

Juice Consulting

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PRPAC Organization Background

- Mission Statement: “PRPAC’s purposes are to serve as an artistic and cultural outlet for the community of Black, Indigenous and People of Color; and to give each group an opportunity to display their skills and talents in an atmosphere of mutual respect” (PRPAC, 2022).
- Vision Statement: “... To enhance the life of the community with the richness and variety of African-American culture” (PRPAC, 2022).

Since its founding in 1982, the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company (PRPAC) has strived to share powerful and educational stories to the local Syracuse community. PRPAC hopes to “... open the eyes and ears of those who are not aware that our Black and brown heritages is a major component of our country’s past, present and future” (PRPAC, 2022). The company was founded by William H. Rowland II and Roy E. Delemos out of a lack of frustration of limited performing arts jobs in the Syracuse area. The two men decided to pay homage to Paul Robeson, a talented performer and activist, when naming it. Paul Robeson was a pioneer both on and off the stage, advocating for causes such as anti-lynching legislation, trade unionism, the end of segregation and more (“Paul,” 2006). He was a titan during the Harlem Renaissance and did so much for his community; it is no surprise that by emulating his ideals, the PRPAC attempts to do the same.

The company was founded in Syracuse, New York, where it remains today. Though they do not possess their own theater today, they still put on several productions a year in various auditoriums throughout the area. Tickets for their productions can be bought online, with some

local schools and organizations having the option to purchase bundle tickets for their group (Franklin-King, Personal Communication, Jan. 27, 2022). They produce and put on a variety of shows, ranging from musicals, to plays, to staged readings, to traveling shows and more. All shows center around race in some regard. Below is a list of past shows they have produced (PRPAC, 2022):

- *Godspell*
- *An Afro-American Christmas Carol*
- *Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This*
- *Drafters: A Parable*
- *Home*
- *The Colored Museum*
- *God's Trombone*
- *Aunt Dee Dee's Consignment Shop*
- *Doors*
- *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*
- *A Tribute to Motown*

The PRPAC goes one step farther, having some shows that include the audience. During the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, when tough conversations needed to be had, the PRPAC began doing “talk-backs” at their productions (Franklin-King, Personal Communication, Jan. 27, 2022). The purpose of these were for the audience to talk to the performers on stage about their own experiences or questions. These open dialogues facilitated at the shows really sheds light on how dedicated the PRPAC is to having their work and their art matter. The Paul

Robeson Performing Arts Company is an important and integral part of the community, looking to expand their audience and bounce back from the lingering effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Since the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company has been a fundamental part of the Syracuse community for 40 years, its current audience and demographic has grown up with the theater. Since their current audience is older, they normally find out about the dates and times of new productions from advertisements on the TV and the radio (Franklin-King, Personal Communication, Jan. 27, 2022). Karin Franklin-King, Board Member and Co-Secretary, has also stated that they are looking to do more “cross-generational” work and get the youth involved in a variety of ways- from a younger audience to young performers and stage technicians. They want to both recognize their older audience, while inviting a new generation in.

The PRPAC has maintained afloat for the past 40 years from the generous support from the local community. Up until 2010, Syracuse University had a deep partnership with the PRPAC. In 1988, Black students at SU organized a protest to draw awareness to the lack of performing arts opportunities for Black students (“From,” 2021). This prompted Syracuse University and the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company to launch a 22 year partnership, through the SU African American Studies Department (Franklin-King, Personal Communication, Jan. 27, 2022). Though this partnership has transpired, the Company has a variety of other local supporters. They have gotten grants in the past from the Central New York Community Foundation and Central New York Arts, with the CNYCF recently giving a \$1,000 grant to the PRPAC in 2020 (“2020”). Additionally, local businesses such as Path Finder Bank, Art Reach Gallery, Interfaith Works and the Gifford Foundation have all contributed financially to the continuation of the company (Franklin-King, Personal Communication, Jan. 27, 2022). Most importantly, local churches have been a loyal supporter of the Paul Robeson Performing Arts

Company. The themes of faith and religion are prevalent in many of the shows put on by the PRPAC. So, it makes sense that the churches would support these shows and this company, as it is a mutually beneficial relationship. A helpful factor on the PRPAC website is that they have a direct link to a PayPal account for donations, encouraging any website visitor to make an impact. Though they may only accumulate small monetary donations from these, this money will eventually make a difference if enough donations are made.

The PRPAC Board of Directors

Charles Anderson	Interim Chair
George Bain	Treasurer
Mary Ann Doherty	PRPAC Board Member
Karin Franklin-King	PRPAC Board Member, Co-Secretary and Facilitator
Melody Holmes	PRPAC Board Member
Evelyn Williams	PRPAC Board Member, Co-Secretary

Interim Chair Charles Anderson has a long history of contributing positively to the local community. He has previously served as the Health and Wellness Committee Chair of 100 Black Men of Syracuse Inc., President of the Pan African Community of Central New York organization, Co-President of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition and served in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia. His dedication to community service is evident in his roles leading up to Interim Chair, making him an ideal candidate to lead this organization. George Bain, Treasurer, is similarly passionate about philanthropy. He has served for Meals on Wheels of Syracuse, the Plymouth Congregational Church Trustees and Friends of the Onondaga Free Library. As Co-Secretaries,

Karin Franklin-King and Evelyn Williams both come from educational backgrounds.

Franklin-King was a Broadcast and Digital Journalism Professor at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, while Williams is on the Retired Teachers Council. Lastly, Melody Holmes and Mary Anne Doherty are both Board Members with a passion for diversity and inclusion initiatives. This board is composed of individuals with their own unique skill sets and passions, all working towards the joint succession of the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company.

Works Cited

- “From Black History to Black Renaissance: Two Syracuse Black-Led Organizations Share Their Stories of Triumph and Struggle.” Central New York Community Foundation, February 17, 2021. <https://cnycf.org/from-black-history-to-black-renaissance-two-syracuse-black-led-organizations-share-their-stories-of-triumph-and-struggle/>.
- Karin Franklin-King, Personal Communication, January 27th, 2022
- “Paul Robeson Biography.” American Masters. PBS, August 26, 2006. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/paul-robesson-about-the-actor/66/>.
- “The Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company,” 2022. <http://theprpac.org/syr/about/>.
- “2020 CNY Arts Grant Awardees .” Central New York Arts, 2020. <https://cnyarts.org/grants/recent-grantees/?debugfailover=1>.