



Empowering Black Gay Men and Allies in the Coachella Valley

# THE BROTHERS' DRUMBEAT



November 2023 | Issue Thirty Two: Thankful for a Vibrant Coachella Valley Black Gay Community  
Lorenzo Taylor, Editor

Welcome to the Brothers' Drumbeat, a monthly e-newsmagazine to keep you informed about what's happening and coming soon with Brothers of the Desert. If you have questions, please contact [info@brothersofthedesert.org](mailto:info@brothersofthedesert.org). Follow us on Facebook and visit our website [brothersofthedesert.org](http://brothersofthedesert.org)

**Please share our newsletter with someone who will benefit from the information!**

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## NOVEMBER ACTIVITIES

## BOD Marching in Pride Parade Nov 5

Thank you for joining us to celebrate Pride in Palm Springs under the "Drag Now, Drag Forever!" theme. BOD is one of the Pride honorees, named Organization of the Year and would like a lot of members and allies to come out and support us. We should be there at 9:15 am. Step off is 10am. Find us on North Palm Canyon Drive, near Tachevah. We will be contingent #65. Contact **Wes Rankins** to let him know you will be joining [wesmess20@hotmail.com](mailto:wesmess20@hotmail.com) or with any questions. If you need a BOD T-shirt, contact **Andre Carthen** at [acafeaway@gmail.com](mailto:acafeaway@gmail.com).



## Flagging in the Desert Nov 4

BOD is the beneficiary, the selected charity, for a flagging event at Ruth Hardy Park from 12-4 pm. We want to encourage all members and allies to attend and watch the flaggers and dance the afternoon away. For details visit [flagginginthedesert.com](http://flagginginthedesert.com)



## Wes Rankin Reflects on LGBT Veteran's issues Nov 8

BOD member **Wes Rankins** will share his thoughts about being a gay veteran as part of Lez Out Loud's fourth edition of "I'm Speaking" to Mizell Center. The event is FREE and open to the public.

## No Monthly Membership Meeting in November

## Wellness Summit Weekend Nov 10-12

One of BOD's signature events is the annual Wellness Summit focusing on Black gay men's health and wellness. "Honoring Our Past, Envisioning Our Future" is the theme of

this fifth annual one day event with a focus on reflecting on the lessons we have learned from the past and use them to create a vision for a healthier future. It will be an opportunity to come together as a community as we learn from a diverse group of health and wellness experts. Everyone is welcome to attend.

### Wellness Summit Tickets

Friday November 10 Meet the speakers reception, sponsored by Icon City and Let's Kick ASS at Margaritaville Resort. This happy hour is dedicated to the memory of one of our past Wellness Summit speakers, Stephaun Wallace (see remembrance below.) Enjoy some cocktails and appetizers and meet our speakers and reconnect with old friends and welcome those attending for the very first time.

Saturday, November 11 This day is the main event and will feature innovative workshops, and inspiring keynote presentations on a range of topics, such as spirituality, relationships, mental health, financial literacy, racism, physical health, history and ancestry, building community, healthy sex, and the importance of advocacy. Lunch will be provided, space is limited, and registration is required.

Sunday November 12 Start the day with brunch at Grand Central to reconnect and kiki over a meal and a few mimosas. There will be a staged reading performance of "All About Esther" at 2:00 pm. (see description below.)

For our Wellness Summit a donation of \$25 is suggested for the event and \$15 for the play. Any amount given will be accepted and appreciated Click the link below to get tickets for all the weekend events:

### Wellness Weekend Event Tickets

Get a preview of some of the exciting workshops on the BOD Youtube channel.  
<https://www.youtube.com/@brothersofthedesert9295>

The Wellness Summit keynote speakers will be amfAR policy director, **Greg Millett**, Fellowship of Affirming Ministries Bishop **Yvette Flunder**, and Pennsylvania State Representative **Malcolm Kenyatta**



The Wellness Summit host and keynote will be film director **Nathan Hale Williams**.



### **"All About Esther" Staged Reading Nov. 12**

BOD member **Yvans Jourdain** brings us another star-studded play reading. At the Mizell Center for one day only see a performance of a reading of the new play, "All About Ester" written by Ovation and LA



Drama Critics Circle Award winning writer, **L. Trey Wilson**. This hilarious retelling of the film classic, "All About Eve" is now placed in present day New York. Davina Davis, star of the long-running hit, 'Snatchin Her Bald-Headed' is delighted to meet her biggest fan, Esther Tamika Johnson. However, Davina soon discovers that below the surface of Esther's sweet lover is a conniving, schemer who threatens to take everything Davina cherishes. Comedic actress **Debra Wilson** (top left) from MAD TV stars as Davina and **Nadege August** (lower left) plays Esther.



The production is co-directed by **Yvans Jourdain** and the amazing cast also includes **William Christian** (All My Children), **Elisa Perry** (Godless), **Fuschia** (Zootopia), **Michael Shepperd** (Bosch), **James Manchester** (Celebrity Ghost Stories), and **Tiara Peters** (Insecure). Get \$15 tickets and more information at this link.

**[All About Esther Tickets](#)**



## **Barbershop Discussion Group Nov. 14**

BOD members **Will Dean** and **Stuart Huggins** are the facilitators of the Barbershop group. The group had their first meeting on October 10 and it was a small, but lively group, having intimate discussions about who they are and whatever is going on in their lives. One topic that surfaced was learning how to ask for support. The group will meet monthly on the second Tuesday from 6:00-7:30 pm. Food will be provided. Send inquiries or register at this email address: [info\\_barbershop@lkaps.org](mailto:info_barbershop@lkaps.org).

## **AIDS Memorial Quilt Program and Exhibition Nov 15-19**

BOD Member **Gil Gerald** will give introductory remarks at the opening ceremony for the exhibit of the AIDS Quilt at the Mizell Center on Wednesday Nov. 15 at 5:30 pm. The panelists will reflect on the history of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and explore the origins and evolution of the Quilt. \$15 fee for non-members and reservations are required at [Mizell.org](http://Mizell.org).

BOD Vice President **Eric Davis** tells us that "Brothers of the Desert was asked by Mizell Center, "wouldn't it be wonderful to have BOD produce a quilt for the exhibition." In addition to BOD, participating quilt producing organizations include: Mizell Center, LGBT Center of the Desert, Coachella Valley Quilt Guild and the Palm Springs Gay Men's Chorus. The goal is to have local non-profits produce an AIDS Memorial Quilt panel. The BOD quilt panel was designed by BOD member **Aaron Allen Marner**. And the quilting was completed by Thommy Kocan aka Dinner with Patsi from Cathedral City.



Quilt panels will be displayed at Mizell Center on Nov. 17-19. The free exhibition will include historical panels as well as panels produced by local Palm Springs non-profits and community based organizations. Stop by and see the all the panels and remember our many friends lost to the AIDS pandemic.

# OCTOBER ACTIVITIES RECAP

## Gil Gerald Receives Legacy Award from Outwards 10/15



## BOD Receives Pride Honors Award 10/16



## BOD at the Health Equity Walk 10/28



## FEATURE ARTICLE

### Heart of Brick - A BlaQueer Music and Dance Collaboration

**Josiah Wise** is a New York-based queer Black performance artist, raised in gospel and providing a neo-soul beat that is catching attention around the country.

He recently performed in San Diego in a riveting theatrical stage work alongside multimedia artist **Wu Tsang** and a cast of seven dancers choreographed by **Raja Feather Kelly**. The collaboration was called Heart of Brick and it explored the love that blossoms between two men in a Black gay nightclub.



Josiah Wise sings under the stage name "serpentwithfeet" and he combines R&B, gospel, rap to come up with a very unique sound. His debut album was "soil." He was closed growing up in Baltimore and uses his music to express his gay identity. He told NPR "Me being inconspicuous growing up, or people around me maybe not being comfortable, it was because I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know how to talk about how I was feeling." He describes himself as the lovechild of **Kirk Franklin** and **Björk**, and he definitely stands at the cutting edge of fearlessness in Black music. Check out some this brilliant brother's tunes on Apple Music at the link below.

<https://music.apple.com/us/artist/serpentwithfeet/992302389>



## NEW YEAR'S EVE GALA AND FUNDRAISER

**ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S EVE LEGACY**  
*Gala & Fundraiser*  
**DANCING THROUGH THE DECADES**  
Sunday December 31, 2023  
8 PM  
[www.brothersofthedesert.org](http://www.brothersofthedesert.org)  
60s 70s 80s 90s 00s  
**MARGARITAVILLE**  
Resort  
PALM SPRINGS, CA

Get ready to ring in the New Year in style. Join us on Sunday, December 31, 2023, at 8:00 PM at the stunning Margaritaville Grand Ballroom in Palm Springs for our gala and fundraiser, **Dancing Through the Decades**.

Prepare for a night of celebration and giving back as we bid farewell to the old and welcome the new. Our Legacy Gala and Fundraiser is the perfect opportunity to come

together with friends, family, and the community to make a positive impact while having a blast!

Individual tickets are **\$175 per person until November 30, and \$195 per person beginning December 1**. The ticket includes a 3-course dinner with wine and a champagne toast at the stroke of midnight.

People can also become a **Table Sponsor** for \$2,250 until November 30, and \$2,500 beginning December 1. This includes a 3-course dinner with wine and a champagne toast at the stroke of midnight, prime seating for (10) guests, and one drink ticket per guest, a special gift for the Table Sponsor.

Entertainment from DJ Space, Gennine Francis, Tommy Dodson and more.

To get in on the early ticket discounts and for more information go to:

### [NYE Gala Tickets](#)

If you want to stay at the Resort, there is a discounted rate that is good until December 10th for New Year's Eve night using this link

### [Hotel Discount Link](#)



## BROTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY



Each month *Brothers' Drumbeat* profiles one of our outstanding members. This month we introduce the amazing **Stuart Huggins**, the co-facilitator of BOD's Barbershop discussion group.



**1. How long have you been in Palm Springs and where did you come from or have you lived previously?**

My husband York and I moved to the Coachella Valley seven years ago, having lived in South Los Angeles the previous twelve years. I grew up in Ventura County California.

**2. What kind of work do you do and/or how have you been involved in the community?**

My 25-year career was in higher education, specifically student affairs. My community work in LA consisted of work with PFLAG Los Angeles among other groups. The most meaningful experience I had with PFLAG was working to start an African American family support group in South LA. I am currently the food bank manager for the LGBT Center and the facilitator for the Friday morning gay men's chat group.

**3. Why is BOD important to you?**

BOD's focus on youth is of the utmost importance to me. Without impacting the youth of our community, our legacy is tenuous. Our investments in the youth of the Valley ensures that our stories will not die with us.

**4. What are your hobbies or non-work activities that bring you pleasure?**

Most of my non-work activities revolve around tennis, reading for our book club, my family and studying our genealogical history, my church family and spending time with my friends, both near and far. When I stop and reflect, my schedule is fairly packed, but it's always been this way for me.

**5. What is your lifelong dream?**

Probably the most important bucket list item is to visit Paris to attend each of the four Grand Slam Tennis tournaments: the French Open, Wimbledon, the Australian and the US Open.

**Ken Page in Conversation Nov 1**

The legendary **Ken Page** will be in town for a performance at the McCallum Theater. He is taking time to sit down for a live conversation with local cultural entrepreneur **Corey Roskin**. Mr. Page will discuss his illustrious career on stages and screens. From iconic films (*Dreamgirls*, *Torch Song Trilog* and and most famously as the voice of "Oogie Boogie" in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*) to the heart of Broadway and beyond (*Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Cats*, *Guys and Dolls*, *The Wiz*, *Children of Eden*), this will be an evening you won't want to miss. There will be a reception at 5:30pm and the program starts at 6:00 pm. The RSVP link is below and when you open click "Register Here." There's a \$10 fee, but if you can't afford click the button below that and just enter what you can pay.



<https://mizell.org/a-conversation-with-broadway-legend-ken-page/>

**In Memorial: Stephoun Elite Wallace**

BOD mourns the passing of our exceptional friend **Stephoun Elite Wallace**.(1977-2023) Stephoun was an

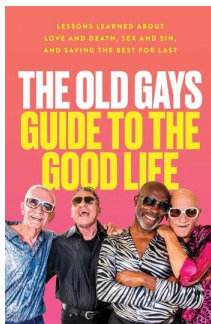




HIV prevention and vaccine research expert and a speaker at the 2021 Wellness Summit. Dr. Wallace was a research epidemiologist, public health and business consultant, and an internationally recognized public health and social justice leader. At the age of 23, he co-founded and became the director of the Atlanta-based My Brothaz Keeper (MBK), a volunteer-run nonprofit focusing on HIV/AIDS and STI prevention among young, Black, gay, bisexual, and queer men. Within the House and Ballroom community, many called him "father" and looked to him for his steady presence, mentorship, and the life lessons he shared. Stephaun gave so much to those around him, and his dedication and commitment to LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities have had an incredible impact on so many.

## Tommy Dodson Receives Gordon Parks Award

Congratulations to BOD member **Tommy Dodson** on being one of three recipients of the "2023 Gordon Parks Choice of Weapons Award." He was honored in early October at the annual celebration in Fort Scott, Kansas. The celebration is in honor Fort Scott native Gordon Parks, noted photographer, writer, musician, and filmmaker. The Choice of Weapons Award was established in Parks' honor to be given annually at the celebration. He has written one novel, *Washed in the Blood* and is currently working on a second. Tommy has been creating monthly videos on YouTube entitled "From My Heart to You" and his purpose with those is to spread love through his voice and music. His lifelong motto has always been "Love is the answer."



## Jessaye and the Old Gays Celebrate New Book

11/30

Congratulations to BOD member **Jessaye Martin** on the publication of a new book based on the popular Youtube videos of "The Old Gays." The Old Gays quartet travel around the country sharing their entertaining life experiences and how being gay has evolved. Now they have a book with advice on life and love. There will be a book signing and panel discussion event at the Mary Pickford Theater on Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023, at 6 pm.



5th Annual  
**Wellness Summit**  
 Honoring Our **PAST**, Envisioning Our **Future**

**SAT.**  
 November  
**11**  
 MARGARITAVILLE  
 Resort  
 Meet & Greet  
 8:30A  
 Starts @ 9:00A

**Keynote Speakers**



Nathan Hale Williams  
 Host/Keynote



Bishop Yvette Flunder



Malcolm Kenyatta  
 PA State Rep.



Greg Millett  
 M.P.H.



Kay Bonadie



Dr. Sheldon Fields



Donnie Hill



Michael Ighodaro



Dante King



Martin Mitchell



Ron Oden



Alvis Ward Jr.



Dr. Curley Bonds



Dr. Aunsha  
 Hall-Everett



Stuart Huggins



Dr. Corey Jackson  
 Assemblymember



Perry Lang



Dr. Donta Morrison



Dr. Alex Del Rosario



Trey Wilson

**Tickets Available At [BrothersoftheDesert.org](http://BrothersoftheDesert.org)**



**Brothers Calendar**

- Nov 1 Ken Page Interview, Mizell Center 5:30 pm
- Nov 4 Flagging in the Desert, Ruth Hardy Park 12-4 pm
- Nov 8 Reflections on Veterans Day, Mizell Center 5:30 pm
- Nov 10 Meet the Speakers Reception at Margaritaville Hotel
- Nov 11 BOD Wellness Summit at Margaritaville Hotel
- Nov 12 "All About Ester" Mizell Center 2:00 pm
- Nov 14 Barbershop Discussion Group 5:30 pm
- Nov 17-19 AIDS Memorial Quilt Exhibition, Mizell Center
- Nov 26 Thanksgiving Day
- Nov 30 Old Gays Book Launch, Mary Pickford Theater 6:00 pm
- Dec 31 New Years' Eve Gala, Margaritaville Resort

**Birthday Brothers**

- Nov 10 Jim Moore
- Nov 11 Perry Lang
- Nov 15 Martin Mitchell
- Nov 28 Michael Henderson

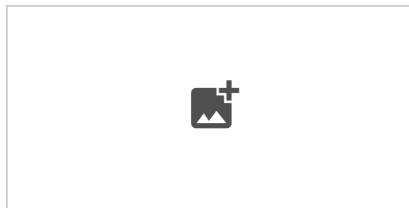
**Honoring Our Ancestors**

Perry Watkins (1948-1996) was one of the first service



members to challenge the ban against homosexuals in the United States military. He was drafted into the army in 1967 and held several non-combat positions, including chaplain's assistant and personnel clerk. He left the army, then re-enlisted twice during which his sexual orientation was no secret. He was even able to re-enlist after performing as a female impersonator under the name of Simone, including on U.S. army bases in Germany. In 1981, the army revoked his security clearance largely based on his sexuality. He challenged their ruling in court and after six years he lost the case, but was able to keep his federal employment status. Watkins continued to challenge his discharge on the grounds that the military's policy of excluding gays and lesbians from service was unconstitutional. In 1989, in *Watkins v. United States Army* the Ninth District Federal Court ruled that "the exclusion of homosexuals from military service violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment." Watkins chose not to re-enlist, but received a settlement of retroactive promotion to sergeant first class, \$135,000 in retroactive pay, full retirement benefits, and an honorable discharge. He died of AIDS related causes in 1996. All gay soldiers and the nation owe a debt of gratitude to Perry Watkins for his courageous challenge to discriminatory policies in the military.

***Brothers of the Desert is a non-profit 501-c3 organization whose mission is to build to nurture, support and connect Black gay men in the Coachella Valley through philanthropy, volunteerism, mentorship, education, advocacy and social networking.  
Follow us on Facebook & Instagram Brothersofthedesert***



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