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For Immediate Release

TD Amplify Cabarets Return to Arts Commons Presents with *Now Listen: A Black Poet's Message*, curated by Jae Sterling for Black History Month

January 18, 2022 CALGARY – The conversation around anti-Black racism, reignited during the summer of 2020, continues to echo and advance in Calgary – including on the stages of Arts Commons. [*Now Listen: A Black Poet's Message*](#) is a special Black History Month cabaret that reflects on the prairie experience of Black artists and celebrates a new generation of poets using spoken word and music to louden their voices. Join Arts Commons Presents for a cabaret of artistic excellence, ambition and vital messages on **Saturday, February 26 for two performances at 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.** in the **Engineered Air Theatre**.

After spending last season in the virtual realm, the TD Amplify Cabaret series from Arts Commons Presents is back for live and in-person performances at Arts Commons. This season, each cabaret features participants from the TD Incubator program, a season-long professional development program for interdisciplinary artists whose work connects to world around us, guided by Incubator Fellows Jae Sterling and Contra. The TD Amplify Cabaret series is the perfect avenue for the Incubator cohort to find new audiences, flex their artistic practice, and explore creative intersections with their peers.

This second TD Amplify Cabaret presentation of the season, *Now Listen: A Black Poet's Message*, features several of the most exciting young artists in the city: spoken word artists KTheChosen and Priscille Bukasa, R&B musician Uyemi, and hip-hop artist Zaire Ink. Zimbabwe-born rapper and artist **KTheChosen** is known for tackling subjects of mental health and wellbeing through his work, and his latest album +Vice specifically addresses the impact of the pandemic on his life and music. An established favorite in the local spoken word scene, **Priscille Bukasa** has been writing and performing for over 10 years. Along with her passion for performance, she believes strongly in supporting the next generation of artists, lending her expertise to up-and-coming young poets. The enigmatic and often hypnotic work of **Uyemi** (also seen in last November's TD Amplify Cabaret *Two Doors: Dispatches from the In-Between*) has gained National attention, landing the young musician on the Top 100 of CBC's Searchlight contest in 2020 for her self-empowering single, *Don't Get in Your Way*. And to wrap up the Cabaret lineup, musician, spoken word artist, and co-founder of Two World Creatives **Zaire Ink** has devoted his professional career to celebrating the power of lyricism and elevating positive messaging. Through his work, he has become a beloved fixture in the Calgary arts community.

Though these artists are still discovering different faucets of their practices, each has a unique and urgent perspective to share with the next generation of Black artists in the prairies. Audiences are invited to witness, absorb, and process the past two years of action and activism through these powerful minds, bodies, and forms of art, asking: What does it mean to be Black in the prairies? In Calgary? How do we exist in between the "before" and the "after"? What does ongoing, long-term action sound like? Helping shape their creations from his own experience as a Black artist in Calgary is rapper, filmmaker, visual artist, and curator of *Now Listen: A Black Poet's Message*, **Jae Sterling**.

"We now have a seat at the table, but we have always been in the room," says Sterling. "We are the insiders, the poets. We are powerful agents tasked with building the foundation of a utopia for the arts, because we process through a lens that has proven to be one of the most important perspectives of the modern world. We are not spectators who just cheer or heckle, we have a say. Now listen."

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The 2021-22 season of TD Amplify Cabarets, produced by Arts Commons Presents, is the fourth year of the innovative series elevating the voices of Calgary artists from equity-seeking communities. Responding to critical social conversations, TD Amplify Cabarets brings new perspectives and different forms of live art to the Arts Commons Presents offerings. Mark your calendar for this season's final two installments in the series on April 30 and June 4, 2022.

For tickets, please call 403-294-9494 or visit artscommons.ca.

What: *Now Listen: A Black Poet's Message*
When: Saturday, February 26, 2022 at 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.
Where: Engineered Air Theatre, Arts Commons
Tickets: 403-294-9494 or visit artscommons.ca.

For media inquiries, high resolution images, or more information contact:
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Jae Sterling is a multidisciplinary artist and founding member of the THOTNATION/SANSFUCCS collective. Beginning as a musician, he has extended his art form over the years to include painting (acrylic & oil), digital design & mixed media, streetwear design, and written essays.

Through his early years in Kingston, Jamaica to the landscapes of North America, Jae has spent the past few years developing his artistry by weaving his experiences growing up in Jamaica, South Florida, and coming into adulthood in Canada into all his projects. In 2019, his exploration in hip hop led him to be one of 10 artists selected for the National Music Centre's Alberta residency program. Sterling has so far released four music projects and has toured in Alberta & Ontario.

In 2020, Sterling embarked on an ambitious year-long multimedia exhibition, *Riding Horses with White Men (RHWWM)*. This exhibition debuted in Calgary in summer 2020 and is currently touring across Canada into 2021. The success of RHWWM led to him being one of Calgary's first Black muralists, painting *The Guide & Protector* in Chinatown.

Jae's more recent work, falling under the self-styled title of *BULLY*, veers towards examining race, sexuality, violence and art's ability to retell and heal histories while simultaneously violating them. In 2021 Jae intends to release a collection of essays from the RHWWM exhibition and launch *BIG BULLY* apparel.

Born in Zimbabwe and currently based in Calgary, **KTheChosen** creates music that is both enlightening and entertaining. As a TEDx speaker, hip-hop, and spoken word artist, KTheChosen believes in the power of storytelling and uses his voice to share the experiences of those around him. His new album, *+Vice* (pronounced "add vice") was released on Oct 22 and covers topics such as grief, feminism and mental well-being.

Priscille Bukasa is an established favorite in the spoken word scene. Based in Calgary; she has been writing and performing for over 10 years. She has had the opportunity to be the supporting act and headliner at various popular events in both Calgary and Edmonton. Her versatility and talent have enabled her to perform at a variety of venues and events such as the 6 Degrees conference, churches, universities, schools, and marketing campaigns such as ATB Listen. Her distinguished work and style have truly set her apart as a one-of-a-kind artist. Priscille Bukasa continues to push the envelope with her work that

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highlights racial injustice like *16 Shots & Seat at The Table* and has expanded her skills to teaching up-and-coming young poets developing their writing techniques and stage performance.

Born in Nigeria and raised in Canada, enigmatic Calgary singer **Uyemi** found her voice listening to the outliers of neo-soul and contemporary R&B, from Erykah Badu and SZA to Frank Ocean and Jhené Aiko. Her debut *Butterfly Effect* EP, which is set for release in the fall of 2021, excavates the depths of love, heartbreak, sexuality, and the battle within yourself. Emerging from pandemic isolation, Uyemi releases the trauma and pain of the past few years through her diaristic narratives and effortless vocal flow.

Uyemi landed in the Top 100 of CBC's Searchlight contest in 2020 for her self-empowering single, *Don't Get in Your Way*, about choosing the wrong people in love and loving yourself first before loving another. Since then, she's released a number of singles and become a go-to vocalist in the Alberta music scene. The singer has collaborated with artists such as Jae Sterling and A.Y.E., having appeared on his recent video for "BLACK," a potent celebration of Blackness.

Zaire Ink is an emerging hip-hop artist with deep roots in spoken word poetry. Over the last several years he has become a fixture in the Calgary arts community through his vivid storytelling and passion for exploring subjects such as existential angst, disenfranchised youth, and a faith-based lifestyle.

Zaire's artistic achievements include 2x recipient of the YYC Inspirational Song of the Year award (2019, 2020), competing in the Canadian Individual Poetry Slam (CIPS), a creative residency with Uproot YYC and a documentary film (*Two World Creatives: Chasing the Dream*) sponsored by StoryHive.

Zaire Ink is also the cofounder of Two World Creatives: an indie music label dedicated to the creative development of artists from diverse backgrounds with a heart for reaching underserved communities.

Arts Commons Presents invites you to discover the transformative power of the Arts. As the programming arm of Arts Commons, the largest performing arts centre in Western Canada, Arts Commons Presents is one manifestation of this mandate, achieved through the programming and presenting of our in-house series: BD&P World Stage, National Geographic Live, PCL Blues, TD Amplify Cabarets, and TD Jazz, as well as the work that we do in the community. Through this work, we are able to do our part to further enrich our city, as well as create opportunities for Calgary-based artists on a multitude of levels.

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