**Event Title:** Tenemos Tumbao: On Building a Black Latinx Poetics

**Event Category:** Poetry Craft and Criticism

**Event Description:** Black Latinx writers are often excluded when it comes to discourse around Latinx literature, and when included only tend to come from a few specific places and backgrounds. In this panel, five Black Latinx poets from various ethnic and geographical backgrounds will discuss how their upbringings inform their notions of Black Latinidad, and what figures they turn to in building a Black Latinx poetics.

**Event Organizer and Moderator:**

Malcolm Friend: Malcolm Friend is a poet and author of the collection *Our Bruises Kept Singing Purple*. He received his BA from Vanderbilt University and his MFA from the University of Pittsburgh. He has received fellowships from organizations including CantoMundo and the Center for African American Poetry & Poetics.

**Event Participants:**

Jennifer Martiza McCauley: Jennifer Maritza McCauley is a PhD candidate at University of Missouri, and holds editorial positions at The Missouri Review & Pleiades. She has received fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, CantoMundo, and Kimbilio, and is the author of the collection *Scar On/Scar Off*.

Julian Randall: Julian Randall is a Living Queer Black poet from Chicago. A Pushcart Prize nominee he has received fellowships from Callaloo, BOAAT and the Watering Hole. Julian is the curator of Winter Tangerine Review’s Lineage of Mirrors and a candidate for his MFA in Poetry at Ole Miss.

Jasminne Mendez: Jasminne Mendez is an award winning author, performance poet and educator. She received her B.A. in English Literature and her M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Houston. She is the author of two hybrid collections of poetry and essays.

Yesenia Montilla: Yesenia Montilla is an Afro Latina poet. Her poetry has appeared in Prairie Schooner, Gulf Coast, Academy of American Poets Poem-A-Day and others. She received her MFA from Drew University & is a CantoMundo Fellow. *The Pink Box* is her first collection & was long-listed for the PEN Open Book Award.

**Opening Remarks:**

Hello, everyone, and welcome to Tenemos Tumbao: On Building a Black Latinx Poetics. We hope you’re as excited to be here as we are to have you join us. My name is Malcolm Friend, and I’m the organizer and moderator of this panel, the name of which, as many of you are likely aware, riffs off of the Celia Cruz hit song “La negra tiene tumbao,” and for me serves a reminder for all of us to live as unapologetically loud in our blackness as Celia Cruz did. The roots of this panel are many. It’s no secret that even today Black Latinxs struggle for recognition and representation both at home and in our diasporas; all of this despite the fact that much of what we use to define Latinx cultures—from music and dance to food to even art and language—would not be here without the contributions of black folk within Latin America. Each of us up here today work to claim our place within our specific diasporas, Latinidad as a whole, and a world at large which would rather ignore and eradicate our existences as Black bodies. This panel wouldn’t be here today without work of all of today’s panelists: the work they do as editors, as organizers, and by constantly questioning who is included in our definitions of Latinidad—our geographies, ethnicities, and everything else that fuels our identities—as well as who gets to make those definitions. And so I’m thrilled to be up here presenting with all of these panelists, who I’ll briefly introduce here and whose full bios you can find on the AWP website: Jennifer Maritza McCauley, Julian Randall, Jasminne Mendez, and Yesenia Montilla.

**Moderator Questions:**

1. One question I wanted to address is one of how our different diasporas interact. Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes notes in the essay “Speaking Black Latino/a/ness: Race, Performance, and Poetry in Tato Laviera, Willie Perdomo, and Josefina Báez” that in many cases being Afrolatinx means coming into contact with other Afro-diasporic communities and building on shared life experiences and commonalities. Similarly, a number of today’s panelists, myself included, have roots in black communities outside of Latin America. Can you all speak to these cross-cultural connections and how you build them in your work?
2. I’m also wondering, are there figures outside of literature that you look toward as you build your craft and specifically when you think of how to build a Black Latinx poetics?