

**Event Description:** One hundred years after his birth, Baldwin's legacy, influence, and relevance cannot be overstated. Panelists writing in several genres share work guided by the critic, activist, novelist, playwright, and poet, and discuss how we as writers and a society can make our way into communion with him.

**Event Category:** Tribute; Poetry, Nonfiction, and Fiction Craft; Scholarship

**Event Organizer & Moderator**
Wesley Rothman, author of *SUBWOOFER*, has recently published work in *Bennington Review, Boston Review, Hopkins Review*, and *Kenyon Review*. Recipient of fellowships from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Sewanee Writers’ Conference, and the Vermont Studio Center, he teaches at Howard University.

**Event Participants**
Kiese Laymon is a black southern writer from Jackson, Mississippi.

Airea D. Matthews’s first collection of poems, *Simulacra*, received the 2016 Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. She is a recipient of a 2016 Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers’ Award and an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Bryn Mawr College.

Ed Pavlić is author of thirteen books written across and between genres: poetry, fiction, nonfiction, scholarship. His most recent works are *Call It in the Air* (2022), *Outward: Adrienne Rich’s Expanding Solitudes* (2021), and *Let It Be Broke* (2020). He lives in Athens, GA.

Khadijah Queen is the author of six books of poetry and hybrid prose, including *Anodyne, Conduit*, and *I'm So Fine: A List of Famous Men & What I Had On*. Her verse play *Non-Sequitur* won the Leslie Scalapino Award for Innovative Women Performance Writers. She teaches creative writing at Virginia Tech.

**Opening Remarks & Housekeeping Announcements**
Good morning. Since you’re here, I imagine you have a fondness for James Baldwin, and probably a fondness for one or all of the writers here today. In many ways, Baldwin needs little or no introduction. His image, his voice, clips of his essays or novels circulate social media as a permanent force of reckoning with much: racism and injustice, American history, notions of identity, awareness and obliviousness, the violent mind and the violent hand.
There is an incredible roster of writers working “in the spirit of” Baldwin, and that’s important, that’s good. But when I looked out to see who is speaking intimately with Baldwin, who is writing themselves closer to him, who is adapting him into the world through themselves, I struggled to find as many writers. I wonder why more people aren’t speaking directly to him in their work and what might happen to our own writing if we try to “commune” with him, whatever that means.

Since 2024 is the centennial of Baldwin’s birth, and given the historical record, we’re overdue for more communion with him, we could really do some things if his voice and ideas and language and vision concretely appear in our writing. These writers show us some booming ways to commune with Baldwin, and share their take on this artful intimacy.

Participants Read Excerpts of Their Own Writing
Khadijah Queen
Ed Pavlić
Airea D. Matthews
Kiese Laymon

Moderator Questions
What brought you close to James Baldwin, beyond mere exposure? Something about you? Something about his work? Something else?

What does it mean for you to be ‘in communion’ with Baldwin; how is that different than writing about him or ‘in the spirit of’ him?

What do you hope comes out of this communion? For you? For readers? For other writers?

5-10 Minute Q&A Session