



**Lambda award-winning poet and activist Pamela Sneed leads
celebration of the Juke Joint in Park Avenue Armory's Making Space
Public Programming Series, March 31 & April 1**

**Weekend events include performances by Sneed with her band as well as Tony
Award-winning singer-songwriter and playwright Stew**

**Roundtable discussion explores the legacy of women and femme artists in
shaping history of R'n'B and rock n' roll**

New York, NY – Tuesday, February 28, 2023 – Park Avenue Armory's Making Space public programming series presents the second program in its 2023 season, [Juke Joint](#), Friday, March 31st and Saturday, April 1st. Led by poet, writer, performer, and activist **Pamela Sneed** (*Funeral Diva*) and singer-songwriter and playwright **Stew**, the two-day event spotlights the history of the juke joint in Black American social history and its legacy in music and culture with two performances and a roundtable discussion.

On **Friday, March 31st at 8pm**, Sneed celebrates the role of women and femme artists in the evolution and cultivation of blues and rock with her band through a tribute cabaret to the legendary female blues artist Big Mama Thornton. The first artist to record “Hound Dog” and composer of “Ball and Chain” later made famous by Janis Joplin, Big Mama Thornton got her start performing on the concert circuit in the segregated South and went on to become a Black feminist blues icon. “Women like Big Mama Thornton gave me the permission I needed to exist,” says Sneed of her relationship to the legendary musician. “My work continues to call me back to the artistry of Big Mama Thornton’s early influence. I am invoking her now to fight against the marginalization of her work from the queer and musical canon and attempted erasures of her voice from the historical records. I hope to assert in her absence the importance of her existence and legacy, hers and mine.” This Friday evening concert is presented in celebration of Women’s History Month as part of the Carnegie Hall Women in Music Festival.

The salon continues **Saturday, April 1st at 3pm** with a performance by singer-songwriter and playwright **Stew** (*Passing Strange, Notes of a Native Song*), who premieres a new cabaret piece inspired by the symbiotic relationship with audience and performer that developed in the juke joint and is displayed in the call-and-response nature of Black music. Featuring new songs and texts drawn from his experiences as a Black artist in the punk clubs of his youth, on Broadway, and now in Ivy league universities, this happening puts the audience in the role of collaborator to the story and explores the effect of race and class dynamic on that collaboration. Of this premiere, Stew said, “My juke joint is less an address than an ideal we as audience and performer continually aspire to, a place to get intellectually loose, to cut a rug of funky concepts, a place to trace the outlandish dance of the recently and soon to be freed, to celebrate & practice life soulfully, lyrically, melodically and, on a good night, lovingly as well.”

Following this performance, Stew and Sneed appear in conversation with award-winning Black feminist music critic **Daphne Brooks** (*Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*) in a roundtable discussion exploring the significance and legacy of the Juke Joint and how the rebel spirit of Black and female innovators lives on today at the intersection of political commentary, music, and cabaret culture.

Emerging after emancipation and continuing through the mid-20th century, juke joints offered a gathering place and secular cultural arena to Black Americans during a time when they were barred from and unsafe in white establishments, especially in the rural South. Juke joints were held in a variety of locations—including bars,

restaurants, open fields, or abandoned buildings—building community around versatile and innovative Black musicians, ultimately serving as the fertile ground for the birth and spread of blues and rock and roll. Today, the juke joint is not only a location, but a cultural symbol that continues to inspire artists across media.

“We are proud to be able to bring musicians and critics together to recapture the spirit of the juke joint and reflect the impact it has had on our culture,” said Curator of Public Programming at the Armory and Yale University Professor Tavia Nyong’o. “The Making Space series interweaves performance and conversation, and this program is an opportunity to catch the spirit of a vernacular American tradition of commentary and cutting loose.”

Held in the Armory’s historic period rooms and spaces, Making Space is an insightful series of cutting-edge conversations, performances, and activations that provides a unique forum for bridging art and culture. Curated by Tavia Nyong’o, these gatherings foster the art of conversation and dialogue about Armory productions and urgent questions of our day, making space for new points of view and unique perspectives from a diverse array of artists, scholars, cultural leaders, and social trailblazers. The 2023 Season of Making Space previously featured Symposium: Sound & Color – The Future of Race in Design, an interdisciplinary forum exploring how race matters in creative design for live performance hosted by lighting designer Jane Cox, playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, set designer Mimi Lien, and sound designer and composer Mikhaal Sulaiman and featuring collaborations with Design Action and Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Future programs on the Making Space Public Programming series include: a concert celebrating the full cultural breadth of the Black Arts Movement hosted by **Carrie Mae Weems** and **Carl Hancock Rux** with musical direction by **Vernon Reid**; Revolutionary Hope, a salon responding to James Baldwin and Audre Lorde’s published conversation of the same name led by **Claudia Rankine** and co-presented with National Black Theatre; **Corpus Delicti**, a convening of artists, activists, and intellectuals imagines and enacts transgender art and music as a vehicle for dialogue across differences presented in conjunction with Arca’s *Mutant;Destrudo*; and **Seasons of Dance**, a contemporary dance salon presented in conjunction with *The Rite of Spring / common ground[s]*.

TICKETING

Tickets at \$35 (plus fees) for individual dates and \$50 (plus fees) for both days are available for purchase online at armoryonpark.org and by phone through the Park Avenue Armory Box Office at (212) 933-5812, 10am to 6pm Monday through Friday. In person box office hours may vary.

SPONSORSHIP

Bloomberg Philanthropies is the Armory’s 2023 Season Sponsor.

Support for Park Avenue Armory’s artistic season has been generously provided by the Charina Endowment Fund, the Donald A. Pels Charitable Trust, The Shubert Foundation, the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the Marc Haas Foundation, the Prospect Hill Foundation, the Reed Foundation, Wescustogo Foundation, the Leon Levy Foundation, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Gregory Annenberg Weingarten, GRoW @ Annenberg, The Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Foundation, the Richenthal Foundation, and the Isak and Rose Weinman Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the Armory’s Artistic Council.

ABOUT PAMELA SNEED

Pamela Sneed is a New York-based poet, performer, and visual artist. She is the author of *Imagine Being More Afraid of Freedom Than Slavery*, *KONG and Other Works*, *Sweet Dreams*, and *Funeral Diva* published by City Lights in October 2020. *Funeral Diva* has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Lit Hub*, *Artnet*, and more. *Funeral Diva* won the 2021 Lambda Lesbian Poetry Award and was recommended by *The New York Times* alongside Baraka Obama’s memoir. In, Sneed was a finalist for New York Theater Workshop’s Golden Harris Award and a panelist for The David Zwirner Gallery’s *More Life* exhibit. She has spoken at Bard Center for Humanities, The Ford Foundation, The Gordon Parks Foundation, Columbia University, The New School, New York Public Library, The Brooklyn Museum, MOMA, DIA, and NYU’s Center For Humanities. She has

published in *The Paris Review*, *Frieze* Magazine, *Artforum*, *The Academy of American Poets*, and more. Her visual work was featured in *Omniscient* at Leslie Lohman Museum and at The Ford Foundation. She won the 2021 Black Queer Art Mentorship Award for her leadership and literary talent. She participated as a reader in the 2022 Whitney Biennial and is a narrator for Coco Fusco's film, also in the 2022 Whitney Biennial. She has had keynotes at Yale University, Georgetown University, and Park Avenue Armory. She has won a BOFFO residency on Fire Island in August 2022. She is an online professor in the SAIC low-res program. She has been a guest artist for six consecutive years. Sneed teaches poetry and art across disciplines in Columbia Universities MFA in Visual Arts program.

ABOUT STEW

As a Tony Award and two-time Obie Award-winning playwright/performer, critically acclaimed singer/songwriter and veteran of multiple dive-bar stages, Stew's focus these days is on creating song-driven films, alternative tv and teaching. He is currently composing songs for Spike Lee's upcoming full-length movie musical (Untitled), and he teaches at Harvard, Sarah Lawrence, and The New School, where his classes are hothouses of multi-disciplinary, self-challenging experimentation, which encourage celebratory transformation via mythmaking. Works include "Maybe There's Black People in Fort Greene" (2019) and "A Clown with the Nuclear Code" (2018) written for Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*; *Resisting My Resistance to the Resistance*, Met Museum 2017; *Mosquito Net*, NYUAD Arts Center Abu Dhabi 2016; *Notes of a Native Song*, commissioned by Harlem Stage (2015 -); *Wagner, Max!!! Wagner!!!*, commissioned by and premiered at The Kennedy Center, 2015; *Chicago Omnibus*, commissioned by and premiered at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago 2013; *California Analog*, commissioned by UCLA 2012; *Brooklyn Omnibus*, commissioned by and premiered at BAM 2010; and *Making It*, commissioned by and premiered at St. Ann's Warehouse 2010. Stew's musical *Passing Strange* had its world premiere at Berkeley Rep in 2006, moved to The Public in 2007 where it won Obie awards for Best New Theater Piece and Best Ensemble, and finally transferred to Broadway in 2008 where it won a Tony award for Best Book of a Musical; Spike Lee turned the musical into the film *Passing Strange* in 2009. Stew and The Negro Problem have released 12 critically acclaimed albums since 1997. Stew is the composer of "Gary Come Home" of *Sponge-bob SquarePants* fame.

ABOUT DAPHNE BROOKS

Daphne A. Brooks is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of African American Studies, American Studies, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Music at Yale University. She is the author of *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006), winner of The Errol Hill Award for Outstanding Scholarship on African American Performance from ASTR; *Jeff Buckley's Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2005); and *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Harvard University, February 2021).

Brooks has authored numerous articles on race, gender, performance and popular music culture, such as "Sister, Can You Line It Out?: Zora Neale Hurston & the Sound of Angular Black Womanhood" in *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, "Puzzling the Intervals': Blind Tom and the Poetics of the Sonic Slave Narrative" in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, "Nina Simone's Triple Play" in *Callaloo*, and "All That You Can't Leave Behind': Surrogation & Black Female Soul Singing in the Age of Catastrophe" in *Meridians*. She is also the author of the liner notes for *The Complete Tammi Terrell* (Universal A&R, 2010) and *Take a Look: Aretha Franklin Complete on Columbia* (Sony, 2011), each of which has won the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for outstanding music writing, and her liner notes essay for Prince's *Sign O' The Times* deluxe box set was published in fall of 2020. She is the editor of *The Great Escapes: The Narratives of William Wells Brown, Henry Box Brown, and William Craft* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2007) and The Performing Arts volume of *The Black Experience in the Western Hemisphere Series*, eds. Howard Dodson and Colin Palmer (New York: Pro-Quest Information & Learning, 2006). From 2016-2018, she served as the co-editor of the 33 1/3 Sound: Short Books About Albums series published by Bloomsbury Press. She is the co-founder and co-director of Yale University's Black Sound & the Archive Working Group, a 320 York Humanities Initiative. Her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *Pitchfork*, and other press outlets.

Brooks is currently editing an anthology of essays forthcoming from Duke University Press and culled from *Blackstar Rising & The Purple Reign: Celebrating the Legacies of David Bowie and Prince*, an international 3-day conference and concert which she curated.

ABOUT PUBLIC PROGRAMMING AT THE ARMORY

Park Avenue Armory's Public Programming series brings diverse artists and cultural thought-leaders together for discussion and performance around the important issues of our time viewed through an artistic lens. Launched in 2017, the series encompasses a variety of programs including large-scale community events; multi-day symposia; intimate salons featuring performances, panels, and discussions; Artist Talks in relation to the Armory's Drill Hall programming; and other creative interventions.

Highlights from the Public Programming series include: **Carrie Mae Weems'** 2017 event *The Shape of Things* and 2021 convening and concert series *Land of Broken Dreams*, whose participants included **Elizabeth Alexander, Theaster Gates, Elizabeth Diller, Nona Hendryx, Somi, and Spike Lee**, among others; a daylong Lenape Pow Wow and Standing Ground Symposium held in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall, the first congregation of Lenape Elders on Manhattan Island since the 1700s; "A New Vision for Justice in America" conversation series in collaboration with Common Justice, exploring new coalitions, insights, and ways of understanding question of justice and injustice in relation moderated by *FLEXN Evolution* creators **Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray** and director **Peter Sellars**; the 2019 *Black Artists Retreat* hosted by **Theaster Gates**, which included public talks and performances, private sessions for the 300 attending artists, and a roller skating rink; *100 Years | 100 Women*, a multiorganization commissioning project that invited 100 women artists and cultural creators to respond to women's suffrage; a Queer Hip Hop Cypher, delving into the queer origins and aesthetics of hip hop with Astraea award-winning duo **Krudxs Cubensi** and author and scholar **Dr. Shante Paradigm Smalls**; the Archer Aymes Retrospective, exploring the legacy of emancipation through an immersive art installation curated by **Carl Hancock Rux** and featuring a concert performance by mezzo soprano **Alicia Hall Moran** and pianist **Aaron Diehl**, presented as one component of a three-part series commemorating Juneteenth in collaboration with Harlem Stage and Lincoln Center as part of the Festival of New York; and legendary artist **Nao Bustamante's BLOOM**, a cross-disciplinary investigation centered around the design of the vaginal speculum and its use in the exploitative and patriarchal history of the pelvic examination.

Notable Public Programming salons include: the Literature Salon hosted by **Branden Jacobs-Jenkins**, whose participants included **Lynn Nottage, Suzan Lori-Parks, and Jeremy O. Harris**, a Spoken Word Salon co-hosted with the **Nuyorican Poets Cafe**; a Film Salon featuring the works of immersive artist and film director **Lynette Wallworth**; "Museum as Sanctuary" led by installation artist and Artist-in-Residence **Tania Bruguera**, curated by **Sonia Guiñansaca** and **CultureStrike**, and featuring undocu-artists **Julio Salgado** and **Emulsify**; a Dance Salon presented in partnership with **Dance Theater of Harlem**, including New York City Ballet's **Wendy Whelan** and choreographer **Francesca Harper**, among others; and Captcha: Dancing, Data, Liberation, a salon exploring Black visual complexity and spirit, led by visionary artist **Rashaad Newsome** and featuring **Saidiya V. Hartman, Kiyon Williams, Dazié Rustin Grego-Sykes, Ms.Boogie, Puma Camillê**, and others.

Artist Talks have featured esteemed artists, scholars, and thought leaders, such as: architects **Jacques Herzog** and **Pierre de Meuron** in conversation with **Ai Wei Wei**, moderated by Juilliard president **Damian Woetzel**; director **Ariane Mnouchkine** and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright **Tony Kushner** in conversation with *New Yorker* editor **David Remnick**; director **Ivo van Hove** in conversation with **James Nicola**, Artistic Director of New York Theater Workshop; artist **William Kentridge** and his collaborators **Philip Miller** and **Thuthuka Sibisi** in conversation with **Dr. Augustus Casely Hayford**, Director of the Smithsonian, National Museum of African Art; *Lehman Trilogy* director **Sam Mendez** and adapter **Ben Powers** in conversation with playwright **Lynn Nottage**; artist and composer **Heiner Goebbels** in conversation with composer, vocalist, and scholar **Gelsey Bell**; choreographer **Bill T. Jones** in conversation with architect **Elizabeth Diller** and designer **Peter Nigrini**, moderated by vocalist and performance artist **Helga Davis**; and composer, librettist, and director **Michel van der Aa** in conversation with conceptual and performance artist **Marina Abramović**.

www.armoryonpark.org

###

Media Contacts

For more information or to request images, please contact:

Tom Trayer, tomtrayer@armoryonpark.org or (212) 933-5801

Allison Abbott, aabbott@armoryonpark.org or (212) 933-5834