2017 Artist Retreat Bios

**IMAN STAFF**

**Alia J. Bilal** *(Director of Community Relations)*  |  Alia serves as Director of Community Relations, where she is responsible for cultivating and maintaining individual donors in order to sustain and advance IMAN’s critical social justice work, and engaging other organizations and institutions around strategic programs and initiatives. In her eight years at IMAN, Alia has worked on development, community organizing, and policy, advocating on issues related to food, criminal, and juvenile justice, and strategizing around creative new ways to get healthy foods and safe physical activities into Chicago neighborhoods. A native of Chicago’s South Side, Alia graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a degree in International Studies and a concentration in Islamic World Studies. She studied Arabic and Islamic history in Cairo, Egypt, and was an intern for the Muslim Public Service Network in Washington, DC. Alia has given talks and conducted workshops on the connection between faith and social justice, IMAN’s community organizing model, and access to healthy food both locally and across the United States. She is an appointee of the Equity Advisory Council of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations and lives with her husband and son on Chicago’s South Side.

Twitter: [@AJannatB](https://twitter.com/AJannatB)

**Binta Diallo** *(Arts & Culture Administrator)*  |  Binta is a blogger, diversity and inclusion advocate, and currently the Arts & culture administrator at Iman. Binta aids the Arts & culture team by managing all things related to art and culture. Binta strives to help as many people as she can through sharing her story and the stories of others via her blog, Internal Archives. The mission of Internal Archives is to serve as a platform to empower millennials of color and to embrace what makes them unique. In 2017, Binta was highlighted by the Illinois State University Alumni magazine for her diversity initiatives. Binta enjoys volunteering for various humanitarian organizations. She is also an avid supporter of anti-bullying campaigns and has a passion for aiding the less fortunate and encouraging others to ignite their passions. Binta is also an ever-evolving student and recently earned her M.S. in Hospitality and Tourism Management.

www.internalarchives.com  |  Instagram: [@internalarchives](https://instagram.com/internalarchives)

**Cristal Chanelle Truscott** *(Senior Arts Advisor)*  |  Cristal is a published playwright and scholar, theatre director, dialogue facilitator, arts/culture consultant, educator and founder of Progress Theatre — a Houston-based, touring ensemble that uses theatre as anti-racism engagement to encourage social consciousness, cross-community healing and cultural awareness. She holds a BFA in Theatre and Africana Studies from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts; and MA/PhD degrees from NYU’s Department of Performance Studies. She is a recipient of the Doris Duke Impact Artist Award, NEFA National Theatre Project Grant, the MAP Fund, two National Performance Network Creation Fund grants and The Idea Fund. She creates *Neo-Spirituals*, a capella musicals crafted using “SoulWork,” her theatre-making technique built from generations-old African American performance traditions and aesthetics. Her plays include: *PEACHES*, ‘MEMBUH, The Burnin’’ and in development, *Plantation Remix*, a site-specific performance to rehabilitate plantation tourism as an intercultural exploration of U.S. shared histories. Her published works include a chapter on historical representations of Muslims in *The Routledge Companion to African American Theatre and Performance* (upcoming 2018), “SoulWork” in *Black Acting Methods* (Routledge 2016) and *PEACHES* in Theater Communication Group’s *Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy: Theatre from the Hip Hop Generation*. She has taught at universities nationally and internationally, including Albeda College in Holland, Wits University in South Africa, Spelman College in Atlanta and Prairie View A&M University in Texas, where she was Department Head of Music & Theatre. Cristal also serves as an arts advisor and consultant for the Association of Performing Arts Presenters and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and facilitates a service project called “Enter
Faith,” that engages spiritual diversity through training workshops and community arts events.


Facebook: @beprogressnow | Instagram: @beprogressnow | Twitter: @beprogressnow

Mansoor Sabree (Atlanta Director) | Imam Mansoor is a distinguished fellow of the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute (AMCLI) from the University of Southern California. He is the former director and Resident Imam of the Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam, Atlanta’s oldest and largest indigenous muslim community in the southeast. After completing tenure as the Director and Imam of the Atlanta Masjid, Mansoor joined the IMAN team in December 2015. Recently he has been recognized as “Who’s Who 40 under 40 Muslim Leaders in Georgia” and inducted into the board of Religious Leaders at Morehouse College. Mansoor is fluent in Arabic and has lectured throughout the United States as well as in West Africa and the Middle East on a range of topics including Islam in America, community development, African American history and social justice. Facebook: @IMANAtlanta | Twitter: @ImamSabree

Rami Nashashibi (Executive Director) | Rami has served as the Executive Director of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) since its incorporation as a nonprofit in 1997. He has a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Chicago and is a Visiting Professor of Sociology of Religion & Muslim Studies at the Chicago Theological Seminary. He has worked with several leading scholars in the area of globalization, African American studies and urban sociology and has contributed chapters to edited volumes by Manning Marabel and Saskia Sassen. Rami has lectured across the United States, Europe, and Asia on a range of topics related to American Muslim identity, community activism and social justice issues and is a recipient of several prestigious community service and organizing honors. Rami and his work with IMAN have been featured in many national and international media outlets and in 2009, Chicago Public Radio selected him as one of the “Top Ten Chicago Global Visionaries”. In 2014, the Center for American Progress profiled Rami as one of the “14 Faith Leaders to Watch in 2014” and he was named one of the “500 Most Influential Muslims in the World” by The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center in concert with Georgetown’s Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. Rami lives with his wife and three children on Chicago’s Southwest Side. Twitter: @raminashashibi

Sadia Nawab (Arts & Culture Manager) | Sadia is a community organizer, youth and arts educator, artist and a mother. As the Arts & Culture Manager of the Inner-city Muslim Action Network (IMAN), Sadia has been organizing disconnected communities through concerts, festivals, youth programs, creative placemaking and a neighborhood ceramic arts studio. Having been raised in many communities, and a graduate of Anthropology, Sadia has been inspired by understanding identities, culture and community. Her passion is in serving disadvantaged individuals and communities towards justice and self-efficacy through cultural capital and the creative class. Instagram: @msdija07 | Twitter: @msdija07

ARTIST RETREAT PLANNING COMMITTEE

Brother Ali | Brother Ali is a hip hop artist, speaker, and activist from Minneapolis, Minnesota. His decade-long resume includes six critically acclaimed albums, performances on Conan O’Brien and Jimmy Fallon’s late night shows, and Al-Jazeera and NPR pieces. He was a keynote speaker at the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize Forum, and has landed coveted press features, among them Rolling Stone's 40th Anniversary "Artist to Watch" and Source Magazine's "Hip Hop Quotables." Brother Ali is currently working on his first literary offering. Brother Ali embraced Islam at the age of 15, inspired by the message and lyricism of the hip-hop greats, and later by the teachings of Malcolm X and the guidance of the late Imam Warith Deen Mohammed’s community. A seeker of knowledge since day one, his mentors range from Dr. Umar
Faruq Abd-Allah and Ustadh Usama Canon to Rakim and Chuck D to Dr. Cornel West. Brother Ali infuses his vision for racial and social justice into all his works.

http://rhymesayers.com/brotherali | Facebook: @BrotherAli | Twitter: @BrotherAli

Azhar Usman | Azhar is a standup comedian, actor, writer, playwright, and producer. He is one of Chicago's top standup comics; CNN called him "America's Funniest Muslim," and Georgetown University identified him as "one of the 500 Most Influential Muslims in the World." In 2010, standup icon Dave Chappelle—for whom Azhar has opened over 50 times—commented "Azhar is untouchable!" As the co-founder of the international comedy showcase "Allah Made Me Funny–The Official Muslim Comedy Tour," he has toured over 20 countries, on five continents. His comedy has been profiled/reviewed by over 100 major world media outlets including The New York Times, The Economist, BBC, The Guardian, NPR, TIME Magazine, Al-Jazeera, USA Today, and Fox News. Besides appearing regularly on television, and in numerous documentary and independent films, he most recently served as a comedy writer for Hasan Minhaj's speech at the 2017 White House Correspondents Dinner. He has contributed comedy material that has appeared in the Netflix original stand up specials: Hannibal Buress' 'Comedy Camisado' (credited as Creative Consultant), Hasan Minhaj's 'Homecoming King' (credited as Creative Consultant), and Dave Chappelle's 'Age of Spin' (Uncredited). Azhar guest stars as KKYMAN CANDAHAR on Amazon Studios' new big-budget original series PATRIOT (created, written, and directed by Steve Conrad). In the Spring of 2017, he appeared on Pete Holmes' popular podcast "You Made It Weird," where he announced that he is working on his first ever one-hour stand up special (to be directed by Ramy Youssef and executive produced by Hannibal Buress).

http://azhar.com/ | Facebook: @AzharUsman | Twitter: @AzharUsman

Jacinda Bullie | Rooted in her Choctaw and Appalachian identity, driven by her BPP Survival Program upbringing, Jacinda Bullie aka JAH da Amp Mouth is a co-founder of Kuumba Lynx, a Chicago based youth art and culture making collective committed to reimagining a more just world. Jacinda has developed many of KL’s premier projects alongside Jaquanda Villegas & Leida Garcia, including 1 Luv Hip Hop Arena, Dance Down Footwork Battle, Chicago Hip Hop Theater Fest, and most recently, AS I AM, an initiative supporting young Creatives ages 18+. Jah's most notable contribution has been her 21+ year role as a co Artistic Director of the Kuumba Lynx Performance Ensemble (KLPE), where she has directed numerous interdisciplinary productions for stages including DC's Kennedy Center, Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre, Harris Theatre and Millennium Park. For the past two decades alongside Jaquanda Villegas, she has nurtured Chicago’s youth spoken word movement as a six time winning Louder than a Bomb Slam Poetry Coach, and Co Artistic founding Director of Half Pint Poetics elementary school literacy project. Together they have wrote, produced and featured in Hip Hop Theater productions such as Braid Tales II ('14), BT the Remix ('15) Love is a Tender Headed Hoe ('16), as well as co authored their first With A Mighty Roar publication, a poetic coloring book entitled, FILLINZ Put Some Respect On It! Jacinda is currently editing her first children’s book, You Winking at Me? illustrated by Sam Kirk. Jacinda, believing we are all elders in training, is studying to practice as a Doula, hoping to deliver her first KL baby this year!

http://www.kuumbalynx.com/ | Instagram: @JacindaBullie | @kuumbalynx | Twitter: @JacindaBullie | @Kuumbalynx

Liza Garza | Emmy Award-nominated Liza Garza is a poet, vocalist and songwriter. Infusing the cultural soul of Mexican folk tunes in modern ballads with the intricacy of Hip Hop rhyme schemes, she bridges the ancestral with the modern. With performances that include The Lincoln Center, The Apollo, the National Association of Latino Arts & Culture, HBO Def Poetry Jam and numerous stages world wide, diverse people are finding a home in her voice.

http://www.lizagarza.com | Instagram: @lizagarza | Twitter: @lamlizagarza
**Tasleem Jamila Firdausee** | Tasleem Jamila Firdausee is an internationally renowned poet, playwright, actor, and cultural producer. Her sound is a fusion of hip hop, spirituals, mystical chants, and lyrical soul. With performances that include The Kennedy Center, Excel London, Columbia University (NYC) and the African World Festival of the Arts. She has performed her works across the US as well as the UK, Africa, and Canada and continues to tour worldwide. Tasleem published a book of poetry, Black Baptist Muslim Mystic which is receiving critical acclaim in addition to her album “Tasleem” and live and unplugged DVD “My Soul Speaks”. She is currently due to release her next book of poetry early 2018. She is sought after for her captivating energy as a host, professional skills as a cultural producer and educating activist as a workshop facilitator. Tasleem is pushing the boundaries with a multi-media show, art exhibit with original musical composition (Reginald Robinson) and educational curriculum to tour 2018.

[www.tasleemjamila.com](http://www.tasleemjamila.com)


---

**Ieasha Prime** | Ieasha converted to Islam more than 20 years ago, and since then has spent her life as an educator, artist, activist and entrepreneur committed to the goal of empowering Muslim women to rise above their challenges. She studied Arabic, Quran at the Fajr Institute and general Islamic studies in other institutes in Cairo, Egypt, and studied at Dar Al Zahra in Hadramaut, Yemen and enrolled in Dar al Zahra, where she studied Aqeedah, Quran, Hadith, Arabic, Fiqh, Islamic law, Purification of the Heart and other religious related learning. Her lineage of scholarship from whom she received direct education can be traced directly back to the Prophet Muhammad (Salla Allahu alaihi wa Salam) from Husseini lineage. In 1994, her passion to educate and empower Muslim women to be leaders in America led her to the creation of the non profit organization, Sisterhood In Action. She has lectured and facilitated workshops for Muslim women, youth, and interfaith groups in high schools, universities, college campuses, churches, community centers and Masajid around the country and the world. She served as the director of Islamic Studies at El-Iman Learning Center and Khadijah Academy, is the former Vice Principal at Al-Qalam Academy in Springfield, VA. and is now the Executive Director of Barakah, Inc. empowering women and youth with a foundation of Islam.


---

**Jamillah Karim** | Dr. Jamillah is an award-winning author, speaker, and blogger. Jamillah specializes in race, gender, and Islam in America. She is author of *American Muslim Women* and co-author of *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam*. Jamillah is former associate professor of Islam at Spelman College and holds a doctorate in Islamic Studies from Duke. She blogs for Hagar Lives, Sapelo Square, HuffPost, and Race+Gender+Faith. In 2014, she was highlighted as a young faith leader in the African American community by JET magazine. 


---

**Imam Al-Hajj Talib ‘Abdur-Rashid (The Oasis Initiative)** | Imam Talib is the religious and spiritual leader of The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood Inc, originally founded by the late El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X). Imam Talib serves on or has advised several local and global interfaith bodies, past and present. He has given sermons and lectures in Mosques, Churches and Synagogues throughout the U.S.A. Furthermore, he was a presenter at the Parliament of World Religions in both Chicago (1993) and Capetown, South Africa (1999). A spiritual advisor to the hip-hop generation, he appeared in the award-winning documentary “The New Muslim Cool”. The Imam’s work has been the object of several featured articles and books, and he has authored several books himself. Imam Talib is a champion advocate for Muslims living with AIDS and their families. He is the recipient of several awards from government and community recognition. He is a loving father and grandfather.

Umar Faruq Abd-Allah | Dr. Umar is an American Muslim who embraced Islam in 1970. He studied Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Chicago and received his doctorate there in 1978. He taught at the Universities of Windsor (Ontario), Temple, Michigan, and King Abdul-Aziz (Jeddah). He returned to the United States in 2000 under the auspices of the Nawawi Foundation (Chicago), where he worked until 2011. He taught Islamic studies at Darul Qasim (Chicago) from 2012 until 2013. He is currently engaged in independent research, writing, and teaching activities with institutions across the United States, Europe, and Africa with a focus on Islamic theology. Among his written works are: A Muslim in Victorian America: The Life of Alexander Russell Webb (Oxford University Press) and Malik and Medina: Islamic Legal Reasoning in the Formative Period (Brill).

Facebook: @Dr.UmarFaruqAbdAllah | Twitter: @umarfabdallah

ARTISTS & ATTENDEES

Adriana Velazquez | Adriana is the lead singer of Quinto Imperio, a Chicago Latin alternative band who's music is rooted in the stories and rhythms of the Latino and immigrant community. Adriana grew up enjoying songs around the house and leaving a mark on her grandfather's cassettes as she made the first attempts to record her voice. In the city of Chicago she further immersed herself in the performing and visual arts in Back of the Yards, the community that has seen her grow as an artist. She enjoys a variety of music and artists such as Mercedes Sosa, Amy Winehouse, Natalia Lafourcade, Etta James and Mon Laferte. Adriana is also a community organizer with the Southwest Organizing Project, an organization that works with families around the areas of Chicago Lawn, Gage Park and West Lawn to improve the quality of life and build a better future together.

Facebook: @adriana.velazquez.52 | @QuintoImperio | Twitter: @adrianavlu | @qimusica

Alec Payne | I'm 24 years old and live in Chicago, though originally from Los Angeles. I moved to Chicago recently and have been getting to know the wonderful people in IMAN. I have been playing drums for a long time and enjoy various styles of music from around the world. I love making music and playing it with people, especially music with a purpose. Music is a great way for people connect with themselves and others.

Facebook: @Alec.Payne.5

Amir Sulaiman | Amir voice is between a flood and a firestorm. In the spirit of Rumi & Attar, his poems engage sensuality with a kind of religious devotion and engage religious devotion with sensuous fervor. A poet, writer, educator, recording artist, & Visiting Harvard Fellow from Rochester, NY, his poems cross subjects of love, tragedy and what it means to reconcile humanity with the unprecedented trials of modernity. The Center for Muslim Christian Understanding at Georgetown University recognized Amir as one of the 500 Most Influential Muslims In The World, in the field of arts and culture. He has performed his works across the US and around the world and was first introduced to a National audience in 2004 when he was featured for two seasons on Russell Simmons' groundbreaking series Def Poetry Jam on HBO.

Facebook: @amirsulaiman.poet | Twitter: @amirsulaiman

Baraka Blue | Baraka Blue is a poet and Hip Hop artist from Seattle Washington. He is acclaimed for his original synthesis of Western and Eastern mystical poetic traditions. He has released multiple studio albums and collections of poetry. His most recent book is entitled Empty & The Ocean. For his research on Sufi Thought Baraka was awarded a Master's Degree from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. His current research and teaching focuses on Sufi poetry, comparative mysticism, Islam in the West, and creative writing as a means of self-transformation. As a teaching artist he has performed and taught all over the world, including such institutions as Princeton and the School of Oriental and African Studies.

BarakaBlue.com | Facebook: @BarakaBlue | Instagram: @BarakaBlue | Twitter: @BarakaBlue
Che “Rhymefest” Smith | Emerging from humble beginnings, Rhymefest has managed to rise from substitute teacher to global educator. After permanently trading in his janitor uniform for a microphone, Rhymefest has been a vocal advocate for Hip Hop artists worldwide. In October 2006, Fest became the first rapper to meet with the United Kingdom’s Conservative Party. As he sat down with David Cameron, the Parliamentary Leader of the Opposition, Rhymefest was able to convince the political figure not to be an enemy of all things Hip Hop. More recently, Rhymefest has traveled with Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-Texas), Rep. John Conyers (D-Michigan), and Rep. Hank Johnson (D-Georgia) as a proponent of H.R. 848, the Performance Rights Act. As an emcee, Rhymefest is the total package. A two time winner of Scribble Jam (1997 and 2003), Rhymefest came into the national spotlight after co-writing “Jesus Walks” with his childhood comrade Kanye West. Fest contributed significantly to West’s debut The College Dropout, co-writing songs like “All Falls Down.” The two also collaborated on Rhymefest’s breakout single “Brand New” off of 2006’s critically acclaimed Blue Collar LP. From memorable television appearances on Nick Canon’s Wild’N Out, Last Call with Carson Daly and Jimmy Kimmel Live to scribining 16s for legends like Queen Latifah and Lil Jon to lacing his own tracks with extraordinary energy, Rhymefest is a powerhouse behind the scenes and in the limelight. 
http://www.elchethemovement.com/about/

Drea d’Nur | Drea d’Nur is a Buffalo-based singer and songwriter whose work has reached national and international acclaim with localized work that highlights the rich history of Black music and art in Buffalo. This 2017 Spark Awards Artist of the Year has performed overseas, released two independent music projects, produced two short films about Nina Simone, directed a music video, produced two stage productions, and has album credits on the new Gorillaz album, HUMANZ. D’Nur is currently touring the Spirit of Nina and preparing to launch an exciting new creative community arts initiative all while raising five gifted children. www.officialdreadnur.com
Facebook: @Drea-dNur | Instagram: @drea_dnur | Twitter: @drea_dnur

Edy Dominguez | I’m a Mexican immigrant and grew up in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in the Southwest of Chicago. I’ve been involved in community work since my teen years through my church’s youth programs including youth council, youth theater, and the marimba ensemble, and later in the immigration committee. With support from the community and my family I obtained a Bachelor’s Degree at NEIU on Communication, Media and Theater but my real passion and vocation has always been music. I founded a Latin Alternative Music band, Quinto Imperio, with my family and after so many obstacles this year we released our first album Crónica Inmigrante, which is dedicated to the undocumented immigrant community. Currently I help coordinate the Dreamers and Allies Run scholarship for undocumented college students of the Back of the Yards neighborhood.
Facebook: @QuintoImperio | Twitter: @qimusica

Eli Lakes | Eli is a musician, producer, and art activist. Raised and rooted in culture and purpose, he has pursued his passion from an early age. Eli began experimenting with his voice and several instruments and due his self-driven work ethic got on the road as his mother, Liza Garza’s, official guitarist and back-up vocalist at the age of 15. He has joined her at The Happy Feelings Concert at the Flint Institute of Arts, The Clear Creek Festival (Berea, KY), Taking it to the Streets Festival (Chicago) and numerous universities. His experience and inherent wisdom radiates far and wide.
www.elilakes.com | Facebook: @eli.lakes.5 | Instagram: @elilakes

Enoch Muhammad | Brother Enoch is Executive Director and Lead EmPowerMenT Specialist of a public health not-for profit organization called Hip-Hop DetoxX. He is an empowerment speaker and change agent specialist with a background in music: as an artist, manager, booking agent & music business consultant. A grassroots community organizer that range from the Million Man Marches to the NAACP and Black Think Tank college student chapters; And an education consultant focusing on youth,
civic engagement, conflict resolution, healthy lifestyle choices & intergenerational dialogues. Brother Enoch, a collaborative partner and 4 time feature Keynote speaker to 100 plus boys, at the ranch of comedienne Steve Harvey for his mentoring program in Texas, personifies a fusion of Hip-Hop, Spoken Word, Pop Culture, Empowerment, Innertainment and Change. He is dedicated to taking up the task of making a positive impact in the city of Chicago & nationwide as a servant leader that promote positive behaviors and healthy lifestyle choices to teens & young adults while assisting them in navigating through the Map of Life. www.hiphopdetox.org

Facebook: @HipHopDetoxx | Instagram: @HipHopDetoxx | Twitter: @HipHopDetoxx

Faisal Ghias (The Oasis Initiative) | Faisal Ghias is one of the founding directors of the Oasis Initiative. He helped launch the Zawiyah program, a holistic spiritual and educational retreat that brings together leading scholars, thought leaders and Muslims from around the world to discuss relevant issues facing the community. He received his Master’s Degree from the University of Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration, where his interests included nonprofit management, philanthropy, and strategic planning. Mr. Ghias was a member of the Pillars Fund Steering Committee in 2016 and sits on the board of the Oasis Initiative. He is a passionate believer in the rich Islamic tradition and its ability to creatively address the issues facing contemporary society. He lives in Oak Park, IL with his wife and two children.

Frank Waln | Frank is an award winning Sicangu Lakota Hip Hop artist and music producer from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, now based out of Chicago. A recipient of the Gates Millennium Scholarship, Waln attended Columbia College Chicago where he received a BA in Audio Arts and Acoustics. Waln’s awards include three Native American Music Awards, the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development 2014 Native American 40 Under 40, the 2014 Chicago Mayor’s Award for Civic Engagement, and the 2016 3Arts Grant for Chicago Artists. He has been featured in Buzzfeed, The Fader, Vibe, NPR, ESPN, and MTV’s Rebel Music Native America. Frank Waln travels the world telling his story through performance and doing workshops focusing on self-empowerment and expression of truth.

Facebook: @frankwaln | Instagram: @frankwaln | Twitter: @frankwaln

Ifrah Magan | Originally from Somalia, Ifrah Magan fled the civil conflict in Somalia as a child with her family and settled in Egypt where they lived nearly ten years as refugees prior to moving to the United States in 1999. Ifrah received a Bachelor of Science degree from Michigan State University in Family and Community Services with a specialization in Health Promotion and International Development. She then went on to receive a Masters degree from the University of Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration where she was a recipient of many awards including the Kathryn Davis Peace Award, and served as a Child Advocate for unaccompanied undocumented children through the Young Center at University of Chicago School of Law. Ifrah recently defended her doctoral dissertation at University of Illinois at Chicago, Jane Addams College of Social Work. Her dissertation explores the migration paths of Somali refugees in Chicago, and in particular, how ethnic and religious identities impact their resettlement and integration. In addition to her academic work, she has over ten years of experience working in diverse refugee communities, and is the co-founder of the first Rohingya Cultural Center in Chicago. Ifrah is passionate about storytelling, poetry, and creative writing in general. She's currently working on her first poetry collection.

Haroon Najam | Haroon Najam is a post-1965 immigrant from a third-world, post-colonial Muslim society who has been in the U.S for more than 25 years. He has lived in Rockford, IL since 1995. Since 2006, he has been involved with organizing and arts projects at IMAN. He is currently a consultant to the IMAN Communications Department, and has been the editor of The Urban Edge, a monthly IMAN publication, since 2008. From 2008 to 2010, he was one of the directors of the Muslim Alliance in North America (MANA). Since 2014, Haroon has been active in the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and is one of the original members of its Chicago chapter. Haroon considers himself a participant in the ongoing
struggle to create a dignified, meaningful and relevant existence for Muslims in America. To that critical enterprise, he brings a broad study of (1) American history, social reality, and race formation; (2) Muslim intellectual history; and (3) social and psychological history of colonial and post-colonial Muslim experiences.

Twitter: @HaroonNajam

Iman & Khadijah Taw’am aka Al Taw’am | Al Taw’am (Arabic for The Twins), are nineteen year old, Muslim identical twin sisters, Iman and Khadijah Siferllah-Griffin from Minneapolis, MN. They are 2016 National Young Arts Award recipients and the youngest 2-time Minnesota Sage Cowles Award recipients for dance. Performing since the age of eight, Iman and Khadijah danced in their first production in 2011 "The Joint Project" at Intermedia Arts. During a performance at The Day of Dignity in North Minneapolis, Al Taw’am caught the eye of Rhymesayers recording artist Brother Ali. A few months later, the group was invited to L.A. to dance in a music video for his album titled Mourning in America and Dreaming in Color. For their performance in Mourning in America, the group won the Minnesota Sage Award for Outstanding Ensemble. Out of their desire to increase the presences of women and girls in the Minnesota Hip Hop dance community, Iman and Khadijah created an all-women’s Hip Hop dance collective named S.H.E, which stands for “She Who Holds Everything.” In 2016, S.H.E won Outstanding Ensemble for their performance of Ninth Inning in Rooted, “A Hip Hop Choreographer’s Evening” at Intermedia Arts. As recent dancers and choreographers for Brother Ali’s video “Never Learn” and Mona Haydar’s “Wrap My Hijab,” Iman and Khadijah have performed in such events as The Nobel Peace Prize Forum, Facing Race 2012 and 2016, WE Day Minnesota, Sound Set, and The Minnesota Secretary of State's 50th Voter's Rights Act Anniversary Celebration. In 2016, the pair performed and provided a talk back at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, MN and in 2017 were contestants on season one of World of Dance NBC. Iman and Khadijah believe that their God given ability to dance is their superpower, and they want to use that superpower to inspire others.

Facebook: @Al-Tawam-The-Twins | Instagram: @iman_and_khadijah

John Baker aka John the Author | John the Author is a rapper, entrepreneur & activist who is pioneering a new way of doing things on the Chicago music Scene. John once stated that the best kind of music an artist can create encourages a listener to think critically and live Progressively. His ideas have proven to resonate as John is the founder of BLACKENOMICS, a quickly evolving movement & t-shirt line that brings awareness to the need for financial literacy education & black wealth building in underprivileged communities through the practice of group economics. John has worked closely with GRAMMY & Oscar award-winning songwriter Rhymefest and shared stages with Kanye West, Common, Lupe Fiasco, David Banner, De La Soul, MC Lyte & More. This young artist is using his gifts to give the world great music, inspiration & more. John recently released his fourth full-length solo project, THE RAPPER WHO SAT BY THE DOOR, available on iTunes, Tidal, Spotify & more. www.JohnTheAuthor.com.

Facebook: @John The Author | Instagram: @john_theauthor | Twitter: @john_theauthor

JoVonna Jackson | With three successful private commissions and two residencies under her belt, JoVonna’s ceramic pieces explore nature and community topics with a combination of texture, color and symbolism. Her first mosaic experience was for a high school class that lead to her being hired at the age of 14 by Gallery 37/After School Matters, where she worked for the first time on a mosaic from start to finish titled “Lily A Day” which is displayed at Millennium Park. JoVonna then created several more pieces, some of which she can be seen at the Academy for Global Citizenship’s school cafeteria, Hamilton Park, Clarendon and in the home of a retired Joffrey Ballet dancer. JoVonna is also a graduate of Kennedy-King Washburn Culinary Program in Chicago, Illinois. (When it comes to her culinary skills, the food looks as great as it tastes!) Currently, she works as an Art Lab Assistant at Kennedy-King Community College while pursuing her goal and passion to work in underserved communities.

Facebook: @jovonna.jackson.7 | Instagram: @jovonna_josaiex
**Jecorey "1200" Arthur** | 1200 is an award-winning hip hop and classical musician from Louisville KY. His performances range from Forecastle Festival and 92nd Street Y Musical Introduction Series, to collaborations with the Louisville Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, and Indianapolis Symphony. 1200 is "an uncompromising artist who balances activism, light-heartedness, intense performance, and bass-heavy bangers — a sense of surrealism accessible to all," says LEO Weekly. His double album debut, Seance & Spirit, is available digitally on Spotify, iTunes, Google Play and more.

*Facebook: [@1200LLC](https://www.facebook.com/1200LLC) | Instagram: [@1200LLC](https://www.instagram.com/1200LLC) | Twitter: [@1200LLC](https://twitter.com/1200LLC)*

**Jasiri X** | Jasiri X’s work is synonymous with the artistic dialogue needed in today’s political climate. He is the first independent hip-hop artist to be awarded an Honorary Doctorate and is deeply involved with the national Movement for Black Lives, though remains rooted in Pittsburgh through organizations he has co-founded under the banner of 1Hood. Jasiri’s focus on social change has also touched the global arena, commissioned by The Open Society Foundation to travel to Colombia to create a film, War on Us, with Grammy Award-winning hip-hop artist Rhymefest) that highlights the international effects of US drug policy. One of the most important political voices of his generation, in 2017, he was named a Nathan Cummings fellow and in 2015, a USA Cummings Fellow, a BMe Fellow and a Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Artist as Activist Fellow.

*Facebook: [@jasirixofficial](https://www.facebook.com/jasirixofficial/) | Instagram: [@jasiri_x](https://www.instagram.com/jasiri_x) | Twitter: [@jasiri_x](https://twitter.com/jasiri_x)*

**Kelly Izdihar Crosby** | Kelly Izdihar Crosby is a visual artist and writer based in Atlanta, Georgia. She creates colorful and bold paintings that explore Islamic themes, women’s empowerment and multicultural diversity. Born and raised in New Orleans, she received her bachelor’s and master’s degree in the arts from the University of New Orleans (2002, 2007). She has displayed her artwork in various art shows and conferences throughout New Orleans, Chicago, Texas, Georgia, California, Ohio and Canada. Between 2008 and 2011, while living overseas in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, she participated in art shows at DUCTAC (Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre) and in the Bastakiya Arts Festival. Kelly’s work is featured in private collections in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and United States. She is a member of International Muslima Artist Network, Atlanta Muslim Young Professionals, C4 Atlanta, Wonderroot, Fractured Atlas, Georgia Lawyers for the Arts and African American for the Arts.

*Facebook: [@kellycrosbydesign](https://www.facebook.com/kellycrosbydesign) | Instagram: [@kellycrosbydesign](https://www.instagram.com/kellycrosbydesign)*

**Lavon Nicole Pettis** | Lavon Nicole Pettis is a creative business development outreach and engagement specialist. She utilizes a background in psychology to assist artists and musicians with the business acumen of a comprehensive fine arts company. Lavon recognizes that most professional artists struggle to reach a balance between creative integrity and self promotion. It is her goal to make inroads into presenting an artist to a gallery, critic and/or collector while also encouraging a community to take note of the artist’s work. Lavon has experience in project development, management, and operations for large scale music & art festivals. She's worked as a consultant for not for profit organizations. She creates strategic partnerships with stakeholders for educational and political campaigns. Lavon has helped emerging artists meet their bottom line by connecting them with high profile people. She makes sure community outreach campaigns are timely and effective. She is strategic in promoting an artist’s career by developing an extensive network of contemporary art collectors and professionals from around the world. Performing artists are afforded a finely tuned aesthetic. Lavon is at home whether it is behind the stage, or encouraging a lover of art to factor in for financial support of a play or an art exhibition.


**Brother El** | Brother El is a spontaneous composer and multidisciplinary creative who uses music and visual arts to express ideas while connecting people to a higher plane of consciousness. Formally trained as an Audio Engineer and Graphic Designer, he has acquired many different skills running The Beat Bank, an independent record label. In addition to his Live PA performances, Brother El has multiple
forays and partnerships within the Chicago Music Scene including sonic youth mentorship with The Beat Bank Laboratory in Englewood’s Ogden Park. He also is a member of two groups: The electronic experimental act “Makers Of Sense” and most recently “The Present Elders” who recently came to prominence due to a series of pop up shows held at culturally significant areas of Chicago. Furthermore, Brother El has worked with multiple Chicago institutions including The University of Chicago, Old Town School of Folk Music, The Department of Cultural Affairs, The Oakland Museum of Contemporary Art, Knobcon, and Loyola University. www.thebeatbank.net

Facebook: @BrotherEl | Instagram: @thebrothernamedel | Twitter: @BrotherEl

Lula Saleh | Lula Saleh is a singer-songwriter, poet, writer, Empath, and healer (INFP) based in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. She is Eritrean and Ethiopian American, born and raised in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and also living in the United Kingdom during her formative years. She works as an artist organizer in Little Africa (St. Paul, Minnesota's only African business and arts district). As a domestic violence survivor, and a survivor of intergenerational and ancestral gender-based trauma, Lula is passionate about the intersections of healing, the arts, spirituality, social justice, and empowerment. Lula holds a B.A. from the University of Minnesota in journalism, political science and African studies.

Facebook: @Lula Saleh | Instagram: @lulathelily | Twitter: @lulathelily

Mansoor Panawala (The Oasis Initiative) | Mansoor Panawala is a leader in the Analytics function at Google. He manages a team across Chicago, LA, and San Francisco helping clients with their marketing and sales challenges. Prior to Google, Mansoor was the CFO of Global IT at Aon Corporation, where he managed over $1B in annual global expenditure. Previously, he was a consultant at McKinsey & Company, a premier management consulting firm in their Chicago and Dubai Offices. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Economics from Northwestern University and an MBA from Harvard Business School. He currently lives in Chicago with his wife and daughter.

Twitter: @mpanawala

Mayda Del Valle | Poet and performer Mayda Del Valle has been described by the Chicago Sun Times as having “a way with words. Sometimes they seem to flutter and roll off her lips. Other times they burst forth like a comet streaking across a nighttime sky.” A proud native of Chicago’s South Side, Mayda got her start at New York City's legendary Nuyorican Poet's Cafe, where she was the 2001 Grand Slam Champion and went on to win the 2001 National Poetry Slam Individual title, becoming the youngest and first Latina poet to do so. She went on to appear on 6 episodes of Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam on HBO, and was a contributing writer and original cast member of the Tony Award winning Def Poetry Jam on Broadway. She has been featured in Latina Magazine, The Source, The New York Times and was named by Smithsonian Magazine as one of America’s Young Innovators in the Arts and Sciences. Oprah’s “O” Magazine selected her as one of 20 women for their first ever “O Power List”, a group of visionary women making a mark in business, politics, and the arts. In May of 2009 she was invited to perform at the White House for President Obama and the First Lady. Since 2011 Mayda has been a teaching artist with the poetry-based non-profit youth organization Street Poets, facilitating workshops around the LA area in high schools and probation camps. She is also a dancer and vocalist with the Los Angeles based Afro-Puerto Rican bomba group Atabey, and is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at California Institute of The Arts.

www.maydadelvalle.com | Facebook: @MaydaDelValle | Twitter: @mayda1

Mo Amer | A pioneer of Arab-American standup, Mo has already cemented his stature as an original voice in comedy. In addition to touring with Dave Chappelle, Mo made international headlines when a chance airline upgrade landed him seated next to Eric Trump just weeks after the 2016 Presidential Election. The story of an Arab-American Muslim immigrant sitting and chatting with the POTUS’ son—at a time of heightened cultural tension in America—went super viral. Mo's standup makes controversial news headlines personal. Part improvisation, part memoir, Mo humor reveals his life’s circuitous route,
including how he managed to travel the world without a passport for two decades, was held at gunpoint by an American soldier in Iraq, and once had Bradley Cooper (unintentionally) save his life in the Middle East. Mo has performed in over two dozen countries on five continents—including as the first and only Arab-American refugee comic to perform for U.S. and coalition troops overseas. Mo has had numerous television appearances including Comedy Central’s @midnight and recently made his late night debut on CBS’s Late Night with Stephen Colbert. He's also appeared on Bassem Youssef's ‘Al-Bernameg’ (The Daily Show of Egypt) and served as co-host of Comedy Central Presents (CC Arabia). Mo has been interviewed by over 100 major world media publications including The New York Times, Rolling Stone, and The Guardian. He was also recently listed in Rolling Stone’s 2017 “Comedians You Should Know”. Mo has an original sitcom in development (based on his standup) and plans to record his first one-hour stand-up special for television at the end of this 2017.

**Facebook:** [@realmoamer](https://www.facebook.com/realmoamer) | **Instagram:** [@realmoamer](https://www.instagram.com/realmoamer) | **Twitter:** [@realmoamer](https://twitter.com/realmoamer)

**Nahshid Sulaiman aka One Be Lo** | Currently based in Cairo, Egypt, One Be Lo is an artist/activist known as the OneManArmy; General SUBliminal. He is a Hip Hop producer who first made a name for himself as an Emcee in the Hip Hop group Binary Star. He is also a member of the World Champion B-Boy crew Massive Monkees. One Be Lo is a conceptual thinker who paints stories with words and Metaphors. One Be Lo is constantly evolving and growing as the names of his albums suggest; Project F.e.t.u.s. (For everybody that understands), S.O.N.O.G.R.A.M. (Sounds Of Nahshid Originate Good Rhymes and Music), S.T.I.L.L.B.O.R.N.(Something To Interest Lo Listeners, Beyond Original Recorded Networkings), R.E.B.I.R.T.H. (Real Emcee's Bring Intelligent Rhymes To HipHop), L.A.B.O.R. (Language Arts Based On Reality), K.I.C.K. P.U.S.H. (Keep it cool kid, People usually show hate), and soon B.A.B.Y. (Being a Black Youth). The Fetus > Baby concept is about being pregnant with ideas, and always striving to remain fresh and relevant to the times. Dedicated to self-mastery and finding new solutions to old problems, One Be Lo explains that after all of his years of living and learning, he's still a baby with much to explore and discover. [www.onebelo.com](http://www.onebelo.com)

**Facebook:** [@Nahshid.Sulaiman](https://www.facebook.com/Nahshid.Sulaiman) | **Instagram:** [@OneBeDoubleLo7](https://www.instagram.com/OneBeDoubleLo7) | **Twitter:** [@OneBeLo](https://twitter.com/OneBeLo)

**Norbaya Jameela Durr** | Jameela was born and raised on the Southside of Chicago. Growing up in her family, science, spirituality, art and creativity were definite fundamentals present, which impacted her immensely. Albeit, an “Underground Artist”, and having sporadically performed some singing, poetry since the age of 15, Jameela is a fusion of jazz/blues/indie/folk/EDM singer, modern dancer, a literary poet and writer focusing on spirituality, philosophy, biology, and social unrest. She is also a surreal/abstract fine artist and a healer. Through her business, C. Art Press, she aims to heal individuals and communities through the use of herbs, literature and artistic expressions and in the sciences, develop food & medicine technologies. Through Amel Education LLC, she trains counselors, social workers and others in spiritual/herbal healing. She holds certifications in Veterinary Assistance and Herbalism and currently attends Elmhurst College, seeking a BS in Biology and English and at Darul Qasim, seeking a BA in Islamic Studies and Arabic.

[www.c-artpress.com](http://www.c-artpress.com) | **Facebook:** [@cartpress](https://www.facebook.com/cartpress) | **Twitter:** [@Gret1sunshine](https://twitter.com/Gret1sunshine)

**PHENOM** | PHENOM has dedicated his life to empowering the People through his music. In 1995, First Lady Michelle Obama chose him for the Public Allies program where he had the opportunity to work with and teach youth about violence prevention strategies. As the Founder and CEO of the award-winning POETREE Chicago (People’s Organized Entertainment Teaching Righteous Education Everywhere), PHENOM was influenced to start L.Y.R.I.C, (Let Your Rhymes Inspire Creativity) with co-founder and national poet K-Love in 2009. Today, the L.Y.R.I.C program serves Chicago-based high school students and offers opportunities to write and perform poetry as a non-violent means to stopping the violence in their neighborhoods. As a main member of HIP-HOP DETOXX, PHENOM has also hosted major events such as Ritual Sundays, Neo Soul Explosion, and Lyricist Loft, and while doing so...
this incredible artist has mentored thousands of youth throughout the US. His goal is to inspire change in
the urban neighborhoods of Chi-town and abroad.

**Quadir Lateef**  |  Quadir, born in Houston, Texas, was raised a devout Muslim. His Imam Fajri Ansari, a
two-time class B and C basketball championship-winning coach, recognized Q’s raw sports talent, and
continued to develop his athleticism during high school. Q eventually received a full basketball
scholarship to Howard University in Washington DC. While at Howard, Q began to discover his voice as
a writer, creating intense and soul-stirring poems and began to perform his original spoken word pieces
throughout the Washington DC area. Tavis Smiley (formerly of BET) chose Q to host the poetry section
of his very first “Youth to Leaders National Summit” which was aired on C-SPAN in 2003. The same
year, he published his first spoken word CD entitled “Words of Awakening,” and performed for Russell
Simmons at the Annual Black Face Awards, leading to his performance for the Jam Master Jay
Commemoration where Russell and Danny Simmons personally requested Q to audition for HBO’s Def
Poetry Jam, springing him into a national spoken word spotlight. After performing before Dr. Ben Chavis
Muhammad, Q was invited to perform at the Pre Tony Award show for the Def Poetry cast. Q then joined
the BET All Stars Tour, performing for hip-hop legend Chuck D, In 2005, Q released his first
underground hip hop CD entitled “The Unheard of: Volume 1” and was featured in Artvoice magazine as
the Artist of the Week. After a three-year break, Quadir changed his stage name from Q-Boogie aka Da
Poet to his birth name “Quadir Lateef,” and presented his EF “Half Earth Half Angel.”

**Savera Iftikar**  |  Savera, a lifelong resident of Chicagoland, has had art in her blood since birth. She
received her BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005, and her MAT in Art
Education from Columbia College Chicago in 2013. She teaches art to students K-12 as well as any
adults who are willing to give it a try and is always a working artist & artisan. Alongside being a multi-
media fine artist, Savera is a self-taught jewelry maker and crocheter (she may have made up that word).
Savera has always dreamed of blending her artistic abilities with her love of helping those in need which
already manifests itself in teaching art. Last fall she began her lifelong dream and goal of becoming an art
therapist at Adler University where she is completing her second Masters Degree in Counseling & Art
Therapy and doing her clinical internship working with clients to help them heal through art therapy.

**Tammy McCann**  |  Tammy, began her career as a Classical musician. But Jazz stole her heart. Tammy
McCann has been named “Best Jazz Vocal Performance” for several years by the Chicago Tribune!!!
Tammy is an internationally recognized Jazz Vocalist who’s powerful, sultry, and emotionally charged
voice paints pictures and tells stories by merging Classical vocal technique and Gospel esthetic with Jazz
to create a sound that is completely her own. Chicago Tribune’s Arts Critic, Howard Reich says McCann
has, “A voice that soars in all registers, at all tempos, on all occasions… a voice that inspires wonder!”
Tammy is a storyteller who draws emotion from and makes connections with her audiences worldwide.
Her warm delivery allows her audience to go on the musical journey with her and her engaging
personality imprints the memory of her performance on their hearts.  Inside Jazz Magazine Music Critic,
Nora McCarthy says “She came bearing natural gifts and with raw talent in hand, she stepped up to the
mic and into the hearts of everyone in the room.”Los Angeles Jazz Scene columnist „Scott Yanow
writes” There are many fine jazz singers on the scene today but few are on Tammy McCann’s level.”
Tammy McCann has performed with Chicago’s own Ramsey Lewis & NEA Jazz Master, Von Freeman
and toured as a ‘Raellette’ with the great Ray Charles. McCann has thrilled audiences in festivals and
clubs world- wide as well as the nation’s premier Jazz venues such as Birdland, The Blue Note, Jazz at
Lincoln Center’s Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola and Chicago’s own Jazz Showcase. Her shows are not to be
missed. Cultural & Jazz Critic Stanley Crouch says, “Her pitch is superb…clear on the top and startling at
the bottom, while all of the steps in between are polished with swing…I have not heard a voice like hers in decades.”

www.tammymccann.com | Facebook: @tammy.mccann.946

Uday Sharad Joshi | Uday’s professional career, research and programmatic pursuits are heavily based in the intersection between arts practices, social justice, community development and leadership by young people of color. He is currently the Director of Engagement and Innovation at Old Town School of Folk Music and serves as co-chair of the Education Committee for Chicago’s Project Enrich. Previously, Uday produced national youth arts, media, and civic action programs with the Kennedy Center’s ArtsEdge in D.C. Prior, he launched a social impact arts and performance curriculum in the Global Village Zone of the Newark, NJ Public Schools as part of a partnership between the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and New York University’s Broader Bolder Approach to Education as a strategic approach to address education achievement gaps in some of the lowest performing schools in the United States. From 2004-2007, Uday was a senior staff member at the Oakland School for the Arts and a Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of Oakland, CA. In addition to co-producing the Oakland Youth Arts Festival: Arts Save Lives, Uday also started a youth mentorship in the arts program in East Oakland, CA and served as a model arts education program consultant for the Alameda County Office of Education. Twitter: @udayarts

Yaasha Abraham | Yaasha Abraham is a Chicago-based professional dancer trained in the traditional dances of Brazil and Ethiopia. She has been actively performing and teaching for over 10 years locally, nationally, and internationally, facilitating everything from year-long in school residencies, university workshops, and educational workshop series. The primary objective of her programming is to teach underserved youth about other cultures through music and dance while building social emotional learning skills.

Facebook: @yaashaabraham | Instagram: @justyaasha | Twitter: @afro_sambista80