

PRESS RELEASE

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SEASON 18 OF AFROPOP OPENS WITH *LISTEN TO ME*

Kanika Harris and Stephanie Etienne's urgent call-to-action on the Black maternal health crisis premieres on Black Public Media's Peabody Award-winning series on June 15

NEW YORK (May 21, 2026) — [Black Public Media's](#) Peabody Award-winning series [AfroPoP: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange](#) returns for its 18th season on June 15 with *Listen to Me*, an intimate and urgent documentary following three Black women as they navigate the risks, realities and inequities of pregnancy, birth and care in America. The film, which brings striking racial disparities in maternal health into sharp focus, will be available on the PBS App and PBS.org. Check local listings for broadcast times.

Premiering ahead of Father's Day and the national Juneteenth celebration, *Listen to Me* follows three Black women through pregnancy, birth and early motherhood, revealing how systemic inequities shape their care and endanger their lives. Directed by Kanika Harris and Stephanie Etienne, the film pairs deeply personal storytelling with a probing examination of the Black maternal health crisis, offering a powerful call for accountability, healing and change.

Listen to Me will also air later in the month on WORLD, which feeds at the same time to all time zones. Broadcast times are listed in Eastern Time; viewers in other U.S. time zones should tune in at the corresponding local time. The film airs Wednesday, June 24, at 7 p.m. ET; Thursday, June 25, at 12 a.m. ET, which is 9 p.m. PT on Wednesday, June 24; Thursday, June 25, at 8 a.m. ET and Saturday, June 27, at 1 p.m. ET.

The film is being released at a time when maternal mortality rates in the United States are declining for all groups except Black women. Black women are more than three times as likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause as White women and Black infants are more than twice as likely to die as White babies.

Harris, a Washington, D.C.-based behavioral health scientist, near-miss survivor, doula and birth justice advocate, focuses on health equity, maternal health and women's health. She holds a doctorate and a master's in public health and serves as executive director of the National

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Association to Advance Black Birth. Etienne is a Baltimore-based certified nurse-midwife and herbalist who holds a master's in public health and serves on the boards of several organizations dedicated to promoting midwifery care and reducing maternal and infant mortality in the African diaspora. *Listen to Me* is the duo's debut film.

BPM was an early funder of the film, which won its PitchBLACK Forum in 2021. PitchBLACK is the nation's largest pitching competition for Black film and immersive stories.

Season 18 of *AfroPoP* continues July 2 with *This World Is Not My Own*, an award-winning, genre-blending feature documentary by Opendox (Petter Ringbom and Marquise Stillwell). It traces the life and legacy of Nellie Mae Rowe, a self-taught 20th century Black artist whose bold, deeply personal work carried her from the rural South to late-life recognition on the national and global art scene. The film features Emmy® Award winner Uzo Aduba as Rowe and Broadway veteran Amy Warren as gallery owner/arts patron Judith Alexander. It is the first feature-length documentary to premiere exclusively on [BPM's YouTube channel](#).

A third film, planned for November, will be announced later this year.

"*Listen to Me* is exactly the kind of story *AfroPoP* was created to share — powerful, unflinching and rooted in the lived experiences of Black people across the diaspora," said BPM Executive Director Leslie Fields-Cruz, who executive produces the series. "It is vital that these stories remain in the public sphere because they deepen our understanding of one another, challenge inequities and reflect the complexities of Black life."

Presented by Black Public Media and PBS Plus, *AfroPoP* is the only U.S.-based public media program solely devoted to independent documentaries and narrative films about contemporary life, art and culture across the African diaspora. BPM saved the series from the brink after a 2025 Congressional vote rescinded \$1.8 million that had been allocated to it and the series is expected to reach its 100th film presentation this season. Since it premiered in 2008, *AfroPoP* has presented films by an array of award-winning and noted filmmakers, including George Amponsah, Joel Zito Araújo, Violeta Ayala, Blitz Bazawule, Yaba Blay, Barron Claiborne, Rebecca Richman Cohen, Daniel Fallshaw, Luchina Fisher, Bobbito Garcia, Alain Gomis, Thomas Allen Harris, Eric Kabera, Terence Nance, Raoul Peck, Sam Pollard, Michèle Stephenson, Anisia Uzeyman, Marco Williams and Saul Williams.

Denise A. Greene is the series producer/director of *AfroPoP*.

The series is presented with the generous support of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

To find out more about *AfroPoP*, visit <https://blackpublicmedia.org/afropop/>.

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ABOUT THE PRESENTERS

ABOUT BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA:

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.

ABOUT PBS PLUS:

PBS Plus is a syndicated programming service for public television stations, supplementing the primetime, daily news, and children's content in the National Program Service, providing series and specials intended for various dayparts. All PBS member stations, reaching all available national TV households, have access to PBS Plus content. Annually, stations are provided with approximately 500 hours of programming via PBS Plus.

PBS Plus series and specials range from "how-to" programs such as *This Old House* and food series such as *Family Ingredients* to topical news and information programs and arts and cultural shows such as *Austin City Limits* and *The Caverns Sessions*.

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