

I am a proud American and a proud Pittsburgher. I was born in Guyana, and that experience informs who I am. But while being an immigrant in Pittsburgh is a powerful part of whom I've become, it's not the whole story.

What gives me hope for Pittsburgh is the number of people talking and thinking about connecting people across social and cultural barriers—about “a community of we.” It's a priority. In the East Liberty neighborhood, what Kelly-Strayhorn Theater has been working for is creating a sense of community, inspiring people to not just pass by each other and tolerate each other, but to become genuinely interested and connect.

It's important to remember that we all share in the responsibility of making a community. You don't need to be an official, elected leader in government or an organization to act like a leader. We all can take the initiative and act, starting with simple steps like reaching out and connecting with our neighbors. We all can find opportunities to lead the way in our everyday lives. The moment you walk out your door, you have the opportunity to show compassion and be kind; that's the first step to “a community of we.”

At the Kelly-Strayhorn, we believe in the power of a diverse, connected community. We have a slogan, “Together, we build community.” That includes seeing or making art together. You can find dance, music, theater and other cultural entertainment here featuring people from many identities. This helps foster a sense of unity in Pittsburgh.

We believe inspiration comes from many sources, and our goal always is to ensure that our programming reflects the diversity of both our neighborhood and our city. We want to ensure that new communities are formed, across perceived and real cultural barriers. Diversity is not easy; it requires open-mindedness and trust. You can find both at the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater.

— Interviewed by Kellie Gormly

> **Janera Solomon**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE KELLY-STRAYHORN THEATER

FOSTER UNITY THROUGH THE ARTS

