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BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA'S PITCHBLACK FORUM & AWARDS MOVES TO HARLEM

History-making veteran film editor Lillian E. Benson to receive BPM Trailblazer Award as PitchBLACK Forum & Awards heads uptown this spring

NEW YORK (February 21, 2025) — The PitchBLACK Forum & Awards, [Black Public Media's](#) annual celebration of filmmaking and immersive media, is coming to Harlem this spring. The PitchBLACK Forum — the largest pitch competition of its kind in the United States for independent filmmakers and creative technologists who create Black content — will take place on Wednesday, April 30, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Winners of up to \$150,000 in production and distribution awards will be announced at the PitchBLACK Awards on Thursday, May 1 at 7 p.m. BPM also will present its prestigious Trailblazer Award to history-making film editor **Lillian E. Benson, ACE** (American Cinema Editors), whose impressive filmography includes her Emmy® nominated work on *Eyes on the Prize II*, Showtime's *Soul Food*, NBC's *Chicago Med* and OWN's *Greenleaf*.

Since 2015, Black Public Media (BPM) has awarded more than \$1.8 million to 23 film and immersive projects through the event, which this year takes place at The Apollo Stages at the Victoria in Harlem, the New York City neighborhood where BPM is based.

Benson, the first woman of color invited to join the American Cinema Editors (in 1991), received a Career Achievement Award from the organization in 2022. She has also been honored by the Motion Picture Editors Guild with its esteemed Fellowship & Service Award.

BPM Trailblazers are honored for their work as a producer, director, writer or editor, primarily in public media, as well as their strong track record of mentoring the next generation of media makers. Previous BPM Trailblazer Award winners include **Orlando Bagwell**, **Joe Brewster**, **Sam Pollard**, **Yoruba Richen**, **Michèle Stephenson** and **Marco Williams**.

Each year, a who's who of the documentary film and emerging media worlds — including executives from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, PBS, Netflix, Paramount+, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute, Women Make Movies, New York Women in Film and Television, and more — converges on the event in New York City.

"We are thrilled to be able to bring PitchBLACK to the internationally renowned heart of New York City's Black creative community: Harlem," said **Leslie Fields-Cruz**, executive director of BPM. "This year is especially meaningful as we honor the remarkable Lillian Benson, whose career has helped pave the way for so many and whose commitment to mentoring is shaping a new generation of artists. We look forward to once again convening the documentary and immersive media communities and their supporters for this auspicious occasion."

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BPM is a national nonprofit that funds quality film and immersive work, develops creatives, and produces and distributes original content, including its signature series, *AfroPoP: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange*.

Sponsorship opportunities are available by contacting DeLynda Lindsey, BPM's contracts & grants specialist, at DeLynda@blackpublicmedia.org.

To find out more about BPM, visit blackpublicmedia.org. Follow the organization and watch PitchBLACK highlights at @blackpublicmedia on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.

ABOUT LILLIAN E. BENSON, ACE

Lillian E. Benson, ACE, is a film and television editor of narrative films and documentaries. In 1991, this native New Yorker was nominated for an Emmy® for her work on the acclaimed PBS civil rights series *Eyes On the Prize II*. Projects she edited have garnered five Emmy nominations, four Peabody Awards, and numerous other honors. Benson's vibrant career is heavily entrenched in the documentary space. Her recent documentary credits include *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise*, *Get in the Way: The Journey of John Lewis* and *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: Beyond the Steps*. Benson also directed two educational documentaries *All Our Sons: Fallen Heroes of 9/11* and *Amen: The Life and Music of Jester Hairston*. Benson is currently editing the independent feature *Flash Before the Bang*, a coming-of-age story of a deaf athlete. For eight seasons she was an editor of NBC's episodic television series *Chicago Med* and she previously worked on the first seasons of the OWN series *Greenleaf* and Showtime's *Soul Food*. She collaborated with director-choreographer Debbie Allen on several of her film projects including the highly rated Lifetime Movie of the Week *Life Is Not A Fairytale: The Fantasia Barrino Story*.

Benson serves on the board of directors of the American Cinema Editors. She is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Television Academy. Benson serves as chair of the ACE Diversity in Editing Mentoring Committee and as co-chair of the Motion Picture Editors Guild's DEI Committee. She also serves on the board of the Motion Picture Editors Guild.

ABOUT BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA (BPM)

BPM supports the development of visionary content creators and distributes stories about the global Black experience to inspire a more equitable and inclusive future. For 45 years, BPM has addressed the needs of unserved and underserved audiences. BPM-supported programs have won five Emmys®, 10 Peabodys, five Anthem Awards, 14 Emmy® nominations and an Oscar® nomination. BPM continues to address historical, contemporary, and systemic challenges that traditionally impede the development and distribution of Black stories.

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