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## Library system gets \$1 million to support August Wilson archive

Friday, August 26, 2022

The University of Pittsburgh Library System has received a \$1 million grant from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation to support the opening of and the public's engagement with its August Wilson archive.

This grant, the largest in the history of the Pitt library system, follows two years of support and other charitable donations toward in-depth public engagement with the archive, which is scheduled to open to the public in January.

In 2020, the ULS acquired the archive of the acclaimed Pittsburgh native, considered one of the greatest American playwrights. All 10 plays in his American Century Cycle were produced on Broadway — two earning Wilson the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Most are set in Pittsburgh.

"Pittsburgh was such a formative influence on August Wilson's work and shaping his worldview," David K. Roger, president of Henry L. Hillman Foundation, said in a news release. "The ability to preserve the archive here in Pittsburgh where it will be accessible to audiences who grew up in the neighborhoods featured in Wilson's storytelling is gratifying."

Roger said this project would not have been possible without the help and collaboration of Constanza Romero, who was married to Wilson from 1994 until his death in 2005. The archive is "helping to create an unprecedented view into the creative process of a singular American playwright," Roger said.

The ULS will partner with other local cultural organizations to provide a week-long celebration of the legacy of August Wilson in March 2023. The August Wilson African American Cultural Center, in downtown Pittsburgh, has a permanent exhibit detailing the writer's life and works,

The late playwright's childhood home in the Hill District was recently restored and reopened as the August Wilson House, which will become an arts center for creative young people. The opening was attended by actor Denzel Washington, who has been a strong

supporter of Wilson's work. He directed and starred in the film version of "Fences" and produced "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" — both of which filmed in Pittsburgh.

Washington and Romero co-chaired the house re-opening, which drew donations from notables such as Oprah Winfrey and Tyler Perry.

At ULS, funding from the Hillman Foundation will support the final stages of processing the archive — comprising more than 450 boxes of materials such as draft scripts, artwork, plaques, correspondence and a guitar — and focus on partnering with groups and organizations both locally and nationally to see the Wilson archive come to life.

"The Henry L. Hillman Foundation grant will enable us to integrate the August Wilson Archive in the very fabric of the local cultural and civic life," Kornelia Tancheva, ULS director who also is the grant's principal investigator, said in the news release. "Wilson's work was deeply informed by his experiences growing up in the Hill District neighborhood of Pittsburgh, which makes the opportunity to share this collection with those communities, local schools, and cultural and arts organizations incredibly satisfying."

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## Archive

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