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BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA AWARDS \$225,000 TO CREATIVES IN FILM AND IMMERSIVE MEDIA

Paramount+ joins PitchBLACK Awards, honoring prolific documentary filmmaker Yoruba Richen

NEW YORK (April 28, 2023) — [Black Public Media's PitchBLACK Forum](#) — the largest pitch competition for independent filmmakers and creative technologists developing new projects about the global Black experience — concluded Thursday with three winners receiving awards totaling \$225,000 in production funding. The Harlem-based national nonprofit, Black Public Media (BPM), has awarded a grand total of \$1.75 million in production funding to 20 projects since launching the PitchBLACK initiative in 2015. Winners were announced at the PitchBLACK Awards, which also honored celebrated filmmaker **Yoruba Richen** at The Greene Space in Manhattan.

Luchina Fisher's *Hiding in Plain Sight*, a rousing exploration of renowned and unknown Black queer artists who have helped to shape every genre of popular music and culture, took the PitchBLACK Film Forum top prize of \$150,000. The documentary, which Fisher pitched with producer Shan Shan Tam, will spotlight the work and lives of artists like Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Little Richard and Sylvester who contributed to the soundtrack of American life but, in many ways, were never permitted to live as their full selves. The Film Forum was moderated by veteran executive producer and 360 Incubator+ Creative Consultant Sandra Rattley and judged by Jamila Farwell, Byron Hurt and Adaora Udoji.

Two of the six projects that competed during Wednesday's PitchBLACK Immersive Forum received a total of \$75,000 in funding. LaJuné McMillian's *The Unseen*, an abstract documentary and motion-capture performance that celebrates Black figure skaters, won a \$50,000 grant. Co-directors Kidus Hailesilassie and Ainslee Alem Robson won \$25,000 for their stunning 360VR film, *Uncharted VR*, which depicts a dance performance set in a data cloud of 5,000 years of African languages. The PitchBLACK Immersive Forum was moderated by advertising futurist Tameka Kee and judged by Jamal Gray, Jon-Sesrie Goff and Dr. Courtney Cogburn.

"Our judges were amazed by the quality and ingenuity of the eleven projects pitched from the film and immersive teams at this year's PitchBLACK Forum," said **Leslie Fields-Cruz**, executive director of BPM. "These filmmakers and creatives represent not only the stunning depth of talent in our community, but also the wide breadth of stories yet to be told. We are happy to award the three winning projects with funding through PitchBLACK, and we look forward to seeing all these documentaries and immersive projects once they are completed."

The evening included pre- and post-event receptions — sponsored by Paramount+ — bringing together creatives and public media, film and television industry executives. Paramount+ recently joined forces with BPM for PitchBLACK and another yet-to-be-announced initiative.

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Richen, the award-winning director of such lauded films as *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* and *The Sit In: Harry Belafonte Hosts the Tonight Show*, discussed her illustrious career with Brittany Luse (host of NPR's *"It's Been a Minute"*) on stage before accepting the 2023 BPM Trailblazer Award. As part of PitchBLACK, BPM is presenting a two-week retrospective of five of Richen's works for registered attendees running through May 8.

Alabama A&M junior Georgiana Wright was awarded the Nonso Christian Ugbode (NCU) Fellowship, for her work in AI and fanfiction. The fellowship, founded in 2016 and named after BPM's late director of digital initiatives, supports creative technologists under age 30.

Hosted by Baltimore comedian Sir Alex, the evening included a moving tribute to Mable Haddock, founding president and first CEO of BPM, a champion of Black storytelling who died last July.

PitchBLACK is the culmination of BPM's intensive, three-month 360 Incubator+ fellowship, a holistic professional development program designed to help bring quality Black content to market. Past PitchBLACK winning projects have premiered on PBS, WORLD Channel, Create and PBS Digital. Program alumni have produced for PBS, CNN, Showtime, Netflix, HBO, BET, NBC, The CW and more.

PitchBLACK 2023 is sponsored by Netflix and Gimlet Media, with additional support from Paramount+ and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

For more information on BPM, visit blackpublicmedia.org.

Black Public Media supports the development of visionary content creators and distributes stories about the global Black experience to inspire a more equitable and inclusive future. The Harlem-based national nonprofit has invested more than \$17 million toward iconic documentaries about the Black experience and, in recent years, has increased its investment in emerging media projects. BPM-funded and supported projects have garnered considerable industry recognition, including five Emmys, two Anthem Awards, nine Peabodys, 14 Emmy nominations and one Oscar nomination.

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For interview and media inquiries, contact:

Cheryl L. Duncan
Cheryl Duncan & Company Inc.
201-552-9239 (O)
cheryl@cdcpnews.com