

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

City Official, Arts Advocate, fayemi shakur, Elected Board Chair at Famed Newark Symphony Hall

shakur, who serves as Newark's arts and cultural affairs director, to provide fundraising and programming guidance as NSH begins renovation, announces new partnerships

NEWARK, N.J. – March 2, 2021 – [Newark Symphony Hall](#) (NSH), New Jersey's largest Black-led arts and entertainment venue, today announced that the City of Newark's Arts and Cultural Affairs Director, [fayemi shakur](#), has been elected chair of the hall's 19-member board of directors. At NSH, shakur will provide strategic fundraising and programming counsel on community programs, virtual events and ongoing racial justice initiatives. This includes NSH staff-led programs designed to bring more diverse populations to arts careers, both onstage and behind the scenes.

In December 2020, NSH began Phase 1 of a planned three-phase, five-year, \$40 million renovation, a project set to create 500 jobs and assist 50 local businesses. shakur and the NSH board will provide counsel on the venue's various fundraising goals for the renovation – a major initiative for its Lincoln Park neighborhood and the Greater Newark region. The election of shakur, also a champion of new and innovative programming, is part of an overall plan to revitalize the hall both structurally and with its many offerings.

“fayemi's reputation demonstrates a commitment to cultural organizing, mentorship and engaging programming that explores art that challenges the way we see and experience the world, ourselves and each other,” said NSH President and CEO, Taneshia Nash Laird, the sole Black female leader of a performing arts center in New Jersey. “We're thrilled to have her as chairwoman of our board and value her input. Overall, we anticipate success in the months ahead – in everything from enriching new programming to several community and economic development initiatives.”

Phase 1 of NSH's renovation process supports the restoration of its exterior façade, which has deteriorated due to nearly a century of use exacerbated by water infiltration. Items include window replacement, mortar work, stucco repairs, structural damage repair, restoration of limestone near the main entrance façade, and repairs to the rooftop ductwork, plus new lighting and signage options.

“Newark Symphony Hall's historic stage represents the cultural backbone of our city, and I'm pleased that fayemi shakur, Newark's arts and cultural affairs director, has been elected to preside over its Board of Directors,” said Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka. “Her sound counsel on the venue's arts programming and fundraising efforts will have a dynamic and positive impact for years to come, enhancing our city's luster as a center for the arts and ensuring that residents and visitors alike enjoy world-class quality performances at Symphony Hall.”

As Newark's arts and cultural affairs director, shakur launched the city's first arts fund, the Creative Catalyst Fund, to provide artists and art groups with flexible grant support during the coronavirus crisis and beyond. In mid-2020, a selection committee recommended 120 artists, art collectives and cultural organizations for funding; \$800,000 was awarded to 120 individual artists, collectives and arts groups.

shakur previously served as executive director at City Without Walls gallery, marketing and public program manager at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, and co-founder of The Annual Lincoln Park Music Festival. In 2019, shakur also founded A Womb of Violet, a project-based collective created to celebrate the work of Black women writers, poets and interdisciplinary artists. shakur also served as a visiting lecturer in Rutgers University-Newark's Department of Art, Culture and Media.

"Newark Symphony Hall's vibrant cultural history deserves to be celebrated," said shakur. "I'm excited and humbled to chair its board of directors – comprised of such talented professionals, who have worked tirelessly to preserve and support the venue's growth and long-term sustainability. This is important and joyful work."

shakur has served as a leader in the Newark arts community for over 15 years. A culture critic and interdisciplinary artist, her writing has been featured in publications including the New York Times, CNN Style, and more. With NSH, she has helped champion new virtual programming (beginning March 2021), including both "Seen" and "Homegrown."

"Seen" is part interview show, part masterclass for local artists. At center stage, as the instructors, are Black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) creatives in the live and filmed entertainment industries.

Similarly, "Homegrown" will share the stories of prominent artists and entertainers born and raised in Newark. Guests for this interview-style series include household names – each of whom will describe the impact and legacy of the Brick City, along with their contributions to the entertainment industry.

In December 2020, NSH also named Grammy-winning record producer, [Jerry "Wonda" Duplessis](#), to its board of directors. In October 2020, NSH also created a volunteer-based, seven-member [Investment Committee](#) to shape oversight policy and provide fund-management guidance. Committee members come from companies such as Goldman Sachs and AllianceBernstein, and will help the venue achieve fundraising milestones while supporting its various social and racial justice initiatives.

About Newark Symphony Hall

Born in 1925, Newark Symphony Hall (NSH) has been the home of almost a century of arts and culture in what is now one of New Jersey's oldest and largest arts and entertainment venues. NSH remains as committed as ever to providing an artistically rich experience for art lovers of all ages, while creating career pathways for people of color from around the world – and bettering both its community and the Greater Newark region. In 2021, the venue will release the production, "The Soul of Newark Symphony Hall," a celebration of "Black Newark" developed by scholar and composer Guthrie Ramsey, told through narration, reenactments, music and cinematic and photographic montage. Its "Symphony of Survival," a creative project led by Newark poet Jasmine Mans as part of the venue's #EmbraceNewark initiative, features writings, footage and photos by 10 talented local Black artists documenting their pandemic experience. For more information, visit: www.NewarkSymphonyHall.org.

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