



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**District of Dance: A D.C. Rhythm & Blues Celebration**

*Inspired by the rhythm & blues history of Washington, D.C. from the 50s, 60s and early 70s*

**Washington, D.C. (February 13, 2017)** – On February 26, Washington Performing Arts' Mars Urban Arts Initiative and the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park will host *District of Dance: A D.C. Rhythm & Blues Celebration* inspired by the rhythm & blues history of Washington, D.C. from the 50s, 60s and early 70s. Held at Anacostia High School from 3 pm to 8 pm, this FREE event will feature live performances, hand dance lessons and panel discussions.

***District of Dance: A D.C. Rhythm & Blues Celebration***

**When:** Sunday, February 26, 2017; 3 pm - 8 pm

*3:15 - 4:00 pm*

Hand Dance Lessons with The National Hand Dance Association

*4:30 - 5:30 pm*

Panel Discussion: *The History of R&B in Washington, D.C.* moderated by musical scholar Mark Puryear

*5:30 - 8:00 pm*

Celebration: Live DJ, R&B Bands including Nu Era, D.C.'s Finest, Shirleta Settles and Mousey Thompson and the James Brown Experience, Hand Dancing & Food

**Where:** Anacostia High School (1601 16<sup>th</sup> Street SE)

**Who:** FREE and open to the public.

**RSVP:** [bridgepark.org/rbcelebration](http://bridgepark.org/rbcelebration)

Hosted by WPFW 89.3 FM's Scooter Magruder, *District of Dance* will feature live performances by local R&B stars including Nu Era, D.C.'s Finest, Shirleta Settles, and Mousey Thompson and the James Brown Experience. Attendees can learn D.C.'s official dance with hand dance lessons from The National Hand Dance Association. Delve deeper into the local R&B tradition through a panel discussion with experts in the field moderated by music scholar Mark Puryear and featuring local musicians and dancers including Maxine Grant, "Sparky" Green, Mousey Thompson and Issac Marsh.

“We are so excited to explore the District’s rich history of rhythm and blues with local neighbors and residents from across the region” said 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park Director Scott Kratz. “Washington is more than just the nation’s capital and this program reflects the deep and beautiful culture of the 650,000 residents who call D.C. home.” “Washington D.C. is brimming with talented performers and artists and we’re excited to showcase them with these programs through our Mars Urban Arts Initiative and in collaboration with the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park!” said Jenny Bilfield Washington Performing Arts President & CEO.

*District of Dance: A Celebration of D.C. Rhythm & Blues* is supported by ArtPlace America, The Kresge Foundation and the Washington Performing Arts’ Mars Urban Arts Initiative. This event is presented by Washington Performing Arts’ Mars Urban Arts Initiative, generously supported by Jacqueline Badger Mars and Mars, Incorporated, and the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park. Washington Performing Arts’ 50th Anniversary Season is generously sponsored by Dr. Gary Mather and Ms. Christina Co Mather.

### **About the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park**

The 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park, a project of Ward 8 based nonprofit Building Bridges Across the River, will be Washington, D.C.’s first elevated public park located on the piers of the old 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge spanning the Anacostia River: a new venue for healthy recreation; environmental education and the arts. After a seven-month design competition, the design team of OMA+OLIN was selected in October 2014. With the ongoing capital campaign securing more than \$15 million to date, the Bridge Park draws on an extensive community outreach and consultative process, anchored by more than 700 stakeholder meetings for design development and impact. Pre-construction began in 2016 and the park is expected to open by late 2019.

### **About Washington Performing Arts**

One of the most established and honored presenters of music and dance in America, Washington Performing Arts celebrates its 50th Anniversary this season. Throughout its history, Washington Performing Arts has been a leader in serving artists, audiences, students, and civic life, generating ideas that have moved it above and beyond the typical role of a presenter. Washington Performing Arts was among the first independent arts presenters to become a non-profit institution; the first to provide musical performances in the DC Public Schools; the first to recognize the art of gospel music on main stages in the region; and the first to take advantage of Washington’s position as an international capital to partner with embassies for both concerts and school-based programs, among numerous other milestones.

Truly, all of Washington is the stage for Washington Performing Arts. All across the city—and beyond—Washington Performing Arts presents performances unavailable under any other auspices. From the most famous names in jazz and global art forms to the most distinguished symphony orchestras, classical soloists, and dance ensembles, Washington Performing Arts stages concerts in venues from concert halls to clubs and public parks. Special events have reached tens of thousands of people through broadcast and online distribution, and neighborhood partnerships present homegrown performers to a wider audience. In schools, in summer camps, in youth competitions, and in myriad other settings, Washington Performing Arts is a leader in arts learning—for students in grades K-12 to senior citizens—and is as committed to education as to performance.

From its beginnings, Washington Performing Arts has promoted the value of concerts as singular events, as well as establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and

adults through sustained residencies and educational programs. Washington Performing Arts nourishes communities throughout the region by partnering with local organizations and with other arts institutions, staging concerts and arts activities in the neighborhoods, employing local artists, and involving internationally known main-stage performers in community programs. Washington Performing Arts stands alone among performing arts presenters in the United States for its integration of educational, community-based, and public performance programs. These achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts from President Obama, and two Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We embark upon our next half-century with the goal of expanding our activities and a commitment to excellence, tying these three areas together even more closely, and rededicating ourselves to the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

### **About the Mars Urban Arts Initiative**

In May 2014, the Mars Urban Arts Initiative (MUAI) was created by Washington Performing Arts with the generous support of Jacqueline Badger Mars and Mars, Incorporated. The Mars Urban Arts Initiative currently works to fuel joint planning between Washington Performing Arts and grassroots neighborhood arts makers, local businesses, local arts institutions, and local residents. Washington Performing Arts utilizes its resources and connections with national and international artists to facilitate artist-to-artist dialogue, the sharing of artistic principles, and programs that amplify the voice and prominence of artists (performance/visual) living in the Washington, D.C. community.

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