

Prison Performing Arts (PPA) is dedicated to enriching the lives of adults and youth in the Missouri criminal and juvenile justice systems. We foster individual and social change by providing current and former inmates with opportunities to participate in the performing arts as artists, students and audience members.

Prison Performing Arts

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PPA News

FALL 2009

Jessica Care Moore Performs For Our Students

Internationally renowned poet Jessica Care Moore performed for PPA students at the St. Louis City Juvenile Detention Center in October. For strangers to the nationally-televised *Showtime at the Apollo*, Jessica Care Moore is the first poet to win the competition five times in a row. She's a featured poet on hip-hop artist Nas' album *Nastradamus* and in the celebrated documentary *SlamNation*, as well as appearing multiple times on the HBO Series *Russell Simmons' Def Poetry Jam*.

In 1997, Jessica launched her own publishing company, Moore Black Press, releasing three of her own books, *The Words Don't Fit in My Mouth*, *The Alphabet Verses: The Ghetto* and *God is Not an American*. Moore Black Press also publishes poet Saul Williams, Def Poetry Jam's co-founder Danny Simmons, NBA basketball player Etan Thomas and former *Essence* magazine editor and author Asha Bandele.

Jessica's performance began with a poem by M.K. Stallings, writing teacher for Prison Performing Arts' Hip Hop Poetry Project.

Jessica performed several poems, including "Hip Hop Cheerleader" with introductory comments about how

much she loves hip hop but how it doesn't always love her back because she's a woman. Several times throughout the thirty-minute performance, Jessica spoke about the joy of doing what she loves, and said poems saved her life growing up in Detroit.

She performed poems about the media's often negative portrayal of African-American men and the fact that women aren't celebrated in any national holidays. She dedicated her poem titled "Black Statue of Liberty" to the "beautiful sisters in yellow sitting in the audience," the young women in yellow Detention uniforms. Jessica also promoted the importance of reading and writing, urging each young man and woman at the Detention Center to "make beautiful things happen."

The afternoon concluded with a thirty-minute workshop facilitated by

SO LET ME TELL YOU...
BY ANQUENETTE
So let me tell you. One day I wanna wake up in a peaceful place.
One day I wanna go outside and see flowers and birds singing.
One day I wanna be able to see girls my age not in boys' faces, but books in their hands.
One day houses will be up and running and out-populate the vacant ones.
One day those drug dealers will realize what they're doing is wrong.
One day mamas, daddies, even grandmas will love the children they had despite their mistakes.
One day no longer exists cause one day was yesterday, and today is a new day.

Jessica and M.K. Stallings where 18 participants wrote poems about where they live and where they want to live. It was a powerful afternoon for everyone involved, as can be seen in the poem above by one of our students.



New Year's Eve in August

A rendition of Guy Lombardo's *Auld Lang Syne* reverberated a few months early this year thanks to the Prison Performing Arts' benefit party *New Year's in August — St. Louis Style*. Hosted by the Mad Art Gallery in Soulard, guests were greeted by Baby New Year, Father Time, Sturdy Gurlisque, and Clownvis (yes, half-clown/ half-Elvis). Non-stop entertainment included The Isobel Ibur Trio, acro-yoga from the Lotus Lovers, fire eating and dancers from Belly Dance Mirage and DJ Rob Levy of KDHX.

Celebrity bartenders Catherine Neville (*Sauce Magazine*), Steven Fitzpatrick Smith (The Royale) and Man-about-Town Rob Thurman kept busy behind the bar, helping everyone ring in the mid-year!

The highlight of the evening was the "roasting" of *Post-Dispatch* columnist and PPA enthusiast Bill McClellan. After some gentle ribbing by friend and former *Post* columnist Harper Barnes, Bill had everyone laughing. He then reflected on

the profound impact on him of the performances by PPA's women students at Vandalia.

Many thanks to the Event Committee and Event Chairs Karen Klaus and David Weaver.

Help Us Grow
To celebrate Prison Performing Arts' successes and to look to the future, our Board of Directors is beginning a strategic planning process. Do you have ideas about where and how we should grow? If you do, we want to meet with you to hear your advice. To be part of the process, please join us on Monday, November 30, or Tuesday, December 1, from 6:30-8:00pm at our offices in the Centene Center. To reserve a spot, call Julie at 314-289-4190.



POET JESSICA CARE MOORE PERFORMS, TEACHES AND INSPIRES OUR STUDENTS AT THE DETENTION CENTER



Kalliopeia Foundation "Gathering"

The Kalliopeia Foundation, located in San Rafael, California, is Prison Performing Arts' largest donor. Their goal is "to evolve sustainable local and global systems of living based on care, equality, responsibility, and respect for all life," which speaks to PPA's mission and is the reason the Foundation supports our work.

In addition to their ongoing financial support, Kalliopeia has honored Artistic Director Agnes Wilcox with an invitation to *Emergence*, a five-day gathering in San Francisco in March 2010. Participants in the gathering will discuss their work and the means they use to promote the interconnectedness of life.

Mark Your Calendars

The Vandalia Women's Theatre is hard at work on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, with plans to complete the play this semester. The company has almost a dozen new members, some of whom are working on Shakespeare for the first time. Performances will be at 1:00 and 6:00 pm on Monday, February 8, 2010.

The actors at NECC in Bowling Green opted to produce a 20th century play this semester, with their three finalists being Gogol's *The Inspector General*, Lawrence & Lee's *Inherit the Wind* or Donald Bevin's *Stalag 17*. The men's final decision was *Stalag 17*, the basis for the television series *Hogan's Heroes*, so please join us for a performance of Act I at 6:00 pm on Thursday, March 4.

Welcome, Julie Venegoni!

Julie Venegoni is Prison Performing Arts' new office manager. She comes to us with an extensive background in administrative management, having previously worked as Assistant Registrar at Chamberlain College of Nursing and in various administrative positions at Fontbonne University.

Julie is an active member of the St. Louis theatre community. She holds a BA and MA in theatre from Fontbonne University and has performed with numerous theatre companies in St. Louis. She performed at the 2007 Fringe Festival in Prague, Czech Republic, with Theatre Belle Bete.

Julie joined the Prison Performing Arts' staff because "The company shares my passion for fostering change through theatre, performance and education."



JULIE VENEGONI



MISSOURI DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES SURPRISES PPA DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION RACHEL TIBBETTS WITH AN AWARD

Congratulations, Rachel!

Please help us celebrate the newest honor to come to Director of Education Rachel Tibbetts. The Missouri Division of Youth Services (DYS) has presented her with a Special Recognition Award: "In appreciation of your time and dedicated service through Prison Performing Arts. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and passion for the arts with our students at Hogan Street Regional Youth Center."

Rachel's award was presented by DYS Regional Administrator Lew Mueller at the 19th Annual DYS Graduation Ceremony. Five of Rachel's students were among the 105 young people who were honored for receiving their G.E.D or high school diploma. Bravo, Rachel!

PPA Juvenile Programming Featured on Local and National TV

In August, our juvenile programming was highlighted on the PBS series "Visionaries," hosted by Sam Waterston, in a feature on Missouri's Division of Youth Services (DYS) and their national model for juvenile justice reform. The show includes a long segment about Shakespeare on Hogan Street, our program with Shakespeare Festival of St. Louis at Hogan Street Regional Youth Center, a DYS group home in St. Louis City.

In addition, our annual Hip Hop Poetry Project at the St. Louis City Juvenile Detention Center was featured on St. Louis HEC-TV's "State of the Arts."

You can watch our students at work on your computer at www.prisonperformingarts.org.

Performing New Lives

The Vandalia Women's Theatre production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be featured in a new book to be published in Spring 2010. Beth Charlebois, former scholar-in-residence, and Artistic Director Agnes Wilcox collaborated on an essay entitled "The Inmates, the Actors, the Characters, the Audience and the Poet ..." which will appear in *Performing New Lives: Reflections on Prison Theatre in the United States*. The book contains essays from twelve prison artists who practice across the country, from Texas and Kansas to New York and New Hampshire, in situations that range from minimum security institutions to solitary confinement.

Beth and Agnes wrote about how the Vandalia production of *Midsummer* changed their view of the play, especially the concept of transformation — from inmate to actor, from actor to character, from ordinary mortal to the Queen of the Fairies. They explored many topics, including language as a vehicle of identity, the power of the dream world and how the simplicity of the prison productions reflects the simplicity of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre.

Beth and Agnes will be happy to sign books at the next PPA event.

New Board Members



Dr. Reynaldo Anderson is an Assistant Professor of Education at Harris-Stowe State College. He is Chair of the Black Caucus of the National Communication Association. In 2007, Dr. Anderson was appointed by Governor Blunt to the Missouri Arts Council and Missouri Faith-Based Initiative.



Justine Craig-Meyer is the Executive Director for Lemay Housing Partnership, Inc., an organization that has worked to preserve affordable housing in Lemay, in South St. Louis County, for over ten years. She lives in Saint Louis city and considers art and performance fundamental to a life well lived.



Lisa Harper Chang, MSW, is Manager of Community Engagement, a shared position between the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts and the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University. She conceptualized and implemented *Staging Old Masters: Former Prisoners Perform at the Pulitzer*, and acted as producer.



Edgar Evans currently works at the Veterans Administration Medical Center and is enrolled in classes at Ranken Technical College. He enjoys fishing, music and travel. Edgar is the proud father of five wonderful children. He considers it an honor to serve as a board member.



Clarence Harmon spent 26 years with the Metropolitan Police Department, rising to chief in 1991. He served as mayor of the City of St. Louis from 1997 to 2001. He holds an M.A. in criminal justice from Webster University, and was a Danforth Fellow at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.



Marie Kenyon is the managing attorney for the Catholic Legal Assistance Ministry. Having represented several former participants in Prison Performing Arts, she is honored to be on the Board.



Tim Norman is an entrepreneur and an actor. He manages the new Sweetie Pie's restaurant in Granite City, Illinois. As an actor, he has worked at Mustard Seed Theatre and St. Louis Shakespeare.



Shinnarachia Rudd received a Bachelor of Accountancy degree from Mississippi State University. Her years as an auditor introduced her to the not-for-profit world, allowing her to realize the profound effects these organizations have on our community. She is currently an accountant at Arcturis.

Do you have a Schnucks eScrip Community Card? If not, you're missing a chance to help Prison Performing Arts. Scan your Community Card at the checkout counter of any Schnucks store, and Schnucks will donate 1-3% of your purchase to us. It's really easy, and it helps us every day of the year. Our office has cards that are registered and ready to use. If you want to do it yourself, get a card from any Schnucks Customer Service desk and register it online. The Community Card is a painless way to support PPA.