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Supervisor Honors Creative Visionaries for Black History Month

In celebration of Black History Month 2020, Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas honored seven creative visionaries for their contributions in arts and entertainment. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors presented scrolls to Actress, Choreographer, and Television Director Debbie Allen; Actor Wren Brown; Actor and Artistic Director Ben Guillory; LA Poet Laureate Robin Coste Lewis; Actress, Author, and Activist Sheryl Lee Ralph; Actress Wendy Raquel Robinson; and Lula Washington Dance Theatre Founder and Director Lula Washington.

“Today we commemorate the legacy of champions of change and the sacrifices they have made so that we may honor and celebrate black history month,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “We are grateful for these individuals who have used their amazing talents to challenge us to reshape the American narrative.”

The recognition is part of the Second District’s Black History Month Celebration honoring Los Angeles County residents who have made outstanding contributions to the arts and entertainment industry. They include:

Debbie Allen is an award-winning director, actress and choreographer. Allen has choreographed for legendary artists including; Michael Jackson, Mariah Carey, James Earl Jones, Phylicia Rashad, Janet Jackson, Whitney Houston, Gwen Verdon, Lena Horne, and Sammy Davis, Jr. Ms. Allen also received a Golden Globe for her role as Lydia Grant in the 1980s hit television series Fame and is a three-time Emmy Award winner in Choreography for Fame and The Motown 25th. She has been honored with ten NAACP Image Awards as director, actress, choreographer and producer for Fame, A Different World, Motown 25th, The Academy Awards, The Debbie Allen Special and Amistad. To date, she has worked on television shows including Scandal, How To Get Away With Murder, Jane The Virgin, Empire, and currently serves as Executive Producing Director of Grey’s Anatomy, where she also holds a recurring role as Catherine Fox.
Wren T. Brow, a descendant of a long line of talented performers, including his father, jazz trumpeter Troy Brown Jr., his paternal grandfather, actor-comedian Troy Brown Sr. and his maternal grandfather, Lee Young Sr., was the first black staff musician in Hollywood. He is widely remembered for his roles in Beyond the Lights, Waiting to Exhale, Heart and Souls, Under Siege 2: Dark Territory, The Dinner, Hollywood Shuffle, Biker Boyz, and The Importance of Being Earnest. In 2007, Wren founded Ebony Repertory Theatre (ERT), the first African American professional Equity theatre company in Los Angeles history where he has served as its producing artistic director from inception to the institution’s now 10-year anniversary. Wren currently serves on the board of Antioch University, Los Angeles and has formerly served on the board of directors of the Screen Actors Guild.

Ben Guillory studied at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco and has worked extensively in theatre, film and television for the past 30 years as an actor and director. Mr. Guillory is the Producing Artistic Director of the award-winning Robey Theatre Company, coordinating Robey’s playwright lab, and directing the Robey play reading series. In the interest of diversity in the Television and Motion Picture industry, 2001 brought an ongoing partnership with ABC resulting in development of a nationwide Industry Diverse Showcase for actors. Mr. Guillory serves as Director for ABC Diversity showcases and has mounted multi-cultural showcases for CBS and consults with Fox.

Poet Laureate of Los Angeles Robin Coste Lewis is the author of Voyage of the Sable Venus (2015), the winner of National Book Award for Poetry - the first time a poetry debut by an African American had ever won the prize in the National Book Foundation’s history, and the first time any debut had won the award since 1974. Her work has appeared in various journals and anthologies, including The Massachusetts Review, Callaloo, The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review, Transition, and VIDA.

Sheryl Lee Ralph has had continued success on stage, and behind the scenes, along with her philanthropic endeavors including The Diva Foundation. A triple threat, Ralph is an acclaimed veteran in film, television and the Broadway stage. In 1991, she received Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Female for her role in the drama film To Sleep with Anger. Her other film credits include The Mighty Quinn (1989), The Distinguished Gentleman (1992), Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit (1993), and Deterrence (1999). On television, Ralph starred from 1986 to 1989 in the syndicated sitcom It's a Living, and later had the leading roles in the short-lived ABC sitcom New Attitude (1990), and CBS medical drama Street Gear (1995). From 1996 to 2001, she starred as Dee Mitchell in the UPN sitcom Moesha, and from 2013 to 2015 as Maggie Turner in the Nick at Nite sitcom Instant Mom.

Actress, Dancer, and Choreographer Wendy Raquel Robinson became a household name as a result of her role as Regina Greer in The Steve Harvey Show. With an extensive film and television resume, Robinson has gone on to appear in films such as; A Thin Line Between Love and Hate, Two Can Play That Game, and Something New. As an advocate for the arts, Robinson vowed to give back to her community. Founded in 1977, Wendy Raquel Robinson established the Amazing Grace Conservatory in South Central Los Angeles.
Lula Washington is the Founder and Artistic Director of the Lula Washington Dance Theatre. Created to provide a creative outlet for minority dance artists in the inner city - the dance company has danced in over 150 cities worldwide.

“These creative visionaries are central to who we are as a county of dreamers, storytellers, and creators,” the Supervisor said. “Each has made immeasurable contributions, and I am proud to honor them today.”

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