



G R O U N D S   F O R   S C U L P T U R E

Danny Simmons Presents a  
Def Poetry Jam Reunion featuring Roberto Lugo

# ***POET BIOGRAPHIES***

*(in order of appearance)*



IG: @toniblackman

## **Toni Blackman**

Toni Blackman is a poet, rap lyricist, and the first official U.S. Hip Hop ambassador, whose influence in Hip Hop education, theater, and diplomacy has left a mark on the global stage. With a remarkable career spanning over 50 countries, Toni has collaborated with legendary names in the industry, captivating audiences with her mesmerizing performances. As a trailblazer, Toni founded innovative projects like Freestyle Union Cypher Workshop and Rhyme like a Girl (RLAG), garnering recognition and prestigious fellowships with Echoing Green Foundation and Open Society Institute. Her recent RLAG tour across Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, and Cameroon solidified her status as a powerhouse performer and leader. With 2024 dates in Holland and Brazil, the international showcase for Toni's talents continue.

Toni seamlessly blends Hip Hop, spirituality, and mindfulness, captivating followers with her innovative Hip Hop Meditation series. The release of the music series begins in September and her forthcoming project, a collaboration with Senegalese singer Kader Kara, is highly anticipated. An accomplished writer, Toni's upcoming October book release, *Wisdom of the Cypher*, offers profound spiritual insights from her transformative platforms.



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IG: @dcrosstheartist

## Derick Cross

D.Cross (Derick Cross) is a Queens NY native and Brooklyn based multi dimensional, visual, vocal poetic performance artist and arts educator. He creates imagery and vocal art that transcends and crosses boundaries of genres and labels. This "Vocal Beat Expressionist" uses "vocal acrobatics" to create sonic collages of his poetry combining words, raps and beatboxing. He has performed nationally & internationally in venues including Madison Square Garden, SOB's, The New Vic Theatre (off Broadway), NJPAC and Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall. Mr Cross was selected as a cultural HipHop Ambassador for The US State Department's Next Level program (2017, 2023). He served as a HipHop Cultural Diplomat in Azerbaijan and The Philippines.

D.Cross has been featured on MTV, The Electric Company Nickelodeon, TV Land & BET's 106's and Park. His vocal talents have been featured on the award winning Aflac "Pigeon Rap" ad & 7-Up's "10" campaign. In 2003 he taped for HBO's Def Poetry Jam Season (Mr Cross has been featured as part of the Def Poetry Reunion shows). In addition D.Cross was the Hottest Poets \$10,000 Spoken Word Grand Champion of 2002/03 as well as a member of their international slam team of 2003.

D.Cross' visual arts has been exhibited nationally & internationally (Sweden & Brazil). Cross' work can be found as part of the collections of Erykah Badu (Singer), Kool Herc (Hiphop founding father), Big Daddy Kane (Hiphop Icon), Rakim (HipHop Icon), Danny Simmons (Artist/Co founder of RUSH Arts & Def Poetry) and Bashiri Johnson (world renowned percussionist). He is the Arts Director for African Voices Communications. Mr. Cross is also a SVA (School of Visual Arts) graduate (Bachelors of Fine Arts ) who has worked as an Arts Educator teaching youth visual arts, Hiphop studies, vocal arts (Beatboxing) and poetry for the past 25 years.



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IG: @urucker

## Ursula Rucker

Poet, recording artist, activist, teacher and revolutionary, Ursula Rucker is a certified veteran of the global music and poetry scene. A skilled writer and dynamic performer, Rucker's rich and textured voice is one of the world's great, living instruments. For nearly 3 decades, Rucker has used her fiery prose and invigorating imagery to excite and inspire listeners around world-wide. Her solo albums are brimming with power and wide-ranging musical diversity and she has built an equally impressive catalog as a collaborator. Rucker can be heard on dance floors across the world, as the voice of many House and Dance music classics. She has toured with her live performance memoir, *My Father's Daughter*, which she describes as "90 minutes of self-truth and discovery." She was a 2018 recipient of the prestigious fellowship from the Pew Center for Arts & Change. In 2020, she released *big/small poems for pockets*, a chapbook of haikus. In 2021, Ursula collaborated with artist Vince Fraser on his exhibit *Ase Afro Frequencies* which debuted at Artehouse Miami and was recognized as Best Art Exhibit 2021 by TimeOut Miami. At the close of 2022, Ursula had the distinct honor of being selected for the Philadelphia Cultural Treasures Fellowship, recognizing her continued commitment to the advancement of art, and artist advocacy, and an endorsement from her community that her legacy is essential to the cultural fabric of Philadelphia.

Whether she's on the stage, in print, or on record, Ursula Rucker is an artistic force of nature.



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IG: @ReddCarpetRoom

## Jamaaladeen Tacuma

Jamaaladeen Tacuma (born 1956, Hempstead NY), is celebrated internationally for his creatively free and funky approach to the electric bass. At the age of 19 his innovative style caught Ornette Coleman's ear, and he became the first bassist in Coleman's electric band, Prime Time, touring and recording with the group throughout the 1970's and 80's. Viewed as one of the most distinctive bassists of his generation, he is credited for redefining the potential of the instrument.

Tacuma debuted as a bandleader, composer, and arranger in 1983 with the album *Showstopper*, going on to develop compositions that blend Prime Time's elaborate harmonies with engaging melodies. His 1988 album *Jukebox* was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1989; in 2011 his ongoing achievements were recognized by the Marcus Garvey Foundation 50th Anniversary Award and award of a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, in 2018 he received the City of Philadelphia's Benny Golson Award, The Benny Golson Award includes a City proclamation and the Liberty Bell award - one of the highest honors from the City of Philadelphia.

Valuing adaptability, adventure, and dynamism, Tacuma's ever-shifting aesthetic is evident in his wide range of projects and collaborators over the years, from fronting the funk trio *Cosmetic* to co-leading ensembles with US and European colleagues such as Vernon Reid and Derek Bailey, as well as recording with James Blood Ulmer, Nona Hendryx, Mark Ribot, Gary Bartz. He has worked with Poets Jayne Cortez, Quincy Troupe, Amiri Baraka, The Last Poets and co-wrote and co-produced a song entitled "WOMEN FIRST" for *KINDRED*.

Since 2015, Tacuma has been producing the annual *Outsiders Improvised & Creative Music Festival* in his hometown of Philadelphia, providing a platform for renowned artists such as Saxophonist Odean Pope, pianist Farid Barron, violinist/bassist Henry Grimes, saxophonist/noisemaker John Zorn, and Guitarist's Mark Ribot and Nels Cline as well as emerging local artists.



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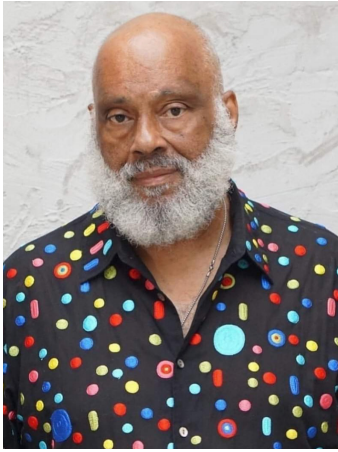
IG: @robertolugowithoutwax

## Roberto Lugo

Roberto Lugo is a Philadelphia-based artist, ceramicist, social activist, poet, and educator. Lugo utilizes classical pottery forms in conjunction with portraiture and surface design reminiscent of his North Philadelphia upbringing and Hip Hop culture to highlight themes of poverty, inequality, and racial injustice. Lugo's works utilize traditional European and Asian ceramic techniques reimagined with a 21st-century street sensibility. Their hand-painted surfaces feature classic decorative patterns and motifs combined with elements of modern urban graffiti and portraits of individuals whose faces are historically absent on this type of luxury item - people like Sojourner Truth, Dr. Cornel West, and The Notorious BIG, as well as Lugo's family members and, very often, himself. Lugo holds a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute and an MFA from Penn State. His work has been featured in exhibitions at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, among others. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including a 2023 Philadelphia's Cultural Treasures award, a 2019 Pew Fellowship, a Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky Rome Prize, and a US Artist Award. His work is found in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The High Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Brooklyn Museum, the Walters Art Museum, and more. He is currently an Assistant Professor at Tyler School of Art and Architecture in Philadelphia, PA.



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IG: @dannysimmonsjr

## Danny Simmons

Danny Simmons is a published author, poet, painter and philanthropist. He is a leader in the art world with his philanthropic ventures, artistic talents and creative mind and drive.

Danny Simmons played an instrumental role in the conceiving of and co-producing the hit HBO show Def Poetry Jam, and won a Tony Award for the Broadway version of the show.

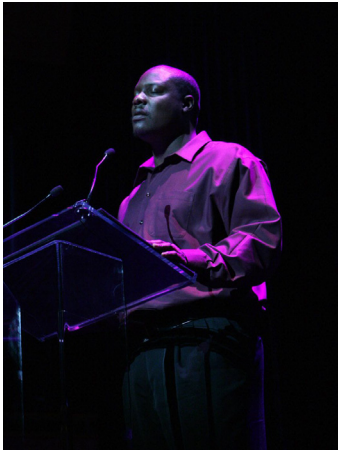
Simmons is co-founder, along with his siblings, Russell, and Joseph “Rev Run” Simmons, of the Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation, and founder of Rush Arts Philadelphia and RAP Gallery II, a new solo exhibition/arts education gallery that opened in 2019. He is a former board member of the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Public Library, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the National Conference of Artists and former Chairman for the NYS Council on the Arts.

Today, his works appear in Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn Museum, Chase Manhattan Bank, Deutsche Bank, Schomburg Center for Black Culture, The Smithsonian, United Nations, United States State Department Collection, David Driskell Collection, Petrucci Family Foundation, PAFA Collection, and, on an international scope has shown work in France, Amsterdam and Ghana. In 2019, he was appointed to Philadelphia Museum of Art’s African American Collections Committee.

Danny Simmons holds a Bachelor’s degree in social work from New York University, a Masters in public finance from Long Island University, and is the recipient of an honorary PhD from Long Island University. He continues to thrive at his ‘home gallery’ in Philadelphia, PA.



GROUND S F O R S C U L P T U R E



IG: @iamkayothegreat

## Kraal “Kayo” Charles

Kraal “Kayo” Charles, a Brooklyn native, is a performer, playwright, and producer. He has traveled extensively around the globe to be featured on stage, television, radio, and film. Kayo began his career on New York City’s poetry slam scene, becoming the youngest Grand Slam Champion at the legendary Nuyorican Poets Café in 1998. He was the first poet ever to present to audiences of thousands at the Harlem Book Fair and millions at the New Year’s Eve Ball Drop in Times Square.

Kayo was highlighted during the inaugural season of HBO’s Def Poetry Jam and in the documentaries, *Bone Bristle* and *Hughes Dreams Harlem*. He has shared the stage with literary legends Maya Angelou, Terry McMillan, and Chinua Achebe and has performed for luminaries Senator Charles Schumer, Congressman Gregory Meeks, and Comptroller William Thompson.





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FB: @Abiodun Oyewole

## Abiodun Oyewole

As one of the founding members of the legendary Harlem group The Last Poets, Abiodun Oyewole has dedicated almost 60 years to using his poetry to articulate, glorify and protest the impurities of the black experience world-wide, and in America particularly. He has become a fixture in the landscape of black consciousness, using uncompromising verse to scold a nation whose inclination to maintain the colonial yoke around the neck of the disenfranchised has always been at issue. For that, he has been honored and appreciated by millions.

Since Abiodun's first recording with the Last Poets, his work has had a profound influence across the hip-hop landscape, having been sampled by the likes of the Notorious B.I.G., N.W.A., A Tribe Called Quest and countless others. Phrases he coined like "Party and Bullshit" have become a mainstay in the Hip Hop lexicon. Today he continues to spread his message, as a performer touring the world with the Last Poets, as an educator teaching kids arts education in NYC public schools, and as an artist collaborating with notable rappers such as Nas, Common, and Dead Prez on award-winning album projects.

Abiodun has also made an unwavering commitment to the next generation of conscious young minds. A labor of love for over 40 years, 'Brother Dune' has opened his home every Sunday to poets, rappers, singers, philosophers, teachers, students, fans and everyday people who have an appreciation for the arts and yearn to be around love and black consciousness. The initial purpose of 'Open House Sundays at 110' was to give aspiring poets a platform to share their work and receive feedback from a giant in the arts. Over the years, Open House Sundays at 110 has grown into so much more, becoming a cultural institution in the Harlem community, with food, political conversation, music, and a fellowship that has touched thousands of people over the years. Prominent artists who have walked through those famed doors at 110 Morningside Drive span from Melle Mel to Doug E. Fresh to Erykah Badu. Moreover, notable institutions such as Def Poetry Jam and celebrated poets such as Jessica Care Moore were born out of Open House Sundays at 110. Undeterred by the pandemic, Open House Sundays has now moved to a virtual space, as Abiodun continues to mentor the next generation of brilliant young artists.