



VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

OPENING CONVOCATION

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2022

VSU MULTIPURPOSE CENTER

7 PM

GUEST SPEAKER
Ms. KJ Smith | Actress

Sophisticated, hard-working, and an undeniable talent with irrefutable beauty both inside and out, actress KJ Smith has brought to life some of the most dynamic characters on screen today.

This year, Smith can be seen starring in the leading role of Andi Barnes on Tyler Perry’s highest-rated series for BET Networks *Sistas*. Currently airing its fourth season with a recent announcement of a fifth season renewal, the dramedy centers around four single Black women from different walks of life who bond over their one common thread: “Why am I single?” Smith shines in her breakthrough role as Andi, a high-powered attorney who must navigate her complicated love life in a fast-paced, high-stakes industry with the help and advice of her close-knit girlfriends. *Sistas* continuously leads Wednesday night network ratings, ranking #1 amongst cable network shows in their hour, with new episodes airing weekly through 2022–2023. Smith’s portrayal of Barnes has also garnered multiple award nominations, including winning *Best Actress in a TV Series* at the 2021 Hollywood and African Prestigious Awards (HAPA).

Smith has been tapped for a major recurring role on season two of the top-rated *Power* prequel series, *Power Book III: Raising Kanan*, on STARZ. From creator and showrunner Sascha Penn, *Power Book III: Raising Kanan* takes viewers back to the '90s and the early years of the now-deceased Kanan Stark, portrayed in Courtney Kemp’s original series by Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson. Smith will play Palomar, one of Famous’ (Antonio Ortiz) new neighbors and a young mom frequently mistaken for her daughter, Corinne’s older sister.



Any responsible parent wouldn’t let their daughter within a mile of Kanan, Famous, and their friends, but Palomar is seemingly not that parent. Season two wrapped production in New York City and is currently airing on STARZ.

Smith previously starred as Sasha Duncan on BET+’s highly rated action-crime-drama series, *The Family Business*. The series follows the upstanding Duncan family, who run a thriving exotic car dealership in NYC while living a dangerous double life by night. Having recurred throughout the first two seasons, Smith was promoted to series regular for season three in her role as Sasha, the niece of L.C. Duncan (Ernie Hudson) and a formerly hired hitwoman who now works exclusively with her family. All three seasons of the series are currently streaming exclusively on BET+.

Additional television credits for Smith in top-rated network and cable television include the CW’s fan-favorite drama series, *Dynasty*, Issa Rae’s *Giants*, CBS’ *NCIS: Los Angeles*, ABC’s *Black-ish*, Freeform’s *The Fosters*, Fox’s *Lethal Weapon*, Netflix’s *Fuller House*, a three-season recurring role on Bounce TV’s

Family Time, a strong supporting role on ABC’s *The Fix*, Netflix’s *Family Reunion*, CBS’ *All Rise* and Netflix’s *#BlackAF*.

In her most challenging role in film, Smith recently starred in the lead role in *The Available Wife* (2020) as Nicole Wright, a beautiful and successful music CEO whose life is on the verge of crumbling when money, affairs, power, and deception collide.

Other credits include Netflix’s *Fatal Affair* (2020), Lionsgate’s *A Madea Family Funeral* (2019) opposite world-renowned director, screenwriter and actor Tyler Perry, and *Baker’s Man* and *Throwback Holiday*.

Born and raised in Tallahassee, FL, Smith knew she was destined for stardom from a young age. Having worked for over a decade in Hollywood, she is a veteran actress with a devoted following of over 1 million fans combined across her social media and counting. Smith is also a staunch advocate for giving back to her community. She travels back to Florida consistently to speak with underprivileged kids as a mentor within Youth Emerging Stronger (YES), providing mental, emotional, financial, and educational support to the homeless and fostered youths. Smith also takes on an active mentorship role with up-and-coming women in the entertainment industry— she continues to speak openly and candidly about the importance of hope: sharing her personal battle with depression, which caused her to temporarily quit acting, further driving her to spread positivity and encouragement to young people and those who may be struggling.

Smith is currently based in Los Angeles, California.

PROGRAM

Donald E. Palm, III, Ph.D.
Executive Vice President and Provost, Presiding

Prelude & Processional James Harris, Ph.D., *Piano*
Canon in D Major by Johann Pachelbel, *The Entertainer* by Scott Joplin,
Prelude I by George Gershwin, *Theme from New York, New York* by John Kandar

Posting of the Colors..... Virginia State University Army ROTC Color Guard

National Anthem..... *The Star Spangled Banner*
 Virginia State University Trojan Explosion Marching Band, Taylor Whitehead, M.M., *Director*

Black National Anthem *Lift Every Voice and Sing*
Words by James Weldon Johnson, music by J. Rosamond Johnson
 Virginia State University Gospel Chorale, Mr. Perry Evans, *Assistant Director*

Opening..... Jasmyn Graham, M. Div.
Director, United Campus Ministries, Virginia State University

Welcome Statements Leonard Githinji, Ph.D., *Chair, Faculty Senate*
 Mrs. Fran Thomas, *Chair, Staff Senate*
 Ms. Yania Campbell, *President, Student Government Association 2022–2023*

Musical Selection..... Virginia State University Trojan Explosion Marching Band
 Taylor Whitehead, M.M., *Director*

Introduction of Speaker Makola M. Abdullah, Ph.D.
President, Virginia State University

Address..... Ms. KJ Smith
Actress

Special Presentations..... Makola M. Abdullah, Ph.D.

Musical Selection..... Virginia State University Gospel Chorale
 Mr. Perry Evans, *Assistant Director*

Closing Remarks..... Donald E. Palm, III, Ph.D.

Alma Mater..... Virginia State University Trojan Explosion & Gospel Chorale
Lyrics by Felicia D. Anderson, music by Johnella Frazer Jackson

Retiring of the Colors Virginia State University Army ROTC Color Guard

Closing Jasmyn Graham, M. Div.

Postlude & Recessional James Harris, Ph.D., *Piano*



GREATER HAPPENS HERE

ALMA MATER

*O, the warm, mellow sunlight is shining,
And the trees like great sentinels stand:
They are guarding our dear Alma Mater,
The pride of Virginia's land.*

*Hail State! Hail Sate! Hail, Hail, Hail!
We're loyal sons and daughters true to Orange and Blue;
Our hearts beat warm with love for Thee,
Though near or far from Thee we be!
Virginia State, Virginia State, Hail, Hail, Hail!*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following organizations for their support in making the 2022 Fall Opening Convocation a success:

VSU OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT & PROVOST

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