

GALA

RALPH *Ellison* FOUNDATION



A NIGHT WITH RALPH ELLISON OF HOPE AND HEALING

JUNE 26

6:00 P.M.

THE SEVENTH ANNUAL
RALPH ELLISON FOUNDATION GALA

RALPHELLISONFOUNDATION.ORG

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MAN'S HOPE
CAN PAINT A
PURPLE PICTURE,
CAN TRANSFORM
A SOARING VULTURE
INTO A NOBLE EAGLE
OR MOANING DOVE


Ralph Ellison

WELCOME

Welcome to our Annual Gala

**“A NIGHT WITH RALPH ELLISON OF
HOPE AND HEALING”**

Launched just seven years ago, our Ralph Ellison Foundation is now a fully-realized contributor to Oklahoma City’s cultural life and a national standard bearer for Ralph Ellison’s legacy. Our mission to promote Mr. Ellison’s legacy and do good works in his name is being fulfilled in more ways than ever before.

Our work is made possible largely by the proceeds of this gala, and so I thank you deeply for your generosity tonight.

We gather to celebrate Mr. Ellison and to enjoy some of the best of Oklahoma’s culture.

Much gratitude for tonight’s program is owed to our founder and executive director Michael Eric Owens, the rest of our Foundation staff, our board of trustees, and our advisory board.

Please, enjoy your evening, and thank you for your support of this most worthy mission.

Sincerely,

Karen Jacobs
President, Ralph Ellison Foundation



PROGRAM

WELCOME

OKLAHOMA CONTEMPORARY ARTS

DANCE SELECTION

University of Central Oklahoma

MUSICAL SELECTION

Paper Moon Trio

POETRY

Quraysh Ali Lansana

MUSICAL SELECTION

Spunk Adams

VIDEO

Ralph Ellison Foundation

MUSICAL SELECTION

Paper Moon Trio

DANCE SELECTION

Classen School of Advanced Studies Dancers

SPEAKER

Dr. Josh Slifkin - Pittsburg Educator

THE ELLISON HOTEL

MUSICAL SELECTION

Liam Ross – Scotland

SPEAKER

Don Katz, Audible Inc.

DANCE SELECTION

Jonathan Batista

VIDEO PROFILES

KAREN JACOBS

Ralph Ellison Foundation Board Chair
Administrator of the Office of Community
and Faith Engagement

MICHAEL ERIC OWENS

Founder / Executive Director
Ralph Ellison Foundation

PAM BRACKEN

Trustee
Ralph Ellison Foundation

LISA FOSTER

Director of Community Engagement
Ralph Ellison Foundation

LATASHA TIMBERLAKE

Director of Education
Ralph Ellison Foundation

THE RALPH ELLISON FOUNDATION

The Ralph Ellison Foundation is committed to highlighting the accomplishments of the acclaimed author Ralph Waldo Ellison and empowering the lives of others through his philosophy, talents, and writings in the areas of Literacy, Music, and the Arts.

The goals of the Foundation include informing new audiences of his work and raising awareness of the relevance of his work today through discussions on creativity, the legacies of history on individual lives, and race relations in Oklahoma and the U.S.

The Foundation will create literary and history-related projects and events; facilitate film screenings, jazz and other fine arts performances; create educational projects and special exhibitions; and sponsor academic conferences and symposiums that will attract people from the state, region, and nation.

Locally, the Foundation will engage the community by establishing a citywide Multicultural Center to promote personal growth, cultural pluralism, community education, and positive social change.

In conjunction with community partners, the Foundation will launch the following initiatives:

Literacy: Ralph Ellison Foundation Reading Clinic, Ralph Ellison Foundation Writing Workshop, poetry and spoken word contests and events

Music: jazz-related projects and programming, music lessons

Arts: public mural, Ralph Ellison statue, and birthplace marker





RALPH ELLISON

African American novelist Ralph Waldo Ellison originally studied music and art but was drawn eventually to the world of literature. Ellison spent seven years writing *Invisible Man* (1952, National Book Award), and, although it was his only novel, it gained him a place as a respected American writer and remains one of the central texts of the twentieth-century canon.

Originally thought to have been born March 1, 1914, recent biographers have determined that he was likely to have been born on that date in 1913, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. His father died when he was three, so he and his brother were raised by a single mother who supported her children through work as a custodian and domestic. His childhood in Oklahoma City was filled with exposure to classical music and learning. Later, in the city's "Deep Deuce" district, he participated in a thriving jazz scene that played host to the likes of Charlie Christian and Jimmy Rushing. In 1933 he hopped freight trains and made his way to Alabama to study music at the Tuskegee Institute. He left before finishing his degree to move to the cultural hub of New York City, where he evolved as a young writer.

He continued to write throughout his career and published short excerpts of a second novel in periodicals, but the follow-up to *Invisible Man* proved a long challenge after he lost major portions of a manuscript in a fire at his summer home in Massachusetts. In addition to *Invisible Man*, his major works include collections of essays and interviews, *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986), and the posthumous publications *Flying Home* (short stories, 1996), *Juneteenth* (1999), and *Three Days Before the Shooting* (2010). His posthumous works were fostered into publication by his literary executor John F. Callahan.

He won many awards, including a National Book Award, and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969. After teaching at various universities, he became the Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities at New York University. Ellison died on April 16, 1994.

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National Advisory Board members include Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt, Mick Cornett, Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of Harvard University, Robert Henry, David Boren, U.S. Senator James Lankford, Sam Combs of the WNBA Tulsa Shock, Dr. Laura Gellott of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, and Dr. Horace Porter of the University of Iowa.

FOUNDATION STAFF

MICHAEL ERIC OWENS

Executive Director

LATASHA TIMBERLAKE

Director of Education

LISA FOSTER

Director of Community Outreach



KAREN JACOBS

RALPH ELLISON FOUNDATION BOARD CHAIR

Karen Jacobs, a 41-year employee of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, became the first Administrator of the Office of Community and Faith Engagement in 2013.

Prior to her appointment, she served as Coordinator of the Office of Volunteerism and has held several positions throughout her career path at DHS, including Special Assistant to the Director.

Ms. Jacobs currently oversees DHS statewide volunteer activities; faith based initiatives as well as domestic violence efforts, and chairs several workgroups.

In May 2008, DHS established the Karen D. Jacobs Volunteer Award, which is given to an individual or organization that exemplifies the character of volunteerism that was established under her leadership. She has received several DHS recognitions and community service awards.

She serves on the Infant Mortality Alliance Executive Team, African American Health Disparities Workgroup, the “For Tia” Domestic Violence African American Women’s Subcommittee and the Northeast OKC Healthy Community Collaborative.

Karen is President of the Ralph Ellison Foundation Board of Trustees and a member of the Regional Food Bank of Central Oklahoma Board of Directors. She has completed DHS leadership trainings and received a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the University of Central Oklahoma. For over 35 years, Ms. Jacobs has volunteered and supported the Spencer Schools and the Spencer community.

Ms. Jacobs is very active in her church, where her husband, Ronnie, serves as Pastor. Karen is the proud mother of three children: TaKisha, Tamara and Myron and two grandchildren, Amari and JaRon.



MICHAEL ERIC OWENS

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
RALPH ELLISON FOUNDATION**

Michael is the founder of and serves as the Executive Director of the Ralph Ellison Foundation. He is President of M.E.O. Consulting. He is distinguished scholar, writer, and speaker. He is the host of the One Mic, One Voice show, which has an international listening audience.

Following a successful career in the United States Navy where he achieved Sailor of the Year honors, he attended the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, earning degrees in History and Political Science and Law as well as the Outstanding Graduate Award. He received his Master of Library & Information Science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Throughout his career, Michael has received countless awards and is a proud member of the National Scholars Honor Society. As a leader and advocate for minority communities throughout the United States, Michael has created, spearheaded, and coordinated community programming that is engaging and unifying. He transitioned to Oklahoma with a proven record of bringing diverse communities together for collaboration and cultural and social exchanges. Michael has appeared on such programs as OKC Metro, OKC Mayor Magazine, and the Fox Morning Show. He has been interviewed on numerous national radio programs.

Michael serves on the Oklahoma Civil Rights Commission Advisory Board, the Oklahoma City Arts Commission Board, and the African American Studies (AFAM) of the University of Oklahoma Board of Advocates. Michael was named 2013 Educator of the Year by Perry Publishing and Broadcasting. He is author of Yes, I AM, WHO I AM: A New Philosophy of Black Identity and S.O.U.L: School of Unselfish Leadership.



PAM BRACKEN

**TRUSTEE,
RALPH ELLISON FOUNDATION**

Michael is the founder of and serves as the Executive Director of the Ralph Ellison Foundation. He is President of M.E.O. Consulting. He is distinguished scholar, writer, and speaker. He is the host of the One Mic, One Voice show, which has an international listening audience.

A thirty-year veteran of higher education and a once practicing Anglophile, Pam Bracken came to an admiration of Ralph Ellison through a first reading of *Invisible Man* in the summer of 2000. Looking for a text to make the teaching of composition to college freshmen more relevant and inviting, she picked up the volume to soon realize how challenging it really was. Lyrical, verbally dense, and thematically complex, the book refused to be pigeon-holed as social commentary or as autobiography. Although her students likely missed the nuances, Pam was hooked on Ellison. Over the next 20 years, she frequently has taught *Invisible Man*, along with other important prose works of Ellison, including short stories and essays.

She proudly joined the Board of the Ralph Ellison Foundation in the winter of 2018. After 26 years as an English professor at Southern Nazarene University, Pam recently resigned to try out a new career as a Project Specialist at Public Strategies in Oklahoma City, providing technical assistance to work development and family strengthening programs at 3 East Main in Bricktown.

A mother of two grown daughters and soon to be a first-time grandmother, Pam is also a volunteer with VOICE okc, a coalition of congregations, worker associations, schools and non-profits advocating for vulnerable families in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. She is also a member of Mosaic United Methodist Church as well a member of the William Morris Society, through which she maintains some of her appreciation for nineteenth century British literature and art.

PAPER MOON TRIO



AMANDA FORTNEY

Amanda Fortney is a professional musician and is the Community Outreach Coordinator for Prairie Wolf Spirits. She received degrees in Music and Letters from the University of Oklahoma and has played/sung in various bands, the most recent being the newly founded Paper Moon Trio. She also performs in weddings (mainly for FCM Entertainment) and various other private gigs around town.

Some of her favorite performances have been with the Ralph Ellison Foundation for "A Solo Act" as well as the Gala last year. Most recently, she got to perform as part of the orchestra for Kangwa Mundunde's opera, "Greenwood" and for Dr. View's "(IN)visible Man," which were also some of her favorite performances. Amanda is honored to be a part of the REF's gala again this year.



MATTHEW DENMAN

Matthew Denman directs the guitar programs at the University of Central Oklahoma, Classen School of Advanced Studies, Oklahoma Youth Guitars, and is the director of the Celedonio Romero Guitar Institute. Matthew has also worked as the Assistant Professor of Guitar at Oklahoma City University, the Director of Education for the Guitar Foundation of America, and the Director of Guitar at Classen School of Advanced Studies.

Matthew is a student of the legendary Pepe Romero who has said, "What José Antonio Abreu is to El Sistema, Matt Denman is to the Celedonio Romero Guitar Institute."

Awards and honors include being 2020 Florida All-state Guitar Conductor and Clinician, the first New Mexico Guitar Festival Artist in Residence, the Virginia and Florida Guitar All-State Conductor and Clinician, and the GFA Augusti



STEVEN STARK

Steven Stark had been playing and teaching professionally for over 20 years. As a session musician he has recorded cello and guitar tracks for numerous artists including Green River Ordinance, Kelly Clarkson, Avril Lavigne, Steve Burns, David Hodges, The Starlight Mints, Ben Rector, Graham Colton, Emily Hearn, The Lovely Sparrows, and Bronze Radio Return.



TINA KAMBOUR

Tina Kambour, M.A., is a Certified Movement Analyst, a Dynamic Embodiment practitioner and a certified teacher of Body Mind Dancing. She teaches modern technique, improvisation, composition and Laban Movement Analysis. She has choreographed over 30 works for the dance department's touring dance company.

Her choreography has been presented in Mexico and at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and she has been commissioned to choreograph for professional companies and universities. From 1999 to 2008, she was a visiting faculty member for the New World School of the Arts in Miami, Florida. She has taught throughout the U.S., in Mexico and in Northern Ireland.



QURAYSH ALI LANSANA

Quraysh Ali Lansana was born in Enid, Oklahoma and earned his MFA from New York University, where he was a Departmental Fellow. He is the author of the poetry collections *A Gift from Greensboro* (Penny Candy Books, 2016); *mystic turf* (2012), *They Shall Run: Harriet Tubman Poems* (2004), and *Southside Rain* (2000); his chapbooks include *reluctant minivan* (2014), *bloodsoil (sooner red)* (2009), *Greatest Hits: 1995-2005* (2006), and *cockroach children: corner poems and street psalms* (1995). He has also written a children's book, *The Big World* (1999).

He is the editor of Glencoe/McGraw-Hill's African American Literature Reader (2001). Other editing projects include the anthologies *I Represent* (1996) and *dream in yourself* (1997), both from Chicago's award-winning youth arts employment program, Gallery 37. He is also co-editor of *Dream of A Word: The Tia Chucha Press Poetry Anthology* (2006) and *Role Call: A Generational Anthology of Social and Political Black Literature and Art* (2002). *Our Difficult Sunlight: A Guide to Poetry, Literacy & Social Justice in Classroom & Community* (with Georgia A. Popoff) was published in 2011 by Teachers & Writers Collaborative and was a 2012 NAACP Image Award nominee. Recent books include *The Breakbeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip Hop* (2015), *Revise the Psalm: Work Celebrating the Writings of Gwendolyn Brooks*, with Sandra Jackson-Opoku (Curbside Splendor, 2017); *The Whiskey of Our Discontent: Gwendolyn Brooks as Conscience and Change Agent*, with Georgia A. Popoff (Haymarket Books, 2017), and *Clara Luper: The Woman Who Rallied the Children* (Oklahoma Hall of Fame Press, 2017) with Julie Dill.

Lansana has been a literary teaching artist and curriculum developer for over a decade and has led workshops in prisons, public schools, and universities in over 30 states. He is a former faculty member of the Drama Division of The Juilliard School, and served as Director of the Gwendolyn Brooks Center for Black Literature and Creative Writing at Chicago State University from 2002-2011, where he was also Associate Professor of English/Creative Writing. Currently, Lansana is on faculty in the Creative Writing Program of the School of the Art Institute in Chicago and the Red Earth MFA Creative Writing Program at Oklahoma City University.

Passage, his poetry video collaboration with Kurt Heintz, won the first ever Image Union/Bob Award from WTTW-TV (PBS). He is the recipient of other awards, including the 2006 Securing the Future Award from ETA Creative Arts Foundation; the 2000 Poet of the Year Award, presented by Chicago's Black Book Fair; the 1999 Henry Blakely Award, presented by Gwendolyn Brooks; and the 1999 Wallace W. Douglas Distinguished Service Award, presented by Young Chicago Authors, Inc.



DR. JOSH M. SLIFKIN

Josh earned his doctorate in Education from Duquesne University. He teaches English and Creative Writing at Allderdice High School in Squirrel Hill, where he also serves as the school's Site Liaison for student teachers and student observers. He helped to rewrite and revise the English 3 AP and English 4 AP curricula for the Pittsburgh Public Schools in advance of the 2007 AP Audit.

He is the English 4 Lead Writer for the Pittsburgh Public Schools' current revision of its Core Curriculum. He has also been an active member of the NCTE and its regional affiliates. Josh was born in Pittsburgh and graduated from Allderdice High School.



SPUNK ADAMS

Spunk is an inspired teacher. Spunk shows his audience how to let go and to be themselves for a time. Although highly improvisational, his live show intentionally takes listeners on an expedition from the banal to the ethereal. Spunk is known for Funk, Jazz, and Fusion, but he's crossed lines from country to neo-soul to hip-hop.



LIAM ROSS

Liam is one of the foremost acoustic fingerstyle guitarists in the Scottish Highlands. A highly qualified musician with a Master of Arts degree in Music and the Environment his unique approach to guitar ensures he never fails to captivate audiences. His first full-length album: 'Hearts and Faces and Abandoned Spaces' was longlisted for 'Trad Album Of The Year 2020' in Scotland. Listeners will hear the influences of Lindsey Buckingham, Mark Knopfler, Tony Rice, and Tommy Emmanuel.



JONATHAN BATISTA

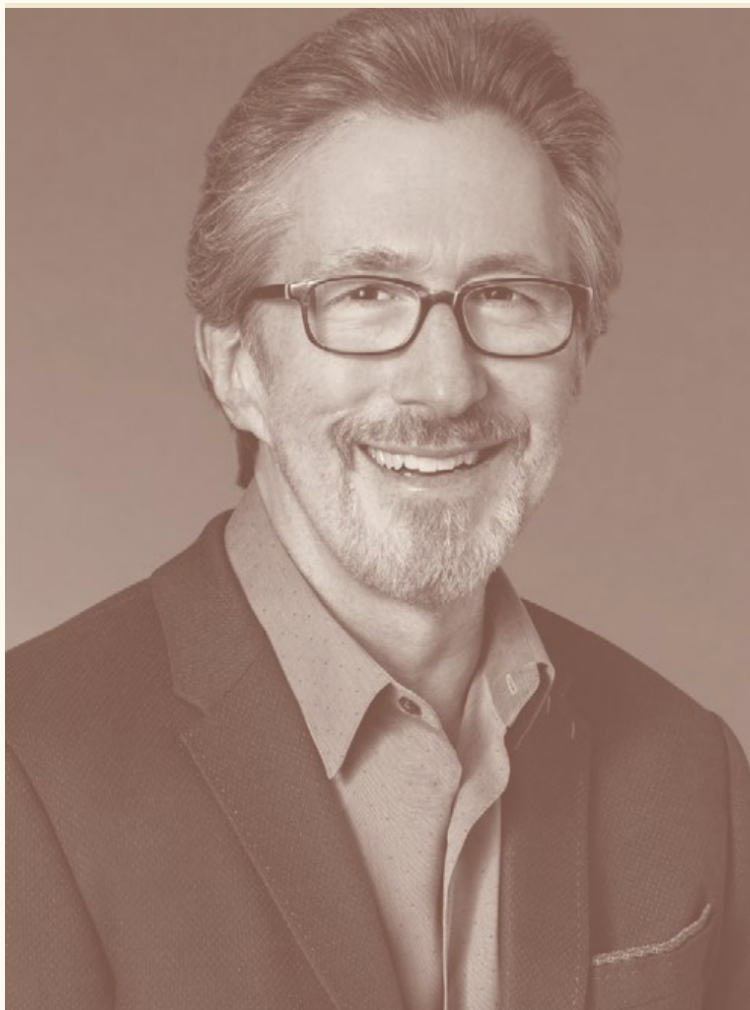
INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPAL DANCER

Jonathan Batista started his training at a social project in the City of God Slums. His talent was then spotted by his teacher which took him to a pre-professional dance division at Alice Arja Ballet School where he started his journey in Classical Ballet. Batista was first seen by Edward Villella (Former Founder & Artistic Director of Miami City Ballet) and then by Jane Hackett (Former School Director at English National Ballet School) which offered him a full scholarship to English National Ballet School in London, UK. Batista also attended The Royal Ballet School.

Upon his Graduation in 2011 Batista went on to perform with major ballet companies such as English National Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, Miami City Ballet, Boston Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, and Oklahoma City Ballet.

Batista has worked and performed Soloist & Principal Roles in many of the most renowned choreographers such as Helen Pickett, Val Caniparoli, Septime Webre, Jiri Kylian, Ma Cong, Jennifer Archibald, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Marcelo Gomez, John Neuemeier, Christopher Wheeldon, Liam Scarlett, Jorma Ello, William Forsythe and more. Batista's rep includes Principal and Solo Roles by choreographers such as Sir Frederick Ashton, Sir Kenneth MacMillan, August Bournonville, Marius Petipa, Rudolph Nureyev, Maurice Bejart, Harald Lander, Robert Joffrey and more. Batista has also performed as a Guest in Galas and events in Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Germany, England, Switzerland & The United States.

Currently as a Principal Dancer with The Oklahoma City Ballet, Batista also serves as a private ballet master & coach, choreograph, and teach groups via ZOOM for studios and students worldwide, and during his spare time he also serves as a Mentor and is wholeheartedly involved in charitable & humanitarian causes. Recently Batista joined the Education & Outreach Committee & subcommittee of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at the Oklahoma City Ballet.



DON KATZ

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN OF AUDIBLE, INC.

Don Katz is Founder and Executive Chairman of Audible, Inc. Don was previously a journalist and author for 20 years, writing five books and serving as contributing editor at Rolling Stone and other publications. His work won a National Magazine Award and his book *Home Fires* was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award. For his leadership of the company since inception, Don won the 2004 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award for New Jersey. Don graduated in 1974 from New York University, where he studied with novelist Ralph Ellison.

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