



Keepers Of The Culture, Inc.

Philadelphia's Afrocentric Storytelling Group

2020 Annual Affiliate Report

Peace and Blessings from the Executive Board, Council of Elders, and Membership of Keepers Of The Culture, Inc. the Philadelphia Affiliate of NABS, Inc. We send love and gratitude to our ancestors who came before us, to our co-founders Queen Mother Mary Carter Smith and Queen Mother Linda Goss, and to the current leadership of NABS Inc., President Janice Curtis Greene, and the NABS Board of Directors. When KOTC left Montgomery after attending the 2019 NABS Festival and Conference, we had no idea what the upcoming year would bring us. The COVID-19 Pandemic has affected us all. This short poem tells our story:

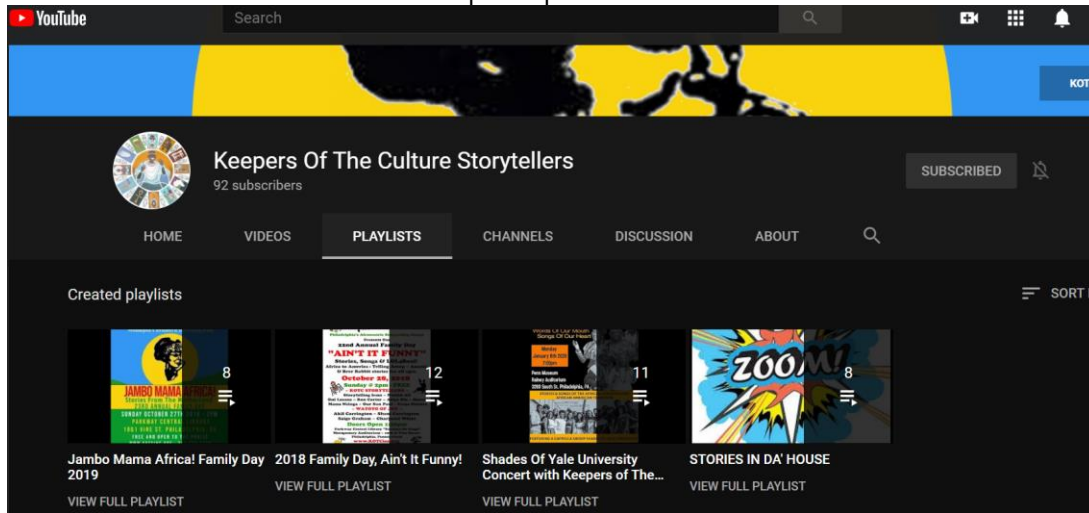
"What Did KOTC Do?" – by Our Sun Paul

Some told stories, some listened in,
some spent hours praying for the sick and shut in.
Some spread joy to those who lived alone,
whether it was in a card or talking for hours on the phone.
Some began to write, honing their telling style,
Some went back home, to care for loved ones across the miles.
Some packed up their things, and moved into a new home,
Some learned new technology, but still can't figure out their phone!
Some were burdened with grief, from loved ones passing away,
telling stories about them helps them make it day by day.
Some got into Zoom, meeting tellers near and far,
Some just couldn't be still and took short trips in their car.
Some cooked meals for others, like it was Sunday Dinner,
Some can't blame the Zoom camera for why they don't look thinner.
Some left this earth, and became ancestors themselves,
their lives were a rich book and are missing from the KOTC bookshelves.
Some had just retired, and couldn't keep their cool,
They had to stay busy, so they got back into school.
Some were worried about COVID-19,
feeling that this pandemic would take KOTC off the scene.
Some felt we needed to stay busy as a Black Storyteller should,
As weeks turned into months, we realized we all were doing the best we could.
So when this pandemic is over and they ask, "What did KOTC do?"
There truly is no one answer, we are enduring this stormy weather.
We are Keeper's Of The Culture, we showed Harambee, and "Pulled Together".

Report begins on the next page.

October 2019

KOTC Corresponding Secretary Oni Lasana launches our KOTC YouTube, a place for the world to access videos of our past productions. You can find our channel [HERE](#).



November 2019

With the help of Past KOTC and NABS President Queen Nur, KOTC secures a six-month storytelling residency with the Penn Museum as their resident tellers of their newly renovated Africa Galleries. The museum desired stories to be told that aligned to the cultures and countries the museum artifacts originated from. Through research spearheaded by Dr. Caroliese Frink Reed, every KOTC member was able to curate stories and be in residence, receiving pay for each story told. Although the residency was cut short due to COVID-19, the Penn Museum is including KOTC as a part of their future reopening plans.





KOTC Lifetime Member Barbara Easley Cox is featured in the documentary, *Angels on Diamond Street*, for her work running the soup kitchen at the Church Of The Advocate in North Philadelphia,



December 2019

KOTC partners with WURD 900AM Radio, Philadelphia's Black radio station for a three-hour Kwanzaa Special. The theme was "The Black Family". KOTC tellers and the Watoto of Joy came together for a night to stories, poems, and drumming, setting a strong and memorable start to Kwanzaa for hundreds of Black families in the city of Philadelphia.

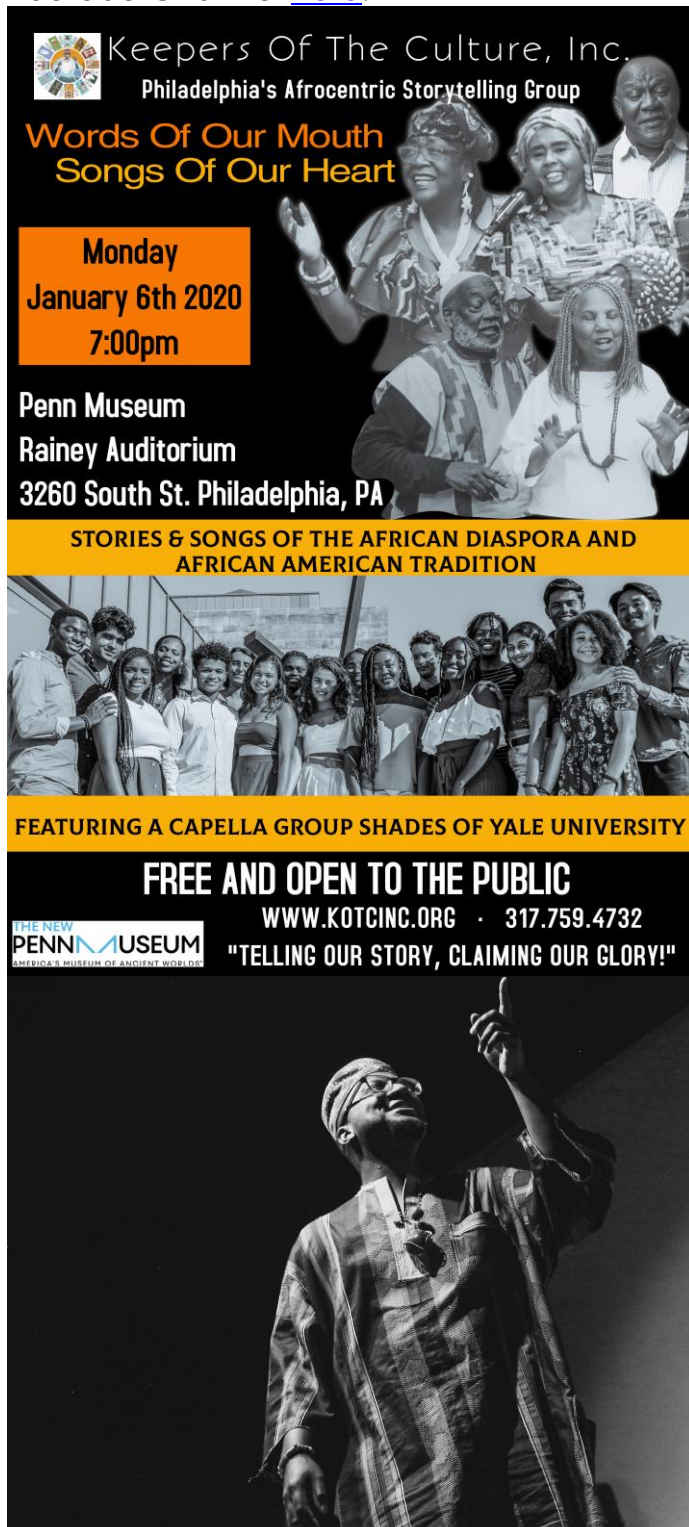



Longtime KOTC Member Thelma Shelton Robinson passes away. Known for her unique genre of "stoetry", KOTC instates the Thelma Shelton Robison Excellence in Writing Award in her honor.



January 2020

The new year rolls in with KOTC members continuing their residency at the Penn Museum and collaborating with Shades of Yale for a night of storytelling and A Capella music of the African Diaspora and African American Tradition. Held at the Penn Museum, the night was filled with laughter, tears, dancing, and moving of Spirit. The production crossed three generations and was regarded as one of the most memorable and unique Black Storytelling productions experienced in Philadelphia. Clips from the production can be viewed on our Youtube Channel [here](#).



 **Keepers Of The Culture, Inc.**
Philadelphia's Afrocentric Storytelling Group

**Words Of Our Mouth
Songs Of Our Heart**


**Monday
January 6th 2020
7:00pm**

**Penn Museum
Rainey Auditorium
3260 South St. Philadelphia, PA**

**STORIES & SONGS OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA AND
AFRICAN AMERICAN TRADITION**

FEATURING A CAPELLA GROUP SHADES OF YALE UNIVERSITY

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
WWW.KOTCINC.ORG · 317.759.4732

 **"TELLING OUR STORY, CLAIMING OUR GLORY!"**





February 2020

Due to the multiplicity of events that take place in Philadelphia during Black History Month, KOTC members devoted their time to collaborating with various schools and community organizations. Our primary partner was the African American Museum of Philadelphia.

March- May 2020

COVID-19 hits Philadelphia and the city is sent into quarantine. KOTC members shelter in place. Members are called three times weekly to ensure their wellbeing. Corresponding Secretary Oni Lasana begins "Stories In Da House", a weekly Zoom call for Black Artists to connect and share their artistry. Black artists from around the country participate weekly and find solace and comfort in the fellowship while quarantined.



Longtime KOTC Member Denise Valentine passes away and KOTC plans a memorial for the summer, pending the status of the pandemic.



June-July 2020

Rather than cancel Love Night, KOTC annual Storytelling concert, the organization decides to make it a virtual production. The theme is, "Love Undaunted: Stories of Difficult and Complicated Love: The following happens in a span of two months:

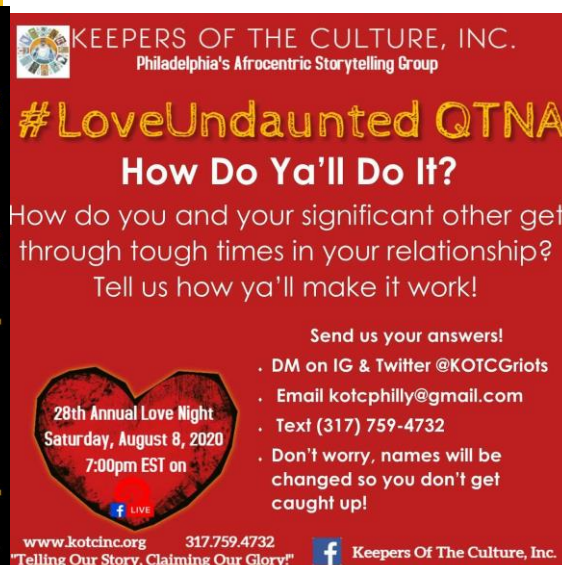
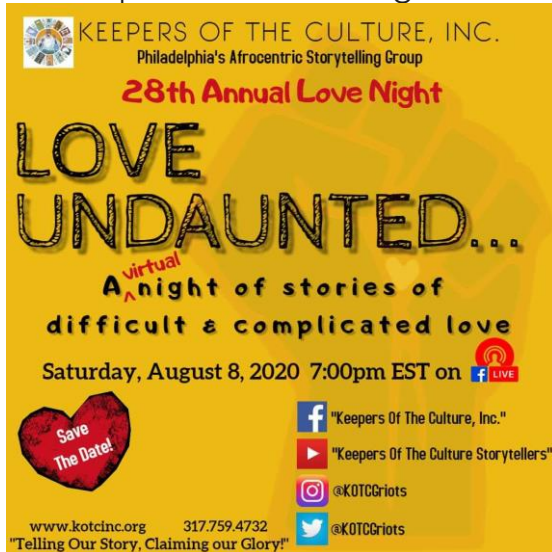
- KOTC grows its Facebook page to build its audience for Love Night. 1000 followers are gained in less than one week!



- A KOTC Instagram and Twitter page are created for Love Night marketing to be shared on multiple social media platforms.



- The Love Night production team decides to pre-record teller's stories. They curate license free music, arrange a schedule to record tellers while being socially distant, and create daily infographics and video content to engage its social media audience in anticipation for Love Night.



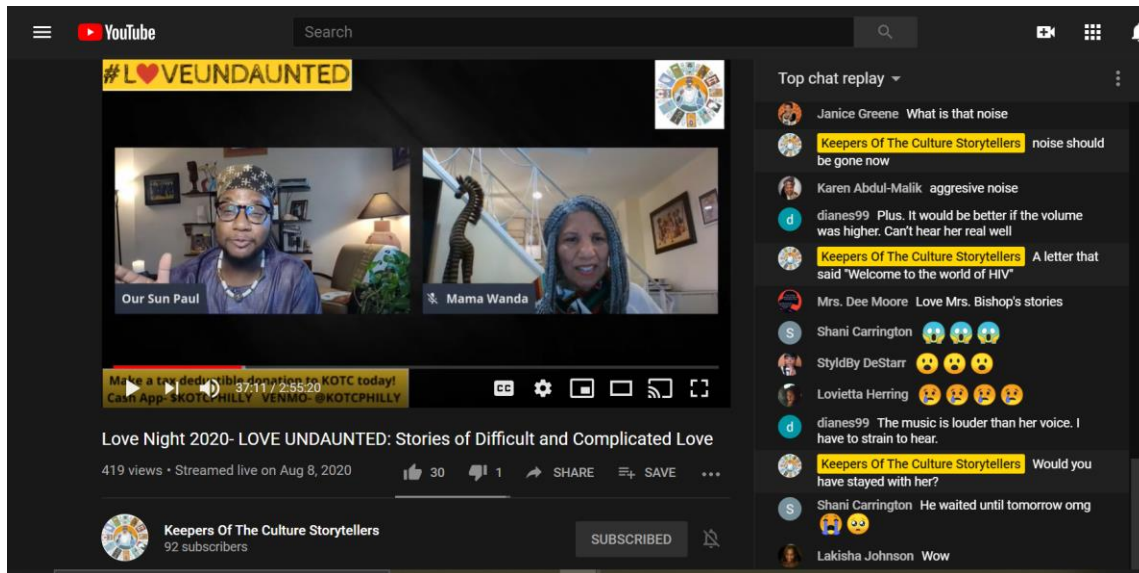


KOTC Member Erma Holmes passes away. Known for her humor and poetry, KOTC honors her legacy at her life celebration and presents the family with a resolution.

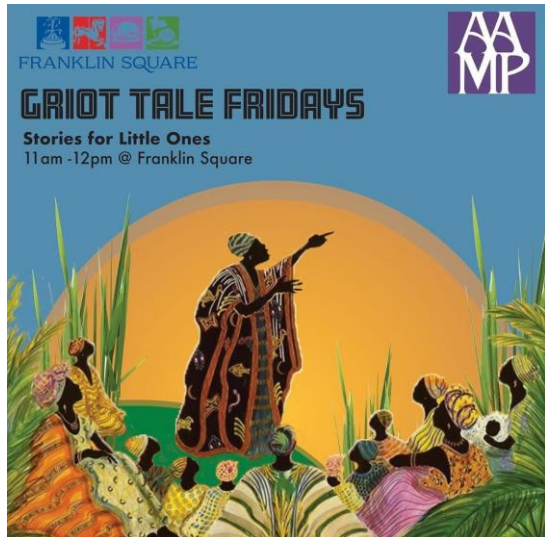


August 2020

After spending the summer planning, Love Night streams live on August 8th, 2020, bringing in over 300 viewers, making it the largest attended Love Night! Over 400 viewers have watched it on demand since. Access a playback of Love Night [here](#).



KOTC begins a two-month residency with the African American Museum of Philadelphia and Franklin Square Park to do weekly one hour socially distant storytelling in the terrace of Franklin Square Park.



September 2020

KOTC members collaborate with the family of Denise Valentine and local artists for a virtual Zoom memorial for her life and legacy. Tellers from around the country log in to share their memories of her and her many contributions to Black Storytelling in Philadelphia and around the world.



October 2020

KOTC members rest from last season's production and work and return to the care plan of contacting members and ensuring their well beings and COVID-19 cases steadily rise in Philadelphia. The board begins to flesh out a 3 year strategic plan to ensure KOTC's sustainability as younger members take on more prominent roles in the organization.

Conclusion

While this year has tumultuous for all, we are in a perpetual state of gratitude. The tough times allowed us to pull together and support each other. Just when we felt we were down, a divine ray of strength illuminated us all, allowing us to reinforce the bonds we shared with each other; bonds that are not limited by wireless connections, updated software, or cameras. As we keep ourselves and loved ones safe during this time, we know that our timeless gift, our voice, will always be the most modern technology available.

In Spirit, In Love, In Culture,

Paul D. Best, "Our Sun Paul"
President
Keepers Of The Culture, Inc.