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BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA TOPS \$2 MILLION IN PITCHBLACK AWARDS FOR BLACK STORIES

**Documentary about a caregiving comedian and two sci-fi immersive projects
are big takers at BPM's national pitch competition**

NEW YORK (May 2, 2025) — [Black Public Media](#) (BPM) selected a documentary about caregiving with comedy and two science fiction immersive projects for a total of \$225,000 in production and development funding at the PitchBLACK Awards on Thursday. These awards catapult the total BPM has invested in Black projects through PitchBLACK, since launching the program in 2015, to over \$2 million. The event, which was sponsored by Netflix and PBS, took place at The Apollo Stages at the Victoria in Harlem.

The Awards show was preceded by BPM's PitchBLACK Forum — the largest pitch competition of its kind in the United States for independent filmmakers and creative technologists who create Black content — which was held Wednesday and hosted by advertising futurist Tameka Kee. The Forum winners, announced at the Awards program, included one film and two immersive projects. *Finding Your Laughter* by Chicago's Arlieta Hall and Brittany Alsot, a documentary about the ups and downs of Hall's life balancing caregiving to her Alzheimer's-ailing father with her comedy career, won the top award of \$150,000 in the film category. *Rhythmic Wave II: Ancestral Waves*, by Nigerian-American new media artist and Los Angeles resident Aya, took the \$50,000 award. The project is a 30-minute live interactive performance set in 5054 blending Afrofuturism, immersive dance and AI-generated movement (from AI dancers trained on the Nigerian Akwa Ibom dance archive) in a three-wall projected space. Prince George's County, Maryland, resident Jeremy Kamal's *Run*, a sci-fi, third person exploration game created in his own unique game universe, was awarded \$25,000.

Hosted by comedian Jamie Roberts with a vocal performance by Yansa Fatima, the evening saw veteran film editor Lillian E. Benson, ACE (American Cinema Editors), awarded the prestigious BPM Trailblazer Award by the group's Executive Director Leslie Fields-Cruz. Benson, who joins Orlando Bagwell, Joe Brewster, Yoruba Richen, Sam Pollard, Michèle Stephenson and Marco Williams in having received the award, is known for her Emmy® nominated work on *Eyes on the Prize II*, Showtime's *Soul Food*, NBC's *Chicago Med* and OWN's *Greenleaf*. NPR host Brittany Luse (*It's Been a Minute*) moderated a conversation with Benson, giving audience members further insight into the history-making editor's career.

"Tonight, it's impossible not to reflect on the path paved by giants like Lillian E. Benson, our BPM Trailblazer. Her dedication to the artistry of editing carved out a space for editors from a mosaic of backgrounds," said Fields-Cruz. "Her legacy as an editor and as a mentor, continues to inspire every single frame of the films that she and her mentees have worked on. And for that I am grateful."

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A two-week BPM Trailblazer Film Retrospective featuring a curated collection of works edited by Benson will stream for free through May 12 on blackpublicmedia.org. Films include *Beyond the Steps: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater*, *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise*, *New World, New Forms*, *The Taste of Dirt*, and two parts of *Eyes on the Prize II: The Promised Land* (Part 10) and *Keys to the Kingdom* (Part 13).

Atlanta resident Joel A. Mack was announced as the latest Nonso Christian Ugboke Digital Media Fellow, an award named after BPM's late director of digital initiatives and awarding a talented under-30 creative. Mack was selected for his work as a developer, storyteller and creative technologist working in new media.

Descended from the Promised Land, a Black Wall Street documentary by New Orleans native Nailah Jefferson, was announced as the first-ever *AfroPoP Digital Shorts* Viewers' Choice winner, in a competition launched earlier this year. Audience members of the *AfroPoP Digital Shorts* series, which streams on BPM's YouTube channel, voted on the award.

In closing out the program, Fields-Cruz gave the crowd — which contained veteran filmmakers including Rachel Watanabe Batton, Lisa Cortes, Chris Metzler, Stanley Nelson and Marco Williams — a charge: "Let us carry forward the spirit of collaboration, the fire of innovation, and the unwavering commitment to telling our stories, our way."

Headquartered in Harlem, BPM is a national nonprofit that funds quality film and immersive work, develops media makers and produces and distributes original content. The group was founded in 1979 and continues to work to center Black stories.

PitchBLACK was sponsored by Netflix and PBS, with additional support from Corporation for Public Broadcasting, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Acton Family Giving, Agog LLC, New York Community Trust, Rockefeller Family Fund, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Jerome Foundation, Sonder Foundation and New York Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment.

To find out more about all of the projects that competed, visit <https://blackpublicmedia.org/pitch-black/pitchblack-2025/>. For more information on BPM, go to blackpublicmedia.org. Follow the organization at @blackpublicmedia on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.

ABOUT BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA

Black Public Media 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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