



NEWS RELEASE

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IMAGINE. CELEBRATE.EXPLORE: Black History Month Events at the Saint Paul Public Library

**All events listed below are free and open to the public.
For more information call 651-266-7000.**

January 13, 2010, SAINT PAUL, MN - The Saint Paul Public Library will offer a variety of events to celebrate Black History Month in February. There's sure to be something fun and interesting for every age group in an offering that includes notable authors, storytelling, African music, rap and hip hop, film, genealogy and very cool jazz. The expanded offerings this year are made possible thanks to Minnesota's legacy amendment to foster and preserve the state's arts and cultural heritage.

The series kicks off at 7 p.m. on Thursday, February 4 at the Rondo Community Outreach Library (461 North Dale Street) as best-selling author and scholar Alexis Pate presents "*The Poetry of Rap*," an argument for a fresh understanding of rap as an example of powerful and effective poetry, rather than a negative cultural phenomenon. Alexis advocates "reading" rap in order to understand both its contemporary and historical literary values, and encourages the reader to step beyond the dominance of the beat and the raw language, and come to an appreciation of rap's literary and poetic dimensions. Alexis will also have on hand copies of his just-published book on the subject, *In the Heart of the Beat: The Poetry of Rap* (Scarecrow Press, Nov. 2009) for purchase and signing.

On Saturday February 6 from 1:30 - 2:30 p.m. at the Arlington Hills Branch Library (1105 Greenbrier Street) popular Twin Cities' actor, vocalist and Emmy Award winner T. Mychael Rambo will share music, songs and poems of African Americans in his stellar program, "*My Heart Sings So My Spirit May Fly.*" He will offer an engaging presentation that reaches back to the freedom songs of slavery and carries us forward into the spirited words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other notable African American leaders. While on this cultural voyage, travel through a landscape of poetry, set against a backdrop of musical compositions created by African American songwriters and composers. It's sure to be a great and memorable event for the entire family.

Acclaimed performer, ethnomusicologist, composer and a "Master Drummer" from Ghana, West Africa, Sowah Mensah, and his fellow musicians will present "*Sowah Mensah and Friends,*" an electrifying musical mix featuring drums, xylophones and other instruments that define African music. Sowah has performed extensively in the United States, the Latin Americas, and in Africa, where he performed with the *Ghana National Symphony Orchestra*. In May 2000, he made his Carnegie Hall debut as a soloist in David Fanshaw's *African Sanctus*. This event is sure to excite listeners of all ages on Saturday, February 13 from 11 a.m. until noon at the Rice Street Branch Library (1011 Rice Street).

Get ready for high energy vocals and dancing on Sunday, February 14 at the Rondo Community Outreach Library with a hip hop extravaganza from 2 - 4 p.m. Come join Twin Cities' hip hop artists sharing the love of poetry, dance, and emceeing: open mic starting at 2 pm, performances kick off right after. The event will be hosted by Tish Jones, with performances by Unicus Harry of Kanser, Niles Miller, Alissa Paris, Aneka McMullen, MC Isreal Coleman, Brittany Delany and B-Boy Showcase. This special event

is a partnership with The Canvas Teen Art Center, a Rondo neighborhood artist workshop run by teens, for teens, a program of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation. Free mixed CDs for the first 20 people in the door.

Saturday, February 20 offers *two* unique events. At 10a.m., the Merriam Park Branch Library (1831 Marshall Avenue) will host Twin Cities' beloved actor, author, storyteller and educator, Isabell Monk O'Connor. Isabell will present "*Stories of Hope*," an hour of tales from our national past that are heavily influenced by the African-American journey. A past recipient of the McKnight Award, Isabell has graced many stages, including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center and Broadway, and has appeared in major motion pictures. She has written several children's books, including *Hope*, *Family* and *Blackberry Stew* and continues to promote children's literacy. She has promised that her stories will be "a delight for the ears and eyes and a balm for the soul." All ages will fall under her spell.

At 1 p.m. on Saturday, February 20, the Central Library (90 W. Fourth Street) presents "*My People*," a genealogical journey by Twin Cities' jazz archivist, historian, memoirist and family history aficionado Tony Garrett. He will bring family photographs, memorabilia and collectibles and talk about the proper care of these kinds of items. The two-hour program will take place in the Meeting Room on the Library's 4th Floor and will be immediately followed at 3 p.m. by a Genealogy Workshop by Saint Paul Public Librarian James Moriarty. This Workshop will teach program attendees how to use the ancestrylibrary.com database to research family histories. *Note: The 3 p.m. Genealogy Workshop will be held in the 4th Floor Training Room and is limited to 10 participants. Advance registration for this workshop is required. Call 651-266-7000, ext. 5 to register.

Get ready to be personally inspired on Monday evening, February 22 at 7 p.m. at the Sun Ray Branch Library (2105 Wilson Avenue). Tommy Watson grew up in a poverty and crime-ridden neighborhood in Denver, a child of heroin-addicted, unemployed parents. The family's life was chaotic, and the children were often uncared for or in foster homes. Despite this start, Tommy avoided drugs, gangs and crime, finished high school and earned a football scholarship to the University of Minnesota. Today, he is an elementary school principal, inspiring speaker and example to others of how one man came from "below nothing" to achieve personal success and inspire others. He will tell his story and have copies of his 2008 biography *A Face of Courage: The Tommy Watson Story - How Did He Survive?* for purchase and signing.

Enjoy an afternoon of smooth jazz by some of the Cities' finest musicians the following afternoon at Central Library when the Dean Brewington Quartet and always-popular jazz vocalist Debbie Duncan will offer a two-hour musical tribute to the late great Duke Ellington. Bring a crowd along on Sunday, February 21st and enjoy "*Take the A Train to the Library for a Musical Tribute to Duke Ellington.*" The event will take place from 2 to 4 p.m. in the Magazine Room (3rd floor). Groove to the sounds of the master of "Satin Doll," "Mood Indigo," and "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" at this unforgettable afternoon of great classic jazz. Guest jazz historian Tony Garrett will provide some historical context for the music.

Grab a front row seat at the Hamline Midway Branch Library (1558 W. Minnehaha Avenue) for "A Literary Evening with Alexs Pate." Join this best-selling author of *Losing Absalom*, *Amistad*, *West of Reheboth*, and other works at the library's fireside on Wednesday, February 24 at 7 p.m. for a fascinating look at his body of literary work and his experience as a contemporary African-American author. Pate has won numerous literary awards and is currently a Professor of African-American and African Studies at

the University of Minnesota. Come to enjoy the discussion and get an early peek at his newest book *In the Heart of the Beat: The Poetry of Rap*.

Isabell Monk O'Connor will offer a second one-hour presentation of "*Stories of Hope*" at the Highland Park Branch Library (1974 Ford Parkway) on Saturday, February 27 at 10 a.m. Come listen and understand why her stories and her presence touch the heart and soul of all who see and hear her.

Black History Month events end with a big finish on Sunday, February 28 with a return engagement of the Dean Brewington Quartet and a performance titled "*Warm Up to Super Cool Miles Davis*". This time Dean's cool jazz musicians will perform with vocalist extraordinaire Lila Ammons. Hear the music of one of America's greatest trumpeters, bandleaders and composers performed by Dean Brewington (sax), Eric Gravatt (drums), Terry Hughes (piano), Jeffrey Bailey (bass) and Bernie Edstrom (trumpet). Come warm your spirit at the Rondo Community Outreach Library from 2 until 4 p.m. and learn something new about Miles Davis from jazz historian Tony Garrett. This special musical event is sure to be a great afternoon of cool jazz and warm smiles.

If watching a great film is more to your liking, head to the Central Library on Sunday, February 28 and enjoy the music and drama of "*Dreamgirls*," a 2006 Academy Award-winning film starring Jamie Foxx, Beyonce Knowles, Eddie Murphy and Jennifer Hudson. The film will be shown at 2 p.m. in the 4th Floor Meeting Room. (Note: This film is rated PG-13.)

For more information on Black History Month events, visit the Saint Paul Public Library website (www.sppl.org). This programming is made possible with money from the vote of the

people of Minnesota on November 4, 2008 which dedicated funding to preserve Minnesota's arts and cultural heritage.

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