

# JASPER





## A Thousand Words: Illustrations in Rare Books

Thursday, May 11 | 1:00 p.m.

Librarian Michael C. Weisenburg from the University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections explores illustrated literature from Hans Christian Andersen's tales, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Free with membership or admission.



## Artist Salon: Tyrone and Hafiza Geter

Friday, May 12 | Noon

In this unique Artist Salon, artist Tyrone Geter is joined by his daughter, poet Hafiza Geter, to explore visual art and the written word. Tyrone, whose work is on view at the CMA, is influenced by his mother and his experiences living in the early 20th century amid racial discrimination, poverty, and illiteracy. Hafiza was born in Zaria, Nigeria. She received her B.A. in English & economics from Clemson University and her M.F.A. in poetry from Columbia College Chicago. She was recently published in *The New Yorker*. Free with membership or admission.



## Summer Camp Registration Now Open

Participating in summer camps is a great way for kids to think creatively, practice their problem solving skills, and have fun! These 26 week-long camps for ages 4 – 18 give kids a chance to see world-class art and get hands-on experience with everything from woodworking to fashion to animation. There is something for everyone! Camps are offered between June 5 and August 11.



Photo by Stephanie Psitel

## CMA Jazz on Main:

### An Evening with Urban Jazz Harmonicist Frédéric Yonnet

Friday, May 12 | Concert begins at 7:30 p.m.

Frédéric Yonnet is one of the most talented and innovative harmonica players on the international music scene today. His mastery of the harmonica has led to appearances on NPR and *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*.

He has performed, toured, and recorded with some of the heaviest hitters in the music business including the legendary Stevie Wonder, Prince, Ed Sheeran, Erykah Badu, India.Arie, Anthony Hamilton, John Legend, and the National Symphony Orchestra. Presented by Family Medicine Centers of South Carolina. General Admission: \$35 / \$28 for members / \$5 for students. Premier Table Seating: \$300 for 6 guests and 2 bottles of wine / \$200 for 4 guests and 1 bottle of wine.

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Join us for these exciting events and more. Details at: 803-799-2810 or  
[columbiamuseum.org](http://columbiamuseum.org)



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CENTERFOLD / ASHLEY MOORE



**08 ON THE COVER**  
LEO TWIGGS

**18 SPECIAL**  
MASTERS OF ART

### JASPER IS

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## Dear Friends,

I missed you.

The fact is that I'm still getting used to only coming to you two times a year after five years of publishing the magazine every other month. But we have grown, and we are growing, using the time wisely as our illustrious board of directors builds this organization, The Jasper Project, which publishes Jasper Magazine.

Some news.

Since we came to you last September we produced an exciting 2<sup>nd</sup> Act Film Festival in October – our third – under the direction of Film Editor Wade Sellers. Filmmaker Tamara Finkbeiner (see page 94) took home the People's Choice Award for the second time with her film "Bait," and we played to another sold out, SRO audience at Tapp's Arts Center.

November saw us hosting the 2016 JAY (Jasper Artist of the Year) Awards at 701 Whaley with a raucous night of holiday lip-synching, homemade cookies, original artist-created Christmas ornaments, shots with Santa, and a generous bar from The Whig. You voted and we awarded JAYs to Michaela Pilar Brown in visual arts, Len Lawson in literary arts, Baxter Engle in theatre, and Mark Rapp in music. Abigail McNeely won the lip-synching contest – our judges were Will Green, Joelle Ryan-Cook, and Katie Fox – and Tony Tallent won the People's Choice Award.

The call for our fourth volume of *Fall Lines* – a literary convergence came in January and closed in March with a record-breaking number of submissions. By the time you read this, submissions will have been sent to their respective judges in poetry and prose, and come July, we'll celebrate the winners. We are very appreciative of the partnership we have with One Columbia, the SC Academy of Authors, and especially our friends at Richland Library for helping us make this – South Carolina's only independent printed literary journal – happen once again.

In February, The Jasper Project played a large role in Columbia's second annual Deckle Edge Literary Festival, the home-grown literary celebration that filled the gap left by the SC Book Festival in 2016. Working with other literary arts organizations like Richland Library, the SC State Library, the SC Center for Children's Books and Literacy, the Pat Conroy Literary Center, the SC Writers Alliance and more, we were able to involve more than 100 artists in the weekend and welcome more than 1000 attendees.

February also found us putting the finishing touches on a new, ongoing project that you'll be able to witness take on several forms – the Play Right Series. The purpose of the Play Right Series is to empower audiences with a heightened theatrical experience at the same time that we increase opportunities for SC theatre artists to create and per-

form new works. We do this by incorporating Community Producers into the process of creating theatrical art. Our first three Community Producers are Bonnie Goldberg, Bill Schmidt, and Jack Oliver, and our first project is the production of Randall David Cook's play, *Sharks and Other Lovers* (see page 76), which premieres on April 28<sup>th</sup>.

Going forward there are a number of exciting projects on the horizon, but one that you'll want to make sure you put on your calendar is SYZYGY: The Solar Eclipse Plays and Poetry Invitational coming up on August 17<sup>th</sup> in celebration of the total solar eclipse coming to Columbia on August 21<sup>st</sup>. The Jasper Project invited six SC playwrights to each create a 10 minute play on the eclipse theme. Similarly, eight poets were asked to wax poetic on the same subject. We'll be celebrating the performance of these original pieces of literature at Tapp's Arts Center as well as commemorating them in a publication.

To follow SYZYGY and all the arts engineering brought to you by the Jasper Project, stay tuned to our website at JasperProject.org. And, as always, thanks for reading Jasper Magazine.

Take care,




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The Jasper Project is a project-oriented, multidisciplinary arts facilitator serving the greater Columbia and South Carolina communities by providing collaborative arts engineering and providing community-wide arts communication.

Jasper// as in Johns, the abstract expressionist, neo-Dadaist artist  
as in Sergeant, the Revolutionary War hero  
as in Mineral, the spotted or speckled stone  
as in Magazine, the Word on Columbia Arts

Jasper Magazine – www.jaspercolumbia.com – is dedicated to the promotion and support of Columbia, SC artists and arts lovers. Jasper Magazine is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in any manner without the publisher's written consent.

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THE  
**JASPER GUILD**

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ISN'T IT TIME THAT YOU JOIN THE

# JASPER GUILD

The Jasper Guild is a group of supporting artists and arts lovers who appreciate not only the vital Columbia, SC arts scene, but the magazine devoted to promoting it. Members of the Jasper Guild recognize the labor-of-love that is Jasper and work to do their parts to ensure that Jasper continues to publish a 100% LOCAL & artist-produced magazine. You're invited to join us in our mission to make Columbia, SC the Southeast arts capitol by becoming a member of the Jasper Guild. And the next time you open a copy of Jasper you'll be able to say,

"I helped  
make this  
happen  
and here's  
my name  
to prove it!"

## *There's Good News for Jasper Guild Members!*

New Guild Memberships and Renewals are Now

### ***TAX-DEDUCTIBLE\****

Please consider becoming a part of the Jasper Team at one of the following levels:

#### ***APPRENTICE***

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Jasper Magazine for 1 year - \$50

#### ***JOURNEYMAN***

The above + your name in LARGE LETTERS - \$100

#### ***MASTER***

The above + free admission to the November 2017 JAY ceremony - \$250

#### ***CENTERFOLD SPONSORSHIP***

The above + your name or dedication printed on the centerfold - \$500

#### ***PUBLISHER***

The above + a Columbia Arts Scene Bonus Pack with tickets,  
passes, books, & more! - \$1000

#### ***ARTIST PEER***

Practicing artists are invited to join the Jasper Guild and see  
your name in Jasper Magazine - \$25

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\*above the cost of a subscription (\$40) to the new (September 2016) perfect bound, archival Jasper Magazine – if you prefer to donate the full cost of membership by not receiving Jasper in your mailbox in September, March, and July, please indicate so upon joining, or contact [Annie@Jaspercolumbia.com](mailto:Annie@Jaspercolumbia.com)





# FADED SOUTHERN HISTORY & THE GREATNESS OF LEO TWIGGS

BY KARA GUNTER



Leo Twiggs is one of South Carolina's most important artists, with a career spanning over five decades. In many ways his resume reads like that of any artist who has gathered plaudits and critical acclaim for his work. He graduated from Claflin University Summa Cum Laude, studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and New York University. He was among the first African-Americans to integrate the University of Georgia, and the first African-American to receive a Doctorate of Arts from the same university. A distinguished and accomplished professor, he developed the arts department at South Carolina State University, as well as the I.P. Stanback Museum, and was named Professor Emeritus in 2000. Largely overlooked in South Carolina early on in his career, he initially found recognition outside of the state. To date, he has had over 70 solo exhibitions around the country as well as around the world. In 2004, the Georgia Museum of Art organized a retrospective of his work which toured the Southeast for two years. In 1980, he was the first visual artist to be awarded South Carolina's Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Award for outstanding contributions to the arts.

But there's another part of Twiggs' story which is more surprising and, when it comes to his work, revelatory. He was born in 1934 in the small rural town of St. Stephen, South Carolina. Like most, if not all, places in the South during that time, the town was divided by implied and literal boundaries constructed around the idea of race. A 15-year-old Twiggs found solace in his work as a movie projectionist in a small theatre downtown even though he only got the job after his predecessor, a white man, quit because the pay was too little. The owner of the theatre hired Twiggs, but paid him even less.

Despite the unequal pay, the young Twiggs was compensated with images and ideas that would shape his aesthetic as an artist. As a college student at Claffin, he was hired by another theatre in Orangeburg, and it was here where he honed his observations on how these films were constructed. After several viewings, he began to take note on how the director created a specific mood by altering lighting, composition, and music. Still a connoisseur of film, he peppers descriptions of his work with allusions to classic movies and past and current directors. In the same way a well-constructed movie can carry you to another place, Twiggs aims to do the same with his batiks, a type of dyed cloth that originated in Indonesia.

A more traditional painter early on his career, he found that batik allowed him to create a mood just like the ones created by some of his favorite directors. Batik, at least in the hands of Twiggs, provides an introspective depth, and he uses the words dingy, aged, and soft to describe the aesthetic. It's what "time does to dreams and ideas," and it has the effect of immediately transporting the viewer



to a different space in time or thought. There are those who draw a heavy line between craft and fine art, and Twiggs has sometimes been relegated to either the fringes of the fine art world or to the seemingly less sophisticated realms of craft due to his embrace of batik. This doesn't appear to ruffle his feathers much, and certainly hasn't deterred his use of the form.

He describes batik as a whisper, and just as one grows older, the voice becomes softer and wisdom allows one to say more with fewer words. The economy of Twiggs' compositions and their rich visual symbolism is earned. You have to "arrive" at this place as we gather up our experiences from our journeys. A rooster, an archetypal Mother, an **X**, a target; all are symbols that Twiggs relies on to say big things with great conciseness.

One such example is the *Targeted Man* series, a powerful collection of works that rely primarily on the silhouette of a man and a target. Begun in 2005, years before the 2012 shooting of a 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, it is an especially timely series today in light of the Black Lives Matter movement. Twiggs describes an adolescence in which he had to be cognizant of who saw him speaking with the white concessions girl in the segregated theatre in which he worked. Nightly walks home from the theatre often felt fraught with danger, and his mother always waited up for him to get home. The street lights stopped at the last "white" house, and the young man had to walk the rest of the way home in the pitch black darkness of night. This must have been the birth of the blues, he says, as Black mothers waited up for children that sometimes didn't make it home at all.

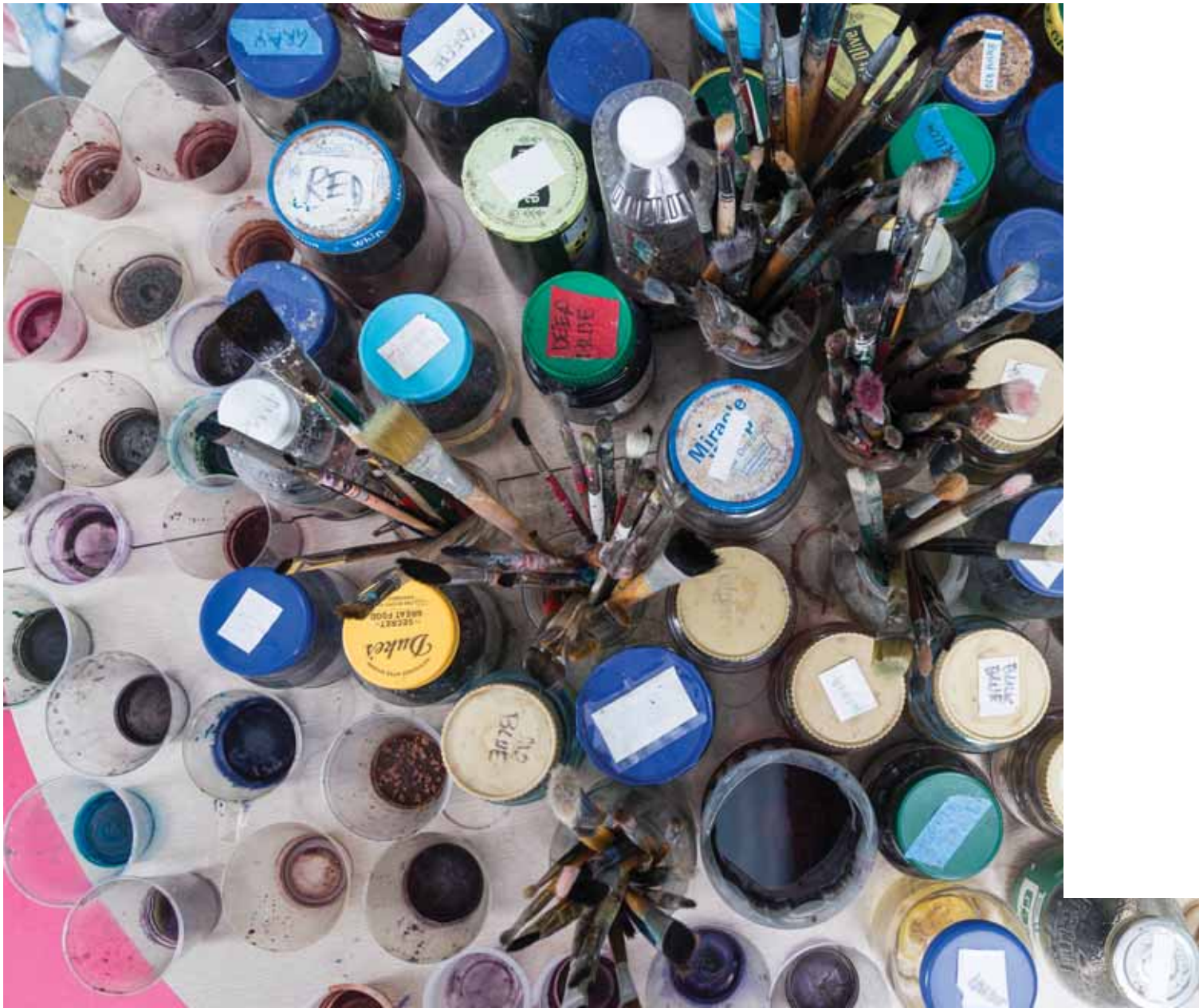
It was so dark on those walks that, if you saw a figure approaching, you didn't know if he was friend or foe. Likewise, you didn't know if the white man you worked for might be a member of the Ku Klux Klan, something Twiggs' brother discovered when he accidentally found the man's hood under the truck seat as he was getting a ride home from work. When the KKK would march through their neighborhood to terrorize, familiar faces were hiding under those hoods. The uncertainty of those situations led to a constant feeling of being targeted, but the direction from which one is being targeted is unsure and nebulous. 9/11, Twiggs says, was perhaps the first time that all Americans could identify with that feeling of being terrorized.

In *Evening of the Rooster* from the *Targeted Man* series, we see several of Twiggs tried-and-true symbols coming together to create a painful narrative of an ever-watchful mother, guarding her children closely, while targets dance and settle on their tiny frames. The rooster, a representation of authority, stands at the foreground.

When he helped integrate the University of Georgia, Twiggs said he'd never seen as many Confederate flags before. He chuckles lightly and said there were times when he expected to see the Confederate Army marching behind him on his way down the road. Twiggs' batik renderings of that flag are some of his most recognizable works. The batik form allows him to create a flag which looks as if it has been long stowed away in a trunk of a generational family home, all cracked and worn. "I don't set out to make the flag the boogey man," he says. The flag should be treated with deference, while simultane-











Requiem For Mother Emanuel #3  
Batik on cotton  
16 x 12 in.  
From the collection of John and Kay Bachmann



ously understanding its full symbolic weight. “The Confederate flag is an icon that whites in the South love to remember, and most Blacks would like to forget; yet, within the dichotomy of these two views is the passion within us all to remember the past and to hold on to some special moment of triumph,” Twiggs writes in an artist’s statement.

The Confederate flag morphed into a simple **X** in Twiggs’ work. The **X** conjures the flag, but also a cancellation or absence, a target (X marks the spot), or a railroad crossing sign. The railroad tracks are often a metaphorical and literal boundary in many small towns, where you can find yourself on either the right or wrong side of the tracks, with the racial implication being that the wrong side is the Black side. Twiggs recounts indignities from being told on his honeymoon that he must go to the back of the restaurant to pick up his and his new wife’s dinner, or to piloting a car full with 3 sons at night when he wasn’t sure he would make it home after being turned away by the mechanic at an auto service station. Those were all personal crossings, he says, and many crossings by African-Americans have been by necessity silent ones. The risks have often been too great to make noise. The **X** hovers over shadowy *Targeted Man* figures in the *Crossings* series, and it does double duty as a menacing warning of no passage as much as it is a beacon of transcendence. Culturally, we must cross over the ideology of racism represented by the flag, but it’s likely to be a difficult crossing.

And as we know all too well in South Carolina, sometimes we make great strides over that crossing, and sometimes we have to take several strides back. In 2015, when Dylann Roof walked into Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston and killed nine people as they met for prayer, it felt as if we’d all been shoved right back into parts of our darkest history—that the last 60 years haven’t happened.

In Twiggs' *Requiem for Mother Emanuel* series, the **X**, true to form, is complex and weighty. It elicits the Confederate flag, the emptiness left in the wake of tragedy, and the final crossing of death. Twiggs' represents the nine shooting victims simply and eloquently with the character of **9**, with nine **X**'s, or nine crosses. The sharp edged shape of the church itself segments the compositions, and conjures the protective and wise mother figure in earlier works. She is a mighty symbol of a spiritual home, redemption, love, protection, forgiveness—all transcendent concepts which outweigh the violence of June 17<sup>th</sup>.

Twiggs wrote in an artist's statement, "My paintings are testimonies to the nine who were slain. But I also record another moment; our state's greatest moment... a response that moved us from tragedy to redemption. For one shining moment, we looked at each other not as different races, but as human beings." That shining moment he refers to, full of the unfathomable grace the victims' families have bestowed upon Dylann Roof as well as the many South Carolinians came together after the tragedy to link arms and cry, and pray together, led to the remove the Confederate battle flag from the State House grounds in Columbia. Maybe race relations are not one big crossing, but several smaller ones we have to traverse together. The glowing **X** in a Twiggs' batik is not the destination, but just one of several goals along the journey.

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*Look for Twiggs on an upcoming episode of CBS Sunday Morning. Leo Twiggs: Requiem for Mother Emanuel recently on exhibit at the Mint Museum, will tour the Southeastern US. If you're in Washington visiting the new National Museum of African American History and Culture, look for a recently donated Twiggs' piece. For an illustrated journey of the artists' life and work, pick up a copy of Messages from Home: The Art of Leo Twiggs available at the artists' website.*







MASTERS

*of*

ART



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*In the landscape of the life of an artist*

there are any number of topographical encounters, all of which represent various stages in one's professional life. Hills. Valleys. Plateaus. But there is one large landform from which an artist never descends. When an artist reaches this point she knows she has made it. At Jasper, we call this the Master Level, as in Masters of Art. The tectonic forces we consider when calibrating this height include maturity, as an artist and a person; the accumulation of a large and impressive body of work; and, a continued involvement in the community of one's peers and protégés.

It is an honor to announce the 2017 Jasper Magazine Masters of Art: Susan Lenz, Tish Lowe, Christian Thee, and Don Zurlo.

And here, in their own words, are the masters' greatest accomplishments, inspirations, and advice for other artists who hope to, one day, see the world from the same heights.



*Susan*  
**LENZ**

***My greatest accomplishment:***

This question might as well ask which of my two sons my favorite is. Even before I became estranged from both of them, I had no answer. How could I? Currently, my only hope is for a brighter future. Such is the case with my artistic practice: My greatest artistic accomplishment is yet to come. I am hopeful for it.

***Inspiration:***

I could say that the concept of time inspires me most. I could say that the accumulated memory inherent in discarded objects inspires me most. I could say that the desire to honor the tens-of-thousands of anonymous, female makers who decorated their homes with handwork inspires me most. These are all ways to sugarcoat my greatest truth. Death inspires me. For me, there are fewer days ahead than in my past. I'm in a race to the final day, hoping to achieve some level of memory, some level of respect, some work of art that will speak beyond the grave. I think my artist statement says it best:

These truths are always with me: I am a female lacking an academic arts education in a male dominated world bent on high-brow approaches to art-making underscored with critical words written by trained professionals. I am a post-menopausal woman with years of experience and mountains of visual expressions waiting to take form. I work and will continue to work because I have something to say in spite of the many obstacles. I work with the faint hope that something, perhaps just one little work of art, might be kept through coming generations, cherished ... admired ... remembered ... regarded for its quality ... something to mark my existence on this planet. I work because I am not invisible.

***Advice:***

Work.











***My greatest accomplishment:***

If “accomplishment” were to be measured in terms of awards or recognition, receiving a top award in the prestigious international Art Renewal Center Salon competition would be a highlight of my career. I don’t paint for awards, however. I paint for the sheer joy the process of painting gives me.

I believe that my greatest artistic accomplishment was actually a leap of faith—a decision taken relatively late in life to change careers and study painting at an art atelier in Italy. Before that decision, my nascent artistic talent had lain dormant for decades. In Italy, surrounded by some of the world’s greatest art from the past and under the tutelage of dedicated instructors who had preserved the technical knowledge of the Old Masters, I was able to develop my artistic talent and vision. That decision to take a chance on the unknown, and more important, following through with determination to master the skills necessary to be an accomplished painter, changed the course of my life and is the foundation of any subsequent artistic success I have achieved.

***Inspiration:***

What has always inspired me most is the people I meet—their faces, their personalities, their character, their appearance, their history, and their indomitable human spirits.

For ideas on how to interpret on canvas what I see and feel, I look to great artists for inspiration, in particular Memling, Van Dyke, Michelangelo, Raphael, Rubens, Ciseri, Velasquez, and Sargent.

***Advice:***

It takes 10,000 hours to become an expert at anything. Do the work. Put in the time. Dream.

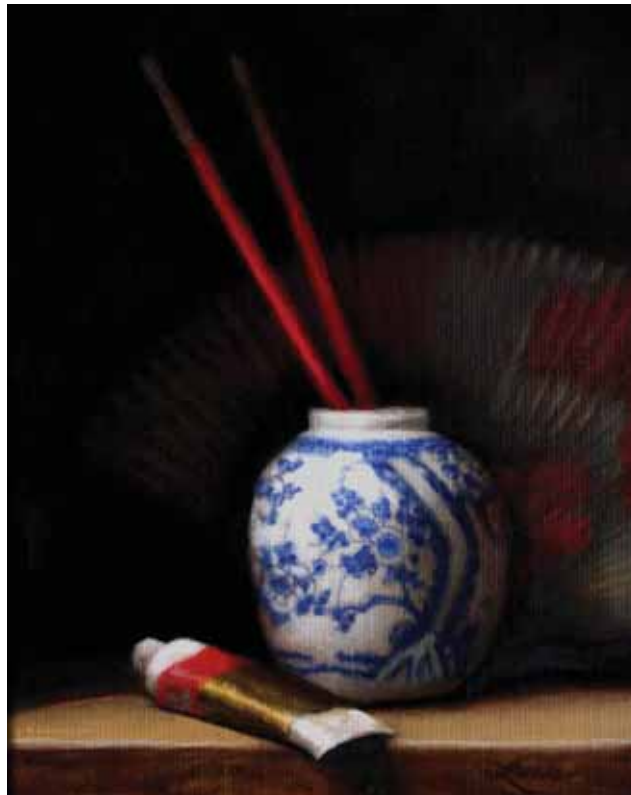
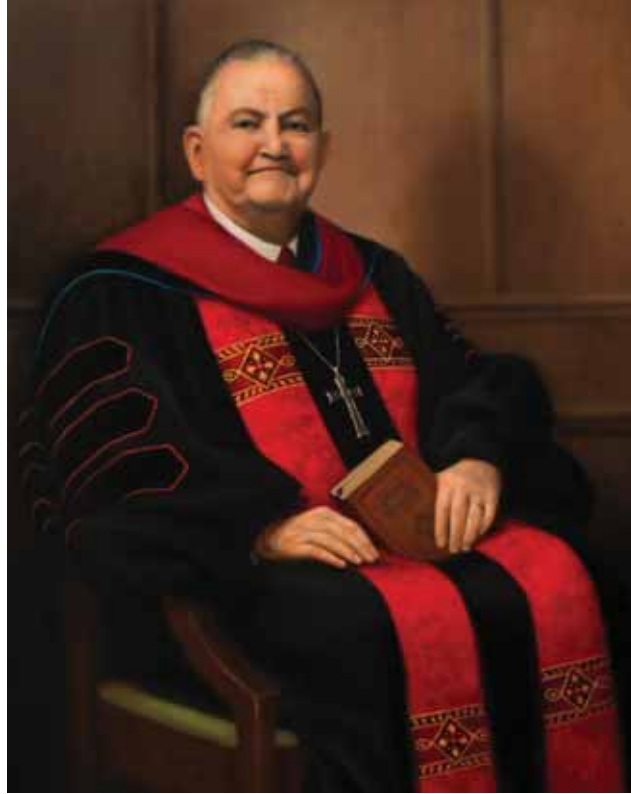
*Tish*  
**LOWE**

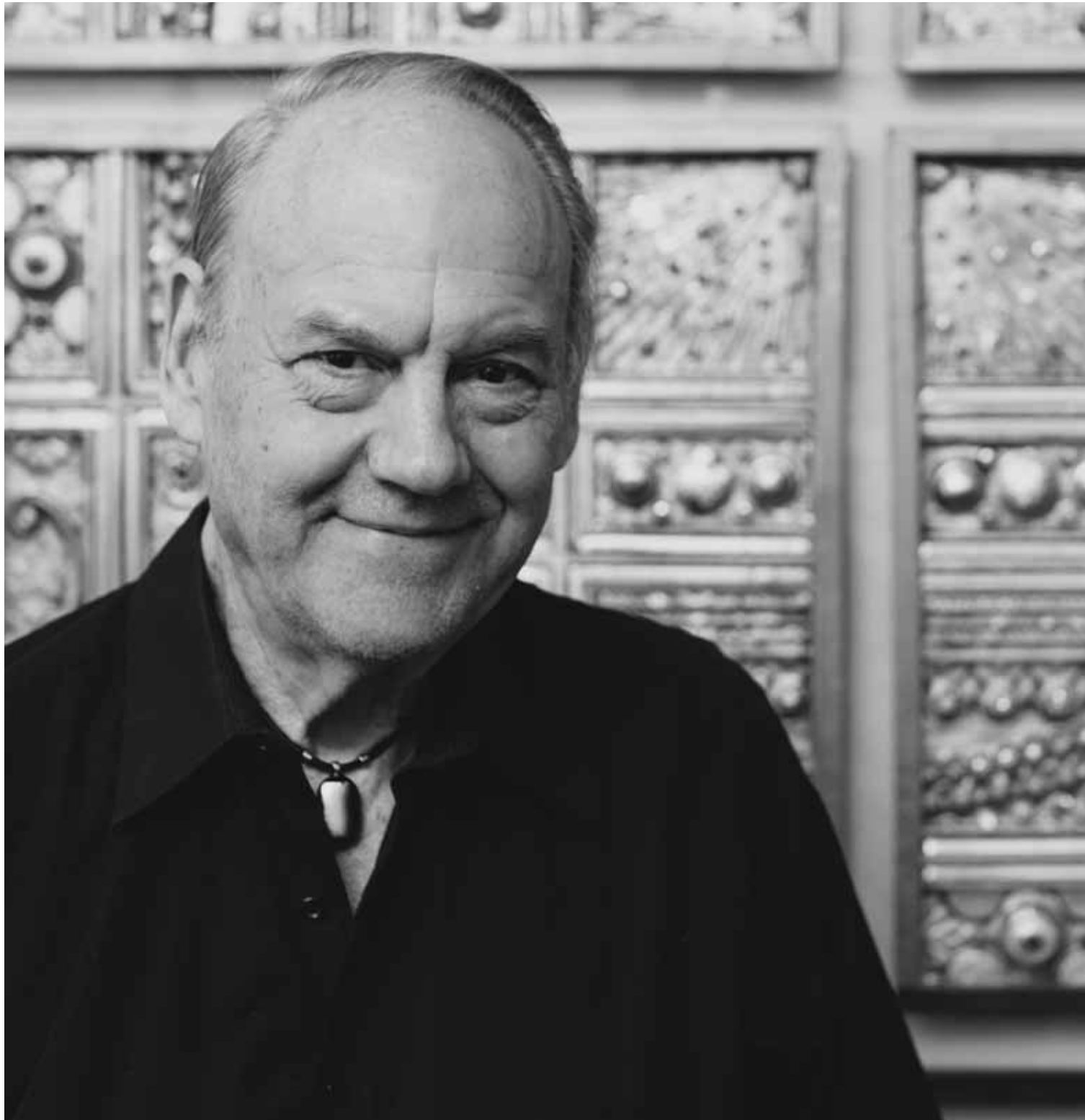














# *Christian* **THEE**

## ***My greatest accomplishment:***

Looking back on the things I've created or consulted on I would have to say that the one "piece" that would be my greatest artistic accomplishment would be my former home in New York. It was originally a garage, which I converted into my home, aptly named "Some garage in Brooklyn." It had no windows and doors except for a few skylights, and I essentially had to create life where there wasn't any. I created windows where they didn't exist, rooms that folded up, seven secret doors, and grass and rocks that weren't real that made up the seating area. It challenged me because it required me to be an artist/painter/architect/and engineer. I've been asked before "Would there have been things I would have gone back and changed?" It is probably the only time I can say that I didn't make any mistakes and I wouldn't have changed a thing.

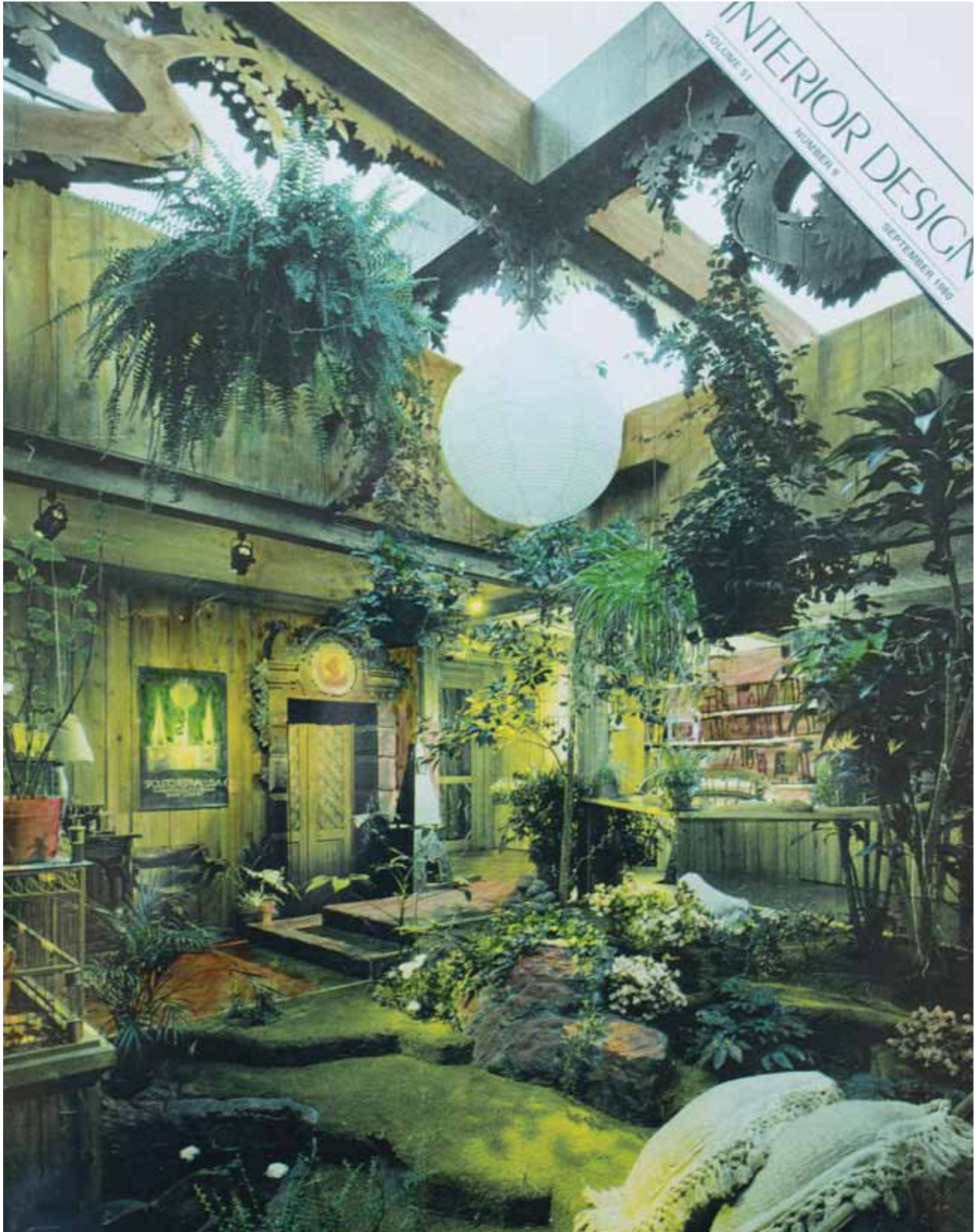
## ***Inspiration:***

I am always inspired by other artists. By being able to see the world in a different perspective other than my own—it helps give my work depth. I'm constantly inspired by those artists who are adept in their respective discipline. It challenges me to be better, and to chase after myself as the artist I want to be in my head.

## ***Advice:***

As an artist you should go outside of your comfort zone and explore, do things that you have never done before. The best way to do that is to travel and experience different cultures and dive into different things. Don't be afraid to stretch the boundaries of your own proverbial box, and use that as your influence to create art that speaks to the soul of your audience.





VOLUME 91  
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INTERIOR DESIGN









# Don ZURLO

## ***My greatest accomplishment:***

In the last year of completing my MFA degree at Rutgers, I constructed a kinetic light box, one of the works for my thesis exhibition. An art professor suggested I show it to Howard Wise who was preparing a light show at his gallery in New York. I took the piece to the gallery, and Mr. Wise accepted it for the 1967 show, "Lights in Orbit." The work was sold while it was on exhibit. After New York, The exhibition traveled around the country to galleries and museums in the east and mid-west. Later, I was commissioned by Mr. Wise to create another similar piece for one of his clients

## ***Inspiration:***

The inspiration for my work comes from a fascination with individual consciousness and the subjective nature of perception. Art is a metaphor; in my field, a visual metaphor. It has meaning based on personal perception, and our perceptions are affected by our individual life experiences, externally and internally, physically and psychologically. The meaning is different from the image, but is derived from the image.

The objects I create are paint on canvas - flat, static, physical objects, aesthetically manipulated to provide a vehicle for traveling about one's memories and emotions. The content or meaning is created by the viewer. It is a personal impression, an amorphous thought image created in the mind of an individual. Each interpretation is valid as a personal perception, and may be different for each viewer. If someone paints a landscape, the object itself is not a landscape. It is only a symbolic representation of a landscape. If we touch it we find it is just dried paint on canvas. The image symbolizes landscape depending upon how it is perceived in the mind. The more abstract the painting of landscape, the greater the chance the viewer will perceive something other than landscape.

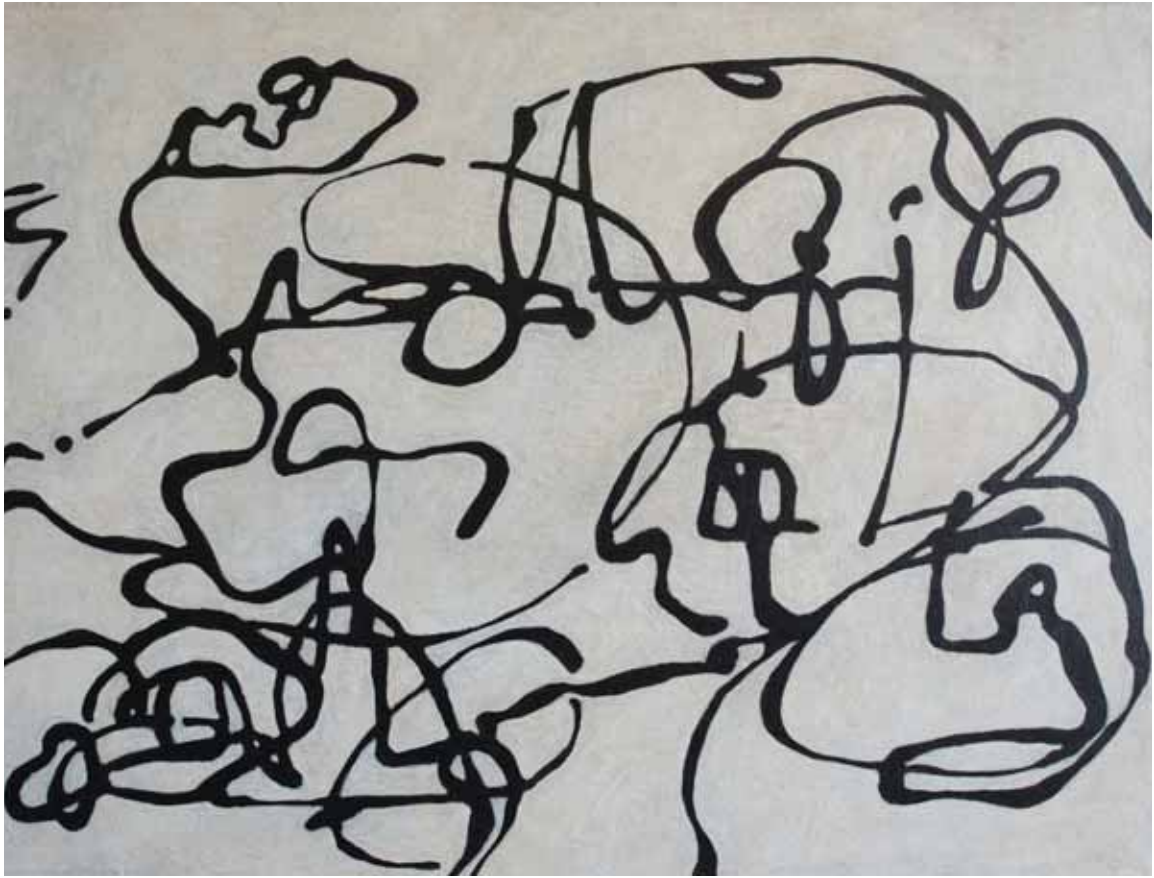
My work is non-representational. I try to make it as ambiguous as possible in an effort to challenge the viewer's personal imagination in creating the greatest possible variety of interpretations, thoughts, and feelings. The work, when viewed, is an adventure in discovery of the recesses of one's own mind. Through aesthetic manipulation of paint on canvas, I attempt to create a pleasant and harmonious visual context within which the mind is able to travel to interesting and often unknown places. When the painting is not being viewed, it is a meaningless physical object, just paint on canvas. The work has two separate realities. The first is the physical object and the second is the metaphor. The metaphor is the art, a function of the mind

## ***Advice:***

Study the history of art including styles and techniques of art, then focus your energy on whatever you find interesting.









# LOCAL RECORD REVIEWS



## THOSE LAVENDER WHALES *My Bones Are Singing*

With a refreshing lack of cynicism or angst, few Columbia bands have dared to explore the sweeter side of pop music quite like Those Lavender Whales. While not altogether avoiding the more unpleasant aspects of life, it's a hallmark of Aaron Graves' songwriting to approach these hiccups with bright-eyed optimism and the belief that love, friendship, and fellow feeling will overcome and win the day. But the band's latest and second full-length release, *My Bones are Singing*, is something markedly different, and for good reason—when it comes to the hardships dealt with on the record, the stakes have really never been higher.

In early 2014, Graves was diagnosed with an astrocytoma, a rare and life-threatening brain tumor. One can (hopefully) only imag-

ine the terror and confusion of being faced with one's own mortality, the helplessness of the knowledge that the world will carry on with or without you not being some abstract, future possibility, but something concrete. Something very much happening *now*. I dread to think what I would do under such circumstances, but we know what Graves did. He took to the blank page and wrote a batch of songs exploring his uncertainties, fears, and hopes; the songs that would eventually come to be *My Bones are Singing*.

"Oh my god, I don't know if I can handle this / Oh my god, I'm not sure if you exist / Oh my god, I feel like I'm talking to myself / Oh my god, I'm acting like somebody else," Graves sings on "Oh My God," the record's second track. As is Those Lavender Whales' custom, the music is peppy and upbeat, propelled by crunchy electric guitars and sprightly synth; but the lyrics, though delivered with Graves' trademark breeziness, couldn't describe a more dismal existential position. By the fifth track, the Rentals-esque "Lose My Mind," fear has become frustration as Graves sings, "I'm gonna lose my mind if anything else takes up anymore of my time / Unless it's something I can understand or feel rearranging parts of my life." The words 'cancer,' 'tumor,' or even 'death' are never used; such terms would have no place in the Whales' lexicon. The drawback, however, is that in the absence of their use, those abysmal images hover ever more palpably over the musical proceedings, like a bad dream whose images becomes stronger the less they're analyzed.

But, true to his nature, Graves doesn't in-

dulge his darker shades for too long. If *My Bones are Singing's* first half is marked by questions of life and death, the second half makes its best attempt at providing answers. This is never clearer than on "I Love My Friends," which finds Graves affirming his worth through the quality of the company he keeps and deciding that, despite the obstacles, it's all worth fighting for. On "The Water," the record's penultimate track, Graves seems to have achieved a Zen-like state of understanding. "If your mind is dim and the lake is calm, bow your head and bathe in the water / and make your worries clean," he sings with disarming calmness, "When your body fails and you find your work is done, take your body down to the water / and wash your body clean."

The good news is that Aaron Graves is well; as of this writing, his tumor is in remission and there's no reason to think it won't remain so. But there's a discomforting sense of voyeurism that accompanies peering inside someone else's head and heart and learning such deeply personal things about them, and it speaks to Graves' generosity and talent as a songwriter that they're presented to us with such honesty and accessibility, and without a whiff of self-pity. As a Those Lavender Whales album, *My Bones are Singing* is as musically fresh, dreamy, and unpretentious as anything the band has put forth before, if not more so; as a piece of art, it's almost breathtaking in its honesty, and therefore an unqualified success. -Michael Spawn



## FAT RAT DA CZAR

### Railroad

Fat Rat da Czar wears many hats. He's a producer, a festival organizer, and a mentor to just about every young emcee making his or her way up the ranks in our city's modest but feisty hip-hop scene. But the one he wears best—and the one he seems to enjoy the most—is that of the performer, the writer. It's been a solid four years since he released *Da Cold War 3* and a new Fat Rat record might seem way overdue. But, given that he hasn't exactly been laying low in the interim, *RailRoad* is actually right on time.

Like the best hip-hop artists, Fat Rat knows how to share the spotlight and give his many friends and protégées their chance to shine. From producer/performer MIDIMarc to Fat's New Success Culture mentees Cole Connor, LaLisa, and Chadd Downing, the guest spots on *RailRoad* never seem frivolous or arbitrary. Most of the time, the guest verse does what it's meant to do and elevates the song beyond what it would be if Fat chose to ride it out solo. Take "Rise," the seventh track and my pick for the record's best song. Fat Rat and Cole Connor trade verses over a jazzy vocal sample that's both perfect for the track and at the same time somewhat disorienting in its rhythm, but the seas part for the chorus, which is little more than a few solitary piano chords underneath Rachel Martin's vocals, providing a stark and beautiful contrast to all that came before. Production-wise, it has Kanye West's influence all over it; perfor-

mance-wise, it's a testament to Fat Rat's vocal prowess and that of the young talent he's become so adept at scouting out.

It's never stated explicitly on the record, but *RailRoad*'s mission statement seems to be to remind the listening public why, after all these years, Fat Rat is still the grand poobah of Columbia hip-hop. And it does. In fact, he's only gotten better with time, and this—his best record yet—is the proof. Fat Rat da Czar isn't known for making records halfway, a sentiment best summed up by the title track's final line: "The only way to do it is when you do it to death." -Michael Spawn



## TODD MATHIS

### Love in the City

Dedicating his latest eleven-song set to his wife Cully, Todd Mathis writes, "There are a lot of themes running through this album and the songs, but the main one is love." It isn't hard to get that impression listening to *Love in the City* even without its creator stating it explicitly. As is common with Mathis' songs, the lyrics are often self-deprecating, but there's a strong thematic undercurrent of peaceful gratitude running throughout the record.

Mathis claims to have written the opening track "Fall With Me" in the summer of 2011, shortly after meeting the woman who would become his wife. With its fuzzy electric power chords; crisp, reverb-laden lead lines; and hopeful, lovesick lyrics ("It's no secret I'm in love with you / You've got my heart tied up in everything you do"), it's more than a suit-

able indicator of *Love in the City*'s general MO. "Fall with Me" is followed by "Old Man," a propulsive, mid-tempo rocker and one of the few that's undeniably reminiscent of Mathis' songwriting with American Gun.

The odd ballad notwithstanding, the big-hearted pop-rock Mathis does best remains consistent throughout *Love in the City*, but it's hard at times not to get nostalgic for the trashy rock 'n' roll attitude that marked much of his past work. But that might not be the point here. If the record is meant as a love letter to his lady, one where the lyrics take a decided precedence, *Love in the City* can't be rated as anything but a success. And since it was written with one specific listener in mind, it will be her opinion that ultimately matters the most. -Michael Spawn



## SODA CITY RIOT

### We're Not PC! Fuck You!

As far as I can tell, nobody has ever accused local punk rockers Soda City Riot of trying to be politically correct, which is why the title of their latest record—*We're Not PC! Fuck You!*—seems like an odd choice. It almost comes across as a little bit defensive. But, for the sake of argument, let's say that this is a common problem for the band. For all I know, they're hounded after every show by people who tell them, "The music is great but you guys need to pump the brakes on the political correctness." If this is indeed the case, they needn't worry about anyone making a similar comment again. The album truly lives up to its title.

The opening track sets the tone nicely. If you can hang with an audio clip of Charles Bukowski comparing the act of writing a poem to taking a “good, hot beer shit,” then there’s little that could offend down the way. In fact, between the title, the bird-flipping baby cover image, the Bukowski clip, and a later audio clip of what sounds like a Baptist preacher warning that “God’s gonna put a cancer in the butthole of every sodomite,” (which precedes a song about anal sex, “First Time”) there seems to be such a concerted effort to *not* be politically correct that the band’s mannerisms wind up feeling as scripted and stage-managed as someone who strives for the opposite.

But I quibble. Beyond its own self-imposed political stance (or total lack thereof, according to “Everybody’s Broke), *We’re Not PC! Fuck You!* contains some truly excellent punk rock in the vein of Rise Against, Bombshell Rocks, or early Against Me! Most tracks are melodic—and often funny—without sacrificing aggression, and the band can pull off gang vocals with a natural ease most of their peers can only hope for. Top tracks include the aforementioned “Everybody’s Broke,” “Don’t Change,” “Phonies,” and a risky-on-paper but ultimately solid cover of the Ramones’ “Bonzo Goes to Bitburg.”

Just don’t call them PC. Apparently they hate that. *-Michael Spawn*



## SAY BROTHER

### *Roam*

It’s been almost six full years since the Columbia party monsters Say Brother have released anything new to the public. For a band that can claim the kind of local fanbase that Say Brother has earned themselves, this is no small amount of time (which, if their debut’s title is to be believed, is all they got, so maybe the guys were never in that big of a hurry to begin with). With only three songs, the cup hardly runneth over, but if there was any fear that Say Brother planned to hang their hat on one great record and be done with it, *Roam* is answer enough.

The EP opens with “Comfort Me,” a jangly, country-tinged ode to the peace of mind that comes with knowing you’ve got a good woman in your corner. Carried by little more than an acoustic guitar and some bright, melodic lead lines, the song isn’t the sort of boot-stomper the band is known for, but works as a reminder that despite their hard-earned reputation as a raucous live act, Say Brother is still up to the most important job of all—writing good, memorable songs. “Comfort Me” also boasts what might be frontman Tripp LaFrance’s best vocal work yet, delivering his lines with the total conviction that accompanies sharing the more hidden parts of yourself with a willing audience.

A punk-blues rocker caked in sweat and sharp licks, “Gimme Love” finds Say Brother back in their element. The song barely cracks the three-minute mark, but if the goal

is to remind a listener what this band does best, that’s more than enough time. Closing out the EP, the title track trades sheer hurricane force for a mid-tempo, clap-along blues groove, the result being a sort of synthesis of the two tracks that preceded it and a satisfying end to a record whose biggest fault is that it’s too damn short. *-Michael Spawn*



## DAVE BRITT

### *Burning in the Afterglow*

If you’re wondering what a rockin’ party in outer space might sound like, your ears can experience such celestial noise, sending you on a rocket over the moon, by listening to Dave Britt’s newest album, *Burning In The Afterglow*. With a melding of high trickling warbles from what sounds like the inside of a computer, fluid guitar riffs drenched in reverb, the active yet discrete bass lines of Jamie Beresford, and carefully crafted percussion formulated by Columbia’s most called-upon drummer, Steve Sancho, Britt generates a dance-like climate suited for aerial robots, aliens, and of course, earthly beings who desire to be lifted into lands above.

Unencumbered by its rhythmic enthusiasm, the album achieves its probable intention of capturing the essence of burning stars. This patient pining after a flame-ravaged relationship can be heard in Britt’s breathy vocals, often building into group choruses chanting their frustrations: “I’m so tired, I’m so tired, I’m so tired of waiting for you.” The languishing continues in lyrics like those in his fifth track, “Is This Living,”



# SEASON 32 AT TRUSTUS THEATRE STARTED WITH A



# AND WE'RE NOT DONE YET!



**HAND TO GOD**  
**April 21–May 6, 2017**  
 Thigpen Main Stage

*A Play by Robert Askins*  
*Directed by Patrick Michael Kelly*  
 After the death of his father, meek Jason finds an outlet for his anxiety

at the Christian Puppet Ministry, in the devoutly religious, quiet small town of Cypress, TX. Jason's complicated relationships with the town pastor, the school bully, the girl next door, and, most especially, his mother are thrown into upheaval when his puppet, Tyrone, takes on a shocking & dangerously irreverent personality all its own. *Hand to God* explores the startlingly fragile nature of faith, morality, & the ties that bind us.



**SEX ON SUNDAY**  
**July 7–15, 2017**  
 Cohn Side Door Theatre

*A Play by Chisa Hutchinson • Directed by Eric Bultman* When Laila moves into a new place uptown, she has to work a little harder than most to fit in. Surrounded by conservative neighbors, Laila is trying her best to make new connections while keeping her business private – which becomes difficult when she starts dating a submissive, and the girls start nosing up in her business. Laila's life becomes even harder when the husband of one of those neighbors becomes obsessed with Laila and blackmails her into offering him her service. *Sex On Sunday* challenges taboos on sex, race, relationships, and gender bias leaving everyone involved begging for more.



**ROCK OF AGES**  
**June 2–July 1, 2017**  
 Thigpen Main Stage

*Book by Chris D'arienzo • Music by Journey, Styx, Pat Benatar, Poison, Reo Speedwagon, Foreigner, Twisted Sister, Night Ranger, Whitesnake,*

*& Many More! Directed by Dewey Scott-Wiley • Music Direction by Christopher Cockrell* It's the end of the big, bad 80's in Hollywood, & the party has been raging hard. Aspiring rock star (and resident toilet cleaner) Drew longs to take the stage as the next big thing (and for Sherri, fresh off the bus from KS with stars in her eyes). But the rock & roll fairy-tale is about to end when developers sweep into town with plans to turn the Strip into just another capitalist strip mall. Can Drew, Sherri & the gang save the strip—and themselves—before it's too late? Only the music of Styx, Journey, Bon Jovi, Whitesnake & more hold the answer.



**BLACK SUPER HERO MAGIC MAMA**  
**August 4–12, 2017**  
 Thigpen Main Stage

*Winner Of The 2016 Playwrights' Festival By Inda Craig-Galvan • Directed by Stan Brown* Single mother, Sabrina Jackson, is unable to cope with the shooting death of her 14-year-old son Tremarion by a White police officer. Rather than become yet another grieving Black mother leading community rallies, Sabrina escapes into her own mind. There, she lives out a comic book fantasy where she is a super hero crime fighter, mimicking the Maasai Angel comic book her artist son had created. Sabrina must decide if she'll stay in the splash-and-pow world where sons don't die, or return to the real world and mourn her loss.

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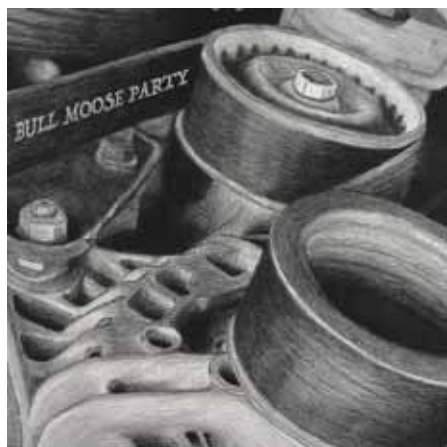


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with lines like, “Yesterday is like a dream/ A clouded haze of memories/ Like shadows of a bird that flew away,” connoting a man holding only the ashes of former days.

*Burning in the Afterglow* is Britt’s fifth independent album. While his acclaim spreads among the Columbia’s music fans for his often catchy and approachable sounds, this album experiments with a new, elevated atmosphere for their ears’ enlightenment.

-Kelley Douglas



## BULL MOOSE PARTY

### *Bull Moose Party*

The first note kicks in the door then this monster starts stomping through your house, a hulk given life by electrified jolts of guitar muscle, grumbling and growling low end from its gut, sweating from sizzling brass and cracks of snare that whip the beast along. It’s a hell of a start to the Bull Moose Party’s self-titled debut EP.

They really put some swamp gas in this introduction, “Homeless Blues,” a blues rock crawl where you can see the confluence of Black Sabbath and Gary Clark Jr. The heavy strings and solid beat are a hearty meal for your ears seasoned by the vocals of Ben Campbell who doesn’t make the mistake of lessers in their throwback genre. He doesn’t disserves a song by being derivative of singers that he isn’t. They’ve built some beautiful bones for the next couple tunes.

That elegance comes through in “All for You,” a waltzing ballad that stays classy, emphasizing the tasteful guitar work that weaves throughout the five tracks. Nice harmonies and whirling organ bring the song home, helping to thicken up the stew Bull

Moose Party has cooking. “Headlines” takes us back to muscular songwriting and riffing, bringing up their Jack White influence. If the album started off like a golem walking into the living room, now he’s smashing everything with sure hands. This is the peak of the EP.

Bull Moose Party should have stopped there. It’s unfortunate that they betray the unique touches they put on a well-trodden genre with “Sweet Seventeen.” It’s your standard *I got the blues...* trudge. Still, it’s done well and they don’t miss a beat. The EP ends on a good campfire, acoustic number, sounding like the Rolling Stones in their sullen moments, some sweet fret work interlacing charming songwriting.

Even given its latter missteps, the Bull Moose Party’s debut gives them a fighting start towards being one of the fiercest blues rock bands in town. -David Travis Bland



## NEPOTISM

### *The Free Lunch Program*

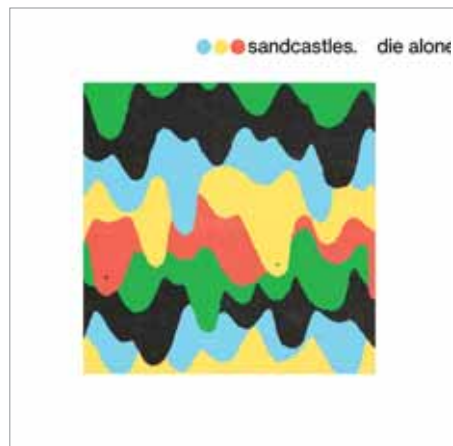
A microcosm of Nepotism’s latest, *The Free Lunch Program*, exists in its title track reprise, which begins like the score to an urban zombie film as we scan over the crumbles of a city. A sampling of ‘60s civil rights activist Dave Dennis cuts in — “Don’t bow down anymore. Hold your heads up. We want our freedom now!” — and vocalist Rob Kershaw comes in spitting, “This ain’t no time to play. This ain’t no time to grieve. Ain’t nobody out here winning,” with the urgency of Kendrick Lamar and a hint of gangsta rap braggadocio as he rounds out that people “bow down” to his message. The interlude gives a snapshot of the album’s mentality, ping-ponging be-

tween revolutionary leanings and wanting to be praised as contemporaries of their musical company.

But *The Free Lunch Program* begins with Nepotism’s heavier angle. “Shots Fired” is a hard alt-rock groove with purposive vocals driving the song. The contrast of political posturing and pop ambitions comes into stark resolution with the next track, “Listen Up.” It’s electro soundscape breaks into a synth hook built straight for radio play. The back and forth keeps going — a strength and weakness. Diversity of sound fights with an unfocused and inconsistent feel over the long run.

The band thrashes through “War Zone,” and then “Fire Signs” gives us a bossa nova-inflected tune that hits a 311 vibe. “Cry” is a piano ballad, followed by the album’s optimal salute and by far the best track, “Television.” With its hectic, screeching guitar and uptempo bombast the song’s a raging ode to Rage Against the Machine that keeps its own trajectory.

In the end, *The Free Lunch Program* populate itself with contradictions, sounding as apocalyptic as it is hopeful, and Nepotism is determined to make it work. -David Travis Bland



## SANDCASTLES.

### *Die Alone*

In the three years between *Die Alone* and sandcastles.’ 2013 album *tantrums* it’s easy to hear the growth of the band musically. While *tantrums* focused mostly on heartache and heartbreak, *Die Alone* is much more of a mid-20s coming-of-age record tackling depression, family problems, love, and finding your place among your peers.



*Die Alone* comes out screaming, with sandcastles, mastermind Bakari Lebbby's gravelly yell followed by distorted guitars and a thudding chorus of "crush it til you're chilling in a casket." In the short and heavy minute and a half song, Lebbby gives us a sneak peek into what's in the album. He mentions it's his "outlet," something which becomes quite clear as Lebbby rarely holds back on even his most private emotions on *Die Alone*. With each track he battles and struggles out loud with not just depression, but a shallowly concealed loneliness and combative substance use. If the album title wasn't clear enough that Lebbby was writing from a dark place, most of the song titles follow suit as well. Throughout *Die Alone* Lebbby seems trapped lyricall in extreme, distorted self-examination.

There's a weird dichotomy running through the album though, in that the music can often be upbeat and propulsive. More electronic tracks like "Okay, Cupid," "Carolina, I Love You, but You're Bringing Me Down," and "Black Sheep" are real gems—none of them are overcooked electronically and each melds its various beats and samples together seamlessly. It's not until later in the album that sandcastles goes back to what they teased at the beginning with "Crush." "Sad Sack" is a straightforward rock song with a huge hook, a swift change of pace from Side A of the record. Even still, it feels in line with the rest of the album, mostly because it hangs so closely together lyrically.

Lebbby slows it down near the end of the album with three strong, beautiful closing tracks. "Die Alone", the final cut, is the true vocal highlight. It seems like a goodbye song, with a full-on synth-laden ascension into the heavens at the end.

As a whole, the album has a tendency to come a bit too melodramatic, but that's often the reality of how we feel and think. Sometimes your mind is racing before you fall asleep, and maybe you're in a bad place. Maybe you're confused, or heartbroken, or your friends are passing you by career-wise and have moved on to big cities. Maybe the girl you love is marrying someone else, and you think you drink too much, and you know you shouldn't be smoking cigarettes. This is a record of those thoughts and that moment, a musical recognition that you are not alone in that state of depression. It takes

a lot of guts to share it all, even if you occasionally roll your eyes every now and then.

-David Stringer



## KENLEY YOUNG *Seneca Guns*

Kenley Young's latest album *Seneca Guns* brings a slick, modern-rock sound to the more traditional singer-songwriter style, a similar approach to his previous record *Standard Candle* from 2009. The album starts slow and acoustic-driven and eases its way into more distorted territory as it progresses, with a handful of standout tracks emerging from the diverse influences you find buried in this record.

"Cut You Up" is the first track that grabs my attention, a catchy song that sounds like something John Hughes had playing on his boom box in '85. "No Good To Me In Pieces" follows, and it broods and builds to a chorus that turns dissonance into something you can sing along to. "Duessa" is a smooth ballad, with horns that hammer home the vibe and package the song in an appropriately romantic fashion. "New Lows" mixes two things Kenley Young does best - emotional melodies and a high-energy chorus - resulting in catchiest of his heavier tunes on the album.

"In Front of the Choir" is the right choice for the closing track on *Seneca Guns*, a low-key exit piece with those romantic horns returning to the scene of the crime for a couple of musical breaks. With talk of lies and confessions, it seems appropriate that this song about the change that comes with both age and growth is the rawest, and arguably the best song on the album. -Michael Spawm

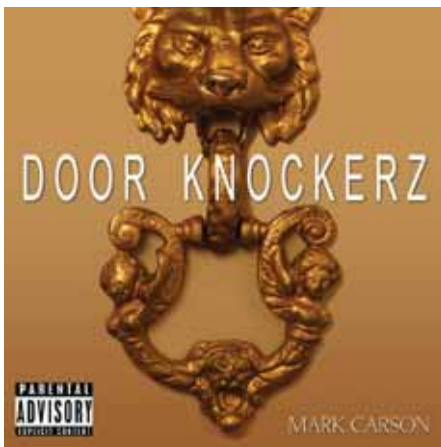


## THE SONG PROJECT, MARK RAPP & DEREK BRONSTON

*The Art of the Song*  
Vol. 3 *Bebop EP*

This ongoing collaboration between local trumpeter Mark Rapp and guitarist Derek Bronston by now has a familiar dynamic in its moody mix of modal and fusion jazz, so the idea of them tackling traditional bebop, as the title suggests, is a bit odd. Fortunately, things don't shift too far from the sonic blueprint that their two prior efforts established. Although it obviously features a few more up-tempo numbers than *Ballads*, there are still moments like "Pannonica" and "Scrapple from the Apple" that move at a more leisurely pace and have that same veneer of low-key experimental fusion (the former) and easy-going folk-infused jazz (the latter). On other cuts, the two players stated purpose becomes clearer as they take genuine bebop tunes like "Quicksilver." They do the busy and technically savvy riffing of the style quite well, but it doesn't necessarily play to the strength of the group, which seems why this EP is more of a mixed bag than a full-on commitment to a stylistic revival of bebop. Instead, it's tracks like the opening "Segment" that are the most invigorating, when the muscular alt-rock riffage that Bronston provides becomes a stunning foil for Rapp's trumpet to cascade over with abandon.

So while the title is an odd billing, this is another fascinating effort from one of the more unusual musical projects coming out of Columbia. -Kyle Petersen



## COLE CONNOR

*Soda*

## MARK CARSON

*Door Knockerz*

In some sense it might seem unfair to talk about local rappers Cole Connor and Mark Carson together just because they both happen to be white.

And yet, it's both their race and their particular styles that invite comparison. Each boasts a flow more than a little indebted to the Great White Hope of the genre, Eminem, and each appeared on the Columbia scene a few years ago as young, precocious emcees who hadn't quite figured out who they wanted to be but were headstrong to get there. And now, within months of each other, each also drops their first "mature," fully-formed records that give us a sense of each's future.

Of the two, it's Connor who is probably the more familiar name. As a member of NewSC and a protégé of the city's hip-hop titan-turned-godfather FatRat da Czar, he's

gotten ample stage time and taken notes from his mentor's professional style and ease with format-hopping, marketing skills, and pop instincts. *Soda*, like many Czar-affiliated efforts, features a unified feel even as it tackles different subjects and sounds. There's everything from "hot for teacher" odes ("Ripe") and romantic foible duets ("Playa," with fellow NewSC member Lalisa) to gritty street rap ("The Hit") and serious socially conscious efforts ("Vulture") here, and Connor handles each with a new sense of assuredness that he's only hinted at before. He's always had a fondness for tricky verbiage, but would often get tripped up when his aim exceeded his grasp before, but that stilted growing period seems over. In fact, what separates him and Carson more than anything is how fluid and dexterous his flow is, throwing change-ups and knuckleballs mid-song while his competitor simply brings the heat. Witness the Chance the Rapper-esque jerkiness on "Haps" or the Nas-inspired propulsive storytelling on "Vulture" to get a full of how far he's come.

For all their similarities, Carson often feels like the flipside of Connor's reach. Although he can often feel like he has only one speed, there's a smirking infectiousness to his delivery that feels effortless as much as Connor's is measured and painstaking. What it loses in technical craft it makes up for in pure bounce and braggadocio. The same is true of their production choices—Connor makes use of A-level local producers to shift from West Coast G-funk to the cinematic strings of "Vulture" and the rootsy folk-hop of Colorblind on "Sometimes," while Carson gets the organic, but more uniform, live band treatment from Jelani at Studio 23. Still, it works like a charming on the Crazy Horse-y vibe of "Bandwagon" and the slick 80s funk vibe of "The Ride," tracks with a sonic richness that can serve as a sort of a chasing duet partner for the inexhaustible push of Carson's flow.

Ultimately, if you pit the two in competition, Connor has the edge thanks to his emotional and technical range, but it's hard to deny that Carson's commitment to a singular style and persona give him an equal chance to break through. What's for sure, though, is that both these records suggest a bright future for Columbia hip-hop. *-Kyle Petersen*



## EIGHT TRACK PARADE

*Self-Titled*

There's a certain casual humility that pervades the music of Eight Track Parade that belies the quality of the musicianship—these cats can play, even if the songs are a bit soft-serve. Aesthetically there's a jammy blend of funk and classic rock, but with tightly-wound songs and a sharp hunger for musical moments rather than formless improvisation. Frontman Stephen Stokes is unlikely to set the world on fire with his affable vocals that have a pared-down Neil Young vibe, but his keyboard fills are dynamic and integral here, often darting through the tack or taking the instrumental lead more than sitting in the background. Guitarists Chance Glass and Steve Rebl play together beautifully, whether doing guns-blazing blues rock ("Black Sin," "Move On") or genuine funk romps ("Chicken Wing," "Funky Riffs Are Forever"). Glass's incendiary leads in particular are a highlight, almost as if he's throwing down for gauntlet for the other six-string dynamos in the city. Fitting for a group with such power in the front-end, drummer Andrew Hoose and bassist David Reddy provide not only solid support but also propel the nuanced shifts and muscular accents that such music requires to tick.

There's also a few well-tempered ballads here, "Burn" and the instrumental "Folly Beach," both of which suggest the group has cleaner pop-rock abilities in the bag as well. It feels kind of rare to have this kind of balance between instrumental prowess and aw-shucks rock 'n' roll exist on a local level with this much poise, but it's a welcome addition to the slightly-stale collection of roots-leaning rock groups in town. *-Kyle Petersen*

# Beyond Trump

BY KYLE PETERSEN

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How are you *feeling*?

Even now, more than two months into Donald Trump's presidency, I still feel like I have to ask the people I interview how they are handling the aftermath of the election. Not all artists are politically-minded, of course, and many probably appreciated the anti-elitism and swashbuckling populism of the reality television star while ignoring (or, perhaps, excusing) the white nationalist sentiments and demagogic undertones that laced his campaign.

But for most of us progressively-minded folks, there's a kind of psychic wounding that took place with Trump's election, a sense of alienation from what we thought was a kinder, gentler national identity that might be finally coming to the fore. And for women, LGBTQ folks, and people of color, the discomfort has to be even more palpable, more visceral, as a united federal government seems intent on stripping away their civil rights, their dignity, their very humanity. How could that not impact a person's art, I wondered?

The answers have been about what one might expect, ranging from disbelief and anger to wry frustration and even historically-aware chagrin. For the most part, though, artists seem to believe that whatever hap-

pens in the world only deepens their own missions, makes them more cognizant of the importance of what we are creating and why we are creating it. Even if they are appalled by the state of affairs in our nation and world, they find a kind of resilience in their often life-long pursuit of making sense of it through paint, song, or play.

It's a lesson I've been trying to draw on in my own life and own practice, even though I can't help but ask the question anew each time. As somebody who writes about arts and culture, I find a value in placing new contexts and fresh angles on the work we as a community are experiencing. This necessarily means thinking about the relationship between art and what's happening in our larger world, whether it's the natural disasters which have rocked South Carolina in recent years, the growing awareness of racial violence and animosities that have come to the fore with the police killing of Walter Scott and the nine mass shooting victims of the Emanuel AME church, and, yes, the rise of the most improbable and frightening political figure in my lifetime.

But it's just as important to realize that art, even art that is very much in response to such events, more often than not transcends or reaches beyond the specific moment to get at some larger understanding. Art, after all, is how we get at things that can't be expressed directly, that need looser, more ineffable

modes of expression to capture their totality. When we think about love, hate, joy, fear, longing, or sorrow, we don't tend to turn to the sobering rationalisms of science or even the level-headed accounting of our reality—instead, we turn to art, to something that can delve into our interior reality or soar above it in proximity to salvation. It lifts us up and brings us down in ways that we aren't otherwise capable of. I honestly think it puts our best selves on display.

The work of Leo Twiggs, our cover artist, is a fine example of such efforts. His *Requiem for Mother Emanuel No. 3* (page 14) plots expected elements—the church spires that flicker and double as KKK hoods, the murky Confederate flag that seems like it is exploding into fireworks, and nine Xs that signify humanity and inhumanity, like both bullet marks and crosses. It's layered with meaning and tragedy, all parts expressing abject loss, dismay, and nuanced confusion at how to pay tribute to those killed in the shooting. It does more than any fact-driven summation or analysis of events can possibly hope.

Humans are imperfect, clumsy creatures, full of foibles and petty grievances. It's in art that we become spirits and angels, beckoning us to the world we want, the world we imagine. So maybe I should be asking folks not how they are responding to Trump, but how is their art creating the world that we want it to be rather than the world that is.

# DANSE du ventre

**BELLY DANCING  
WITH ASHLEY MOORE**

BY CINDI BOITER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BREE BURCHFIELD





The fact that Ashley Bennett Moore is a mesmerizing soul has little to do with her appearance, though, by anyone's estimation, she has all the traits of a beautiful person.

Moore's mesmerizing factor has more to do with her persona—the way she looks at you, the way she carries herself, and lately, the way she carries her baby daughter Pepper. Once you engage Moore in conversation it quickly becomes obvious that her intellect matches her persona. Quick, intuitive, self-aware, challenging, protective. Some of these traits Moore may have been born with. Others, she likely developed as elaborate defense mechanisms, as humans are wont to do, coping methods that help us get by in a world we either don't accept or that doesn't appear to accept us. It was while trying to find a place of belonging as a young woman that Moore encountered meditation and yoga, and interestingly enough, from yoga, the art of the belly dance. Today, as Moore looks at 30, motherhood, womanhood, and personhood, it is with belly dance that she finds her greatest peace, her most true sense of self, and a world of welcome that she not only accepts, but creates.

# THE

daughter of a single mother, Moore spent the early part of her childhood in the Clinton township area of Detroit before moving back to the place of her birth in rural Georgia to be closer to their family. Even though she was only in elementary school, Moore was aware enough of her culture to know that she was different. To her classmates she talked weird, and she wore weird clothes. "From the fifth grade on I didn't fit in with my peers," Moore says. When in the sixth grade she was temporarily moved to a school for the fine arts where she danced every day and felt like she was a part of the culture, but that move was short lived and she soon found herself back in the unsophisticated surrounds of Waycross, Georgia. "So however weird I already was, I got a lot weirder after that," Moore says.

"I finished high school in Waycross but I never made any lasting friendships there," she says. One of the ways she entertained herself was by practicing yoga. In an on-going search to find stimulating new workout videos Moore came across a DVD called "Yoga Isolations and Drills" by Rachel Brice, illustrated with an exotic tribal woman on the cover. "The video was all about belly dancing and from that point on I was never the same again," she says.

Moore did her research and found that Brice was conducting a workshop in Florida and, at 19-years-old, she traveled there to study with her.













Belly dancing became a part of Moore's life and she began teaching any kind of fitness class she could find and eventually moved to Columbia, SC in 2007 at the age of only 20-years-old. "I knew I needed to be near people who were more open minded and ready to rock and roll," Moore says. "I had gotten involved in an online community called Tribal.net and met a fellow belly dancer from Columbia who invited me here. So I came."

Belly dancing, or *danse du ventre*, as it became known during the Victorian period, is primarily a series of movements that isolate specific muscles in the torso while at the same time articulating one's hips. Primarily of Middle Eastern origin, belly dancing plays the roles of both a folk dance and a performing art. First introduced to the US at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, the art form has been imitated and co-opted throughout western culture for decades until, in the 1987, a distinctively American style of Tribal Fusion belly dance began to circulate. It is Tribal Fusion dance that Moore practices and teaches.

Moore joined the now defunct belly dancing group Delirium Tribal. "We had a monthly gig at Art Bar, but I had to wait to perform because I wasn't 21 yet." Delirium Tribal eventually merged with a local fire performance group to create Columbia Alternacirque where she performed until she was 23-years-old. "I was so happy to have an outlet to be weird and nerdy," Moore says.

But a period of unhappiness that stemmed from a combination of social media discord and misinterpretations from people the young woman barely knew caused her to look elsewhere for the peace she had sought in the local belly dance community. "I heard all kinds of things said about me that weren't true. I hated social media and I hated rumors. I hated that everybody thought it was okay to have a fucking opinion about me. I stopped trusting—both myself and the women in my

life—which was terrible because what I had wanted was to be surrounded by sisters."

Moore attended college and found that she loved it. "I took a gender studies class and a world religions class, and I found my activist side. I wanted to be a steward of the world."

When the opportunity to study abroad came along she jumped at it, spending a semester in Salamanca, Spain, a UNESCO city known for its ornate sandstone architecture. Upon returning from abroad however, she found herself once again suffering from anxiety and depression and, to cope, she worked non-stop.

It was during this time that Moore found love and became pregnant with baby Pepper. In December 2015 she married. However, a bought with undiagnosed pre-eclampsia and a nearly fatal experience due to postpartum hemorrhaging created even more doubt in the new parent's mind. "I didn't trust my body. I was afraid it had turned against me and I was afraid to be alone with my baby," she says. "Pepper was six-months-old before I could trust myself with her."

But one day as the baby played in the floor Moore witnessed her daughter pull up and support herself on a table. Music was playing in the background and, suddenly, Pepper looked at her mother and began to move her little body to the rhythm that she heard. "She was dancing!" Moore says, teary-eyed. "And that was it for me. I decided right then that I needed to be a dancer again. I needed and wanted to be a belly dancer again. I've got to be that mom."

Moore used social media to gauge interest in whether she should offer any classes and she reached out to Shigeharu Kobayashi at Tapp's Arts Center, who was eager to help Moore make her plans work out. In July 2016 she offered her first set of classes in belly dancing and she hasn't had any time off since.

I WAS SO  
HAPPY  
TO HAVE  
AN  
OUTLET  
TO BE  
WEIRD  
& NERDY.







Today, Moore is as fully entrenched in tribal life as she is in her family life. She regularly offers classes in beginning belly dancing as well as intermediate belly dancing in her own studio at Tapp's. She feels not only confident as a woman but actualized as an artist. And she feels that she has transcended the self-doubt that caused her to question not only herself but her own body. "I'm doing what I love despite my personal body issues and perceived societal expectations of what a woman's body should be like," she says. "It's made me a better advocate for my students. And I hope it inspires others to show up and do the work."

Belly dancing is also a decided feminist endeavor, according to Moore. "Belly dance, to me, symbolizes an opportunity to bond with other women in a way that had not been so obvious to me before. There is something intensely satisfying about learning something new and sharing that "aha" experience every time we practice together. And, because American belly dance borrows from so many other cultures (Rom, Rajasthani, West African, Ballet, Contemporary, Hip-Hop, Egyptian folkloric, Turkish, Flamenco) there is never a shortage of new worlds to explore."

Moore continues, "For many of my students, taking belly dance was the first time they really felt autonomy and ownership with their body. A lot of mothers, when they talk about their bodies, they refer to their children and their partners' habits and preferences. In belly dance, we refer to our bodies in terms of what we have learned with them," she says. "And for many of my students, this is their first experience in a feminine community that is both physical in a non-sexual way, and non-competitive. It's a very practical execution of every-day feminism."



Moore continues her study of the art form in order to refine her own performance and have more to offer her students. April 2017 will see her traveling to Portland to study once again with Brice, her original mentor. While she toys with the idea of creating a professional company, she knows she wants to remain true to the community project she has invested so much of herself into over the past year. “Admittedly, we are super-nerds and tend to dance for each other, so our dancing can become more and more technical, focused on layering rhythms—moving our hips to 16th notes and rolling our bellies on half notes, and gliding across the stage with a nearly undetectable, vibrating shimmy,” she says.

Even baby Pepper gets into the act sometimes with her own versions of shimmying, shivering, and vibrating. Moore wants to do what she can to insure that her tiny daughter is as comfortable in her own skin when she is a grown woman as she is right now. Maybe belly dancing will be a part of that.

# P L A Y I N G   W I T H   I T

by Ray McManus

When I was an MFA student at USC, I was lucky enough to be invited to lunch with Susan Ludvigson and Nikky Finney – two of the writers reading at the Spring Festival that year. It was a good lunch. The world outside was full of flowers. And I was in love with teriyaki. At some point, after what I'm sure was brilliant conversation, Nikky leaned over the table and asked me if I was a poet. I could've said yes, and probably would have, but Nikky was a "real" poet. Susan was a "real" poet. So, I said I just wrote poems. I could tell that Nikky was disappointed by my response, but I didn't know why. And when lunch ended and I had to get back to class, Nikky shook my hand, looked me dead in the eye, and said "don't play with it."

Fifteen years later, I think I finally know what Nikky meant. Ask me now and I'll tell anyone – I'm a poet. Yes, I write poems and that, by definition, would be enough to warrant the title, I suppose. But that's too easy. Writing poems doesn't automatically make one a poet, no more than playing catch makes one a baseball player, or baking a cake makes one a baker, or building a pergola makes one a carpenter. Doing is not the same as being. If you haven't devoted your life to being a "thing" -- whatever that "thing" is -- then you can't be that thing. You're just a doing a thing. And you're just playing with it. And it's fun to play, sure. But at some point, you better either get real or go to bed.

I haven't slept in fifteen years.

If you are a poet, you are not a stage poet or a page poet or a performance poet or an academic poet or a street poet or a naked poet. If you are poet, if you devote your life to being the thing you are (not what you necessarily want to be, but are), then these labels are nothing more than insecurity talking. And

you are playing with it. Be a fucking poet, or don't. Be willing to give over to something bigger than yourself, or don't. Understand that you will have to wipe an ass, clean out a fridge, locate the smell in your garage from time to time. Understand that everything is going to be undone. Or don't. But if someone asks you if you are a poet, don't call yourself a poet because you think it's hot, badass, or makes you sound smart. Poets, serious poets, as nice as most are, will hear it in your voice, know you are lying and stab you in the throat while you sleep. All out of love, of course. All out of love. Balls to bone.

Poets are the architects and the vandals. Poets are the exceptions and the examples. Poets love your god and hate your god. Poets build bridges and burn them down. Not out of some ego trip. They can't help it. We can't help it. I can't help it. I'm lucky enough to call myself a poet as much as someone who is cursed is just lucky enough to call himself alive. Like most, I want to look for what is good here: my family, my work, my friends – all good. My bones work. That's good. But the truth is, I am on a quest to make sense of the world around me. I can't ignore the constant hum in my right ear. I can't ignore the elderly couple in the park. I can't ignore pulling out my son's teeth. I can't ignore my brothers and sisters fighting to make a living wage. For better or worse. It is not a blessing. It is not a celebration. It is a god-damned curse. Sometimes it is a lonely curse. Sometimes it is an angry curse. I can't play with it.

I am a poet. I live and die in South Carolina. Every day. At least once a day, I hate it here. At least once a day, my heart is broken. Nothing works. Nothing moves. Nothing happens. Like most, I cry on the inside. Like most, I want to love everything forever. Like most, I search and observe, I tiptoe around the house in the dark and listen for breathing. During the day, I scream at the windshield because

I don't know what I'm doing. I read. I witness. I write. I wrestle with my revisions. I struggle with my confidence because you cannot be a poet if you are not willing to see that you are just a small part of an endless sea of parts. As a poet, I am constantly looking for parts. Sometimes the right parts, sometimes the wrong parts, sometimes just to see how this part can fit with that part. Sometimes I pick up the parts and eat them. Sometimes they eat me. Sometimes I feel guilty for what I build. But I know what I am.

A baseball player, a baker, and a carpenter know other players, bakers, and carpenters. Maybe they do not know them personally, but they know their work. They imitate. They respect. They hate. Poets read other poets. Poets read journals full of other poets. They imitate. They respect. They hate. They dream. All to be a part of a larger conversation, one that is always current, always revised. It's all part of it. It's all part of it. The devotion of it. I guess I could have been a figure skater. I could have been a cabbage farmer. I could have managed a hardware store. I became a poet. I wrote poetry back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I have it somewhere. Back then, I played with it. Some years, I played with it more than others. But not now. Not anymore. And yes, that is your pet on the fire.

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Ray McManus is the author of three books of poetry: *Punch, Red Dirt Jesus, Driving through the Country before You Are Born*, and he is the co-editor of *Found Anew*. His poetry and prose has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. Ray is an associate professor of English at the University of South Carolina Sumter, where he teaches Irish Literature, Southern Literature, and creative writing, and he directs the South Carolina Center for Oral Narrative. He is a new contributing editor for *Jasper Magazine*. For more information, visit his website: [ramcmanuspoetry.com](http://ramcmanuspoetry.com).



# LETTER TO A CERTAIN QUEER BROWN BOY, AGE 10

BY ANTON DELA CRUZ

Dear Boy,

Today a group of boys in your fifth grade class will call you a sand nigger. At the end of the day, they will corner you in the back of the classroom, three of them lined up in front of you with your back to the closet, and they will discuss the appropriateness of calling you a gook, a chink, a spik, a nigger. They will inspect you like an animal at a zoo, debating what type of cage to imprison you in. As they do this, you will feel pieces of you fall away, burying themselves deep into your gut, but you will say nothing: not to them, not to your teachers, not to your parents.

Boy, I am not telling you this to scare you, because I know you will grow accustomed to the casual cruelties thrown at and around you. I am telling you this because I know you will grow accustomed to the casual cruelties thrown at and around you.

You will dodge the word faggot as it kills those behind you. You will carry your silence and guilt in your stomach like an ulcer, and it will burn a hole through you. But it is not your fault.

You are a kid. You are a kid, and the grown-ups are absent. You are a kid now, but you will grow into an adult. It will not come easy, or always, but you will fill the silence with noise and music and crackling, and sometimes it will be enough.

When you grow up, you will find what comes after the silence.

You will travel across continents and oceans and meets others carrying pain shaped and sharpened like yours, and you will hear them. And they will listen. And they will hear.

Sincerely,  
A Certain Queer Brown Man

Published originally in *Emerge: 2015 Lambda Literary Fellows Anthology* (Lambda Literary, 2016), edited by Marissa Johnson-Valenzuela, a collection of literary work by writers selected for the 2015 Writers Retreat for Emerging LGBTQ Voices. The annual retreat, established by Lambda Literary in 2007, is the first of its kind for LGBTQ writers, offering mentoring by established writers, exercises in craft, as well as a chance to make connections with publishers and build a community of peers.

Anton Dela Cruz is a Pilipinx writer based in Columbia, South Carolina. He has been awarded fellowships and residencies to VONA/Voices, Lambda Literary, Kundiman, among others. When not writing, he's finding creative Southern substitutes for his father's recipes.

# The “Promise of Wildness”

## John Lane’s *Coyote Settles the South*

REVIEW BY  
JOHNATHAN BUTLER

**J**ohn Lane’s *Coyote Settles the South* (University of Georgia Press) ponders the questions raised by the arrival of the coyote in the American South. Although he teaches environmental studies as well as English at Wofford College, Lane emphasizes that he approaches the subject as a poet rather than a scientist, an orientation that sometimes puts him a little at odds with the people he encounters in his search to learn more about the new arrival. Describing his first experience with southern coyotes—he first heard them howling, appropriately, one Halloween—he writes, “In that first brief coyote encounter I saw some promise of wildness returning to our region. I saw the redemption of our landscape wounded and scarred by hundreds of years of human settlement, a hope that may be hard to explain to my friends and neighbors” (6-7).

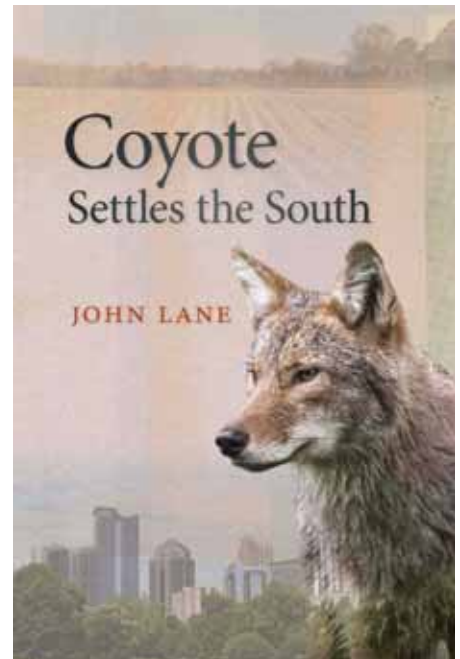
Lane is charmed by the coyote’s resourcefulness and resilience, and by the return of wilderness to the Southeast that its arrival represents. The ecosystems of the American South have been without a top predator for some time, as anyone knows who has had a garden nibbled to nothingness by white-tailed deer. And while the coyote is no wolf, it is a largish, canid predator, something otherwise absent in the South, save for those pockets of wilderness where the red wolf has been reintroduced with very limited success. Into this ecosystem teeming with whitetails and other prey, and free of any serious com-

petition from other predators, came the sly and omnivorous coyote. And Lane emphasizes that we’ve set the table and all but rolled out the red carpet: “We made the landscape that created success for them. We have been foster parents to their pioneering success with our vast alterations of both landscape and biome. We are responsible both for them, now, and for what we have made” (65). Consequently, the coyote has been very successful. Lane argues, and all of the experts he consults agree, that the coyote is here to stay. Even Atlanta has coyotes.

The coyote’s spread to the southeast seems appropriate given the role, in western Native American mythologies, of Coyote as a trickster; the trickster is, above all, a boundary-crosser. And it is difficult not to be charmed by the coyote’s ability to piece together an existence in a variety of environments, often right alongside humans. This adaptability also makes the southern coyote’s habits a bit of a mystery: coyotes in different regions rely on different food sources and behavior to survive. Lane relates accounts of coastal coyotes digging up turtle eggs, or simply waiting nearby for them to hatch.

But while he admires the coyote’s versatility, Lane is not naïve about its effect on Southeastern ecosystems, or the responses the coyote provokes wherever it sticks its narrow snout. Like other immigrants, the coyote is the subject of fear and hostility, some of it perhaps warranted—Lane describes the canid’s predation on deer fawns, which has earned it the ire of hunters, many of whom shoot coyotes on sight. We might see a bit of ironic justice in these hunters’ frustrations, however, since the coyote’s eastward migration was likely advanced by hunters bringing captured coyotes east for use in training their dogs. He quotes fox hunter Ben Hardaway: “There may be some question in the minds of the State Fish and Game biologists as to how the coyote crossed the Mississippi River in the eastern migration, but there is no doubt in my mind—he crossed in a crate on the back of a pickup driven by a Georgia foxhunter” (26). Brought across the Mississippi by eastern hunters, the coyote has established a territory that stretches all the way to the Atlantic coast.

As a poet, Lane is interested not only in the story of the coyote’s environmental effects,



but in another, related story, that of the disappearance of the South’s rural customs: he mentions hilltop hunts, a pack of dogs baying as they run down the trail of some animal they pursue—a sound I heard in my Spartanburg county childhood. As the forests were sliced by highways and pushed back to accommodate subdivisions, folkways disappeared along with the bear, the turkey, the fox. “Where will future southern poets and songwriters find their lyrics of wildness and love and loss now that the farms and dairies are vanishing and the suburbs are filling in the spaces between the cities?” Lane asks (23). The hope that Lane holds on to is that something of southern folkways and southern wilderness might survive, that we might still learn to live alongside wildness, and that if we do we’ll gain something difficult to put into words, a deeper knowledge of the wildernesses inside and outside ourselves. He writes, “At night when I hear the coyotes in three directions and the serenade goes on a long time, it occurs to me that there is no sound more American than this, a coyote howl, and so to hate it (and them) is to hate myself” (6).

According to Navajo mythology, Coyote has been around since the beginning. If the coyote’s success on both sides of the Mississippi is any indication, it will be here at the end as well.

# Seeing Us in James D. McCallister's *Let the Glory Pass Away*

REVIEW BY  
KYLE PETERSEN

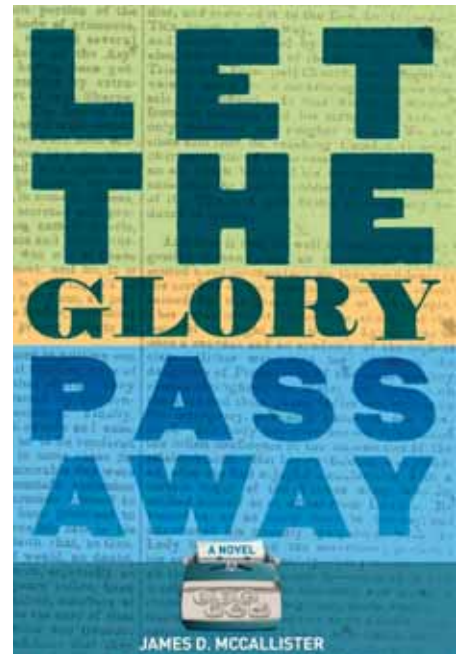
*It's funny how hard it is to see yourself in the mirror.*

That's what I was thinking a lot about after finishing James McCallister's new novel *Let the Glory Pass Away*, his third published effort and first under his own Mind Harvest Press imprint. The book takes for its subject a fictionalized version of Columbia's arts scene, replete with both mover-and-shaker leader types and struggling, vaguely dissatisfied artists, with a governor adversarial to arts funding to boot. It's a landscape that McCallister knows well, having owned a hippie retail shop in the heart of 5 Points for two decades while becoming known as a writer around town and sporadic professor, so it makes sense that he would be able to craft an uncanny facsimile of the city's cultural currents. And, indeed, the two focal points of the book mirror real-life developments: a quest to get a piece of public art built in honor of a yesteryear rock star, now a recluse, that remains the city's sole large-scale cultural export, and, concurrently, a festival celebrating the resurgence and revitalization of the arts in the Main Street district. The former endeavor obviously mirrors the Hootie & the Blowfish sculpture in 5 Points, while the latter mirrors the rise of places like The

Nickelodeon and Tapp's Art Center in historic downtown Columbia.

These recognizable broad strokes are what McCallister hangs his true narrative on, which is on a middle-aged writer, Cortland Beauchamp, with some early success trying to find his groove again—and some romantic love—while these events are unfolding. So, the book ends up as much an intense reflection on the author's dedication to writing and creative success as it is on the city's art scene writ large, and shares many of the same small pleasures and disappointing pitfalls that can plague such efforts. McCallister does a great job delving into the behind-the-scenes politics and machinations of cultural organizations, including an astute recognition of how personal relationships are intimately tied up in such affairs, as well as providing a detailed window into the interior life of a dedicated creative writer. But, too, the dangers of such intense navel-gazing also crop up here—long passages of waxing poetic in purple prose on the writing process can slide into a bit of self-regard, and there's a certain indulgence of wish fulfillment to write about a writer with some success and fans apparently scattered throughout the state waiting to be bumped in to. Such moments reach a few cringeworthy peaks, including when a eulogy for a fallen arts leader becomes a chance to read the governor the riot act about defunding the arts—something which almost unbelievably manages to get a sequel just a few chapters later.

Such details aside, there's no denying that McCallister is adept at spinning a yarn, managing to intertwine the plotlines of creative



struggle, romantic love, and depiction of larger cultural and civic life quite well. And while his main character suffers from some creative indulgences, the other characters that populate his narrative—the on-and-off the wagon roadie-turned-soundman, the restaurateur civic leader, the struggling singer/songwriter still looking to strike gold—are detailed and fully realized, evading typecasting just enough to come alive. Even some of the most cliché-laden possibilities here—the reclusive rock star suffering from PTSD, the two-faced governor playing craven politics—strike the right notes.

In the end, even the quibbles with character are a testament to McCallister's craft—it's an engrossing tale that invites its own bit of a navel-gazing for members of both Columbia's arts scene and others like it all across the country.

# EQUINE ELEGY (II)

BY BRANDON RUSHTON

Because the bales must be unloaded individually by hand  
the workers understand the need for assembling  
an assembly line. Before there were factories there were  
factories. The horse on the dark side of the stable  
stays there. A young man and a young woman stand  
at the edge of a field and watch her mother aim  
a rifle at her father. Both of their glares dare the other  
to move first. Unfortunately, nothing  
comes of it. The young man and young woman remain  
on the outskirts of the field. If he said  
it's getting dark he meant he loved her. If she agreed  
to shoot the pistol in the pasture, even better.  
Consider the height. How long since both of them.  
The meadow is incredibly fast.

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Brandon Rushton is the winner of the 2016 *Gulf Coast Prize* and the 2016 *Ninth Letter* Literary Award for poetry. His poems have appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *The Journal*, *CutBank*, *Sonora Review*, *Passages North* and *Denver Quarterly*. He co-founded the poetry journal *Oxidant / Engine*. He holds an MFA from the University of South Carolina. Born and raised in Michigan, he now lives and writes in Charleston, South Carolina and teaches writing at the College of Charleston.



# HANDLERS

BY NATHALIE ANDERSON

1.

Out from the woods to sun on the rocks  
they come, as autumn falls, and you can't tell  
the chatter of leaves from their rattle of warning:  
with what slow steps along the mined hillside  
through springs coiled tight and ready to volley.

Yet by God's grace the preacher takes them up  
so confidently, so casually, so quick,  
a lightning bolt in each hand, held and firmly bound.

2.

Her heart kept startling, a nervy bird, clutch  
of blue at the breast, her fingers' twining and  
intertwining fretting up the shakiest of nests.

His arm snaking round and his hand hovering –  
she knew he'd swallow her down. Knew he'd keep her  
own hands flustering til held and firmly bound.

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Nathalie Anderson is the author of four books of poetry – *Following Fred Astaire*, *Crawlers*, *Quiver*, and *Stain* – and libretti for four operas. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Atlanta Review*, *DoubleTake*, *Natural Bridge*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Recorder*. Anderson grew up in Columbia, and teaches now at Swarthmore College, where she is a Professor in the Department of English Literature and directs the Program in Creative Writing. This poem appears in her chapbook *Held and Firmly Bound*, published this spring by Muddy Ford Press.

# ORDINARY RITUALS

BY JUAN DAVID CRUZ DUARTE

Claudio, my mother's dad, would get angry  
as hell if you sat at the table with  
no shirt on. He once told a cousin of  
mine that he looked like a tramp for breaking  
this arbitrary rule of decorum.

My grandfather is dead, and it is summer  
in South Carolina. Sometimes the heat  
and the humidity are unbearable.  
And even though I always eat alone,  
I never sit at the table with no  
shirt on. I don't think my grandpa is looking  
at me from the great beyond, I don't think  
we go somewhere else when our bodies die.  
I think that one life is more than enough.

But still, I always wear a freaking shirt  
when I'm having breakfast, dinner or lunch.  
Sometimes I wonder why I keep doing this.  
Who knows, perhaps I do it for Claudio.  
It might be something I do in order  
to remember. Maybe I do it for you,  
grandpa.

Like these verses that you will never read.

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Juan David Cruz Duarte is a Colombian graduate student living in Columbia, South Carolina. Some of his essays, poems and short stories have been published in the Colombian literary magazine *Escarabeo*. His work has also appeared in *Jasper*, *Blue Collar Review*, and *Burningword*. Cruz Duarte published a collection of short stories (*Dream a Little Dream of Me: cuentos siniestros*) in 2011, and a short novel (*La noche del fin del mundo*) in 2012.

# AMERICA.

BY LEN LAWSON

A dark-skinned mother of triplets weeps  
holding the infants for the first time.

With sweat pooling in her gullet  
she announces to the hospital room

*These children will be called  
Ferguson, Baltimore, and Charleston.*

The babies cycle around  
the room through many hands.

A nurse conveys the news of  
their names to the father in

the waiting area. He glances  
at the rapid fire sun rioting

through the window.  
Sweat angers a necklace

around his beige button shirt.  
A terror slaps his eyes

back at her like daggers.  
He cuts her in a whisper

*I have babies being born  
to weeping mothers*

*all over this country  
Right now!*

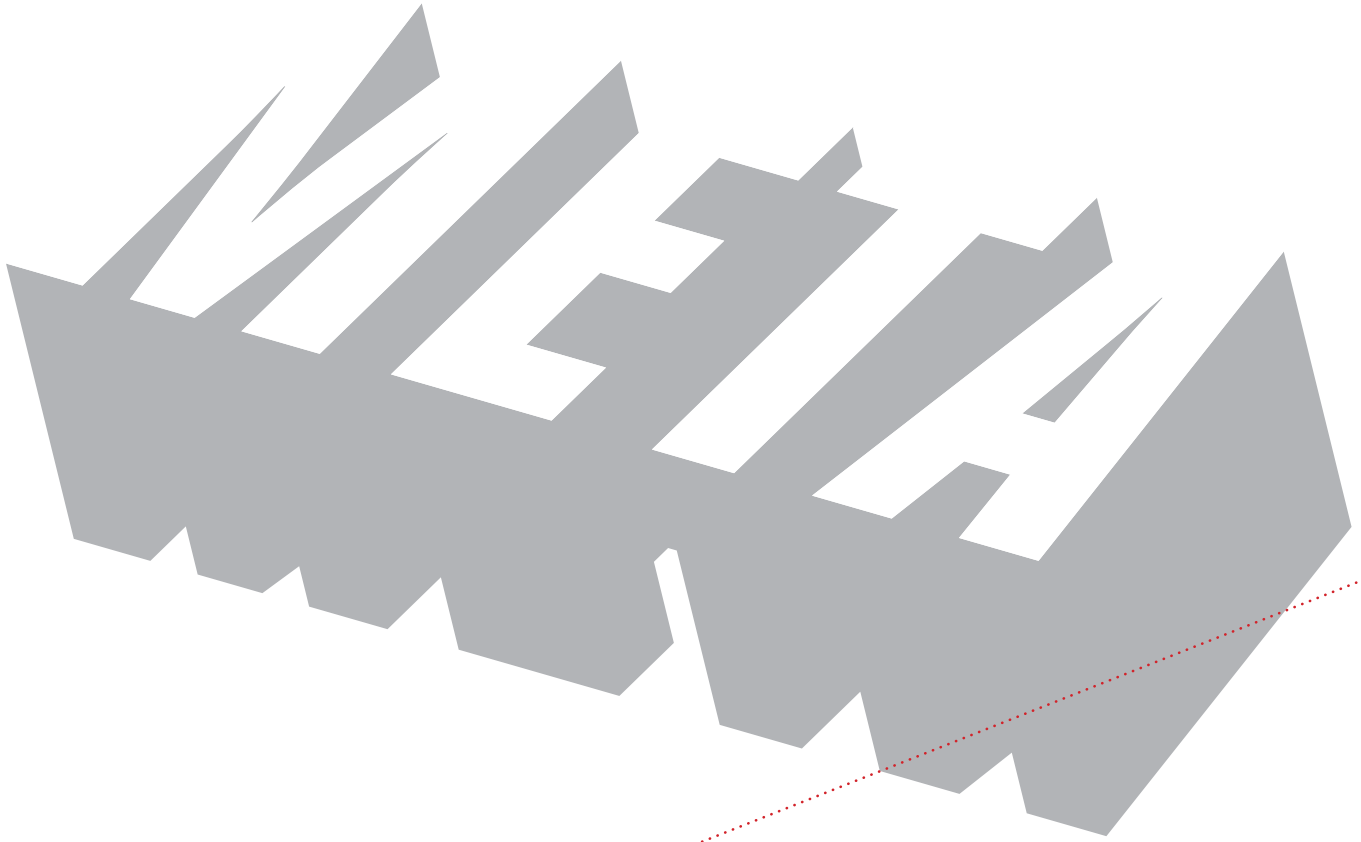
*Tell me their names!  
Tell me they matter!*

*Excerpted from Hand in Hand: Poets Respond to Race, 2017 Muddy Ford Press.*

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Len Lawson began pursuing a Ph.D. in English Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2016. Len is co-founder of the Poets Respond to Race initiative and Poet-in-Residence for Sumter County Cultural Commission. A Berfrois Poetry Prize finalist and a Best of the Net nominee, Len has poems appearing in journals and anthologies such as *Pluck! A Journal of Affrilachian Arts and Culture*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Poetry on the Comet*, *Fall Lines*, and *The Petigru Review*.

# IT MIGHT GET



## *A Field Report From Across Enemy Lines*

BY MICHAEL SPAWN

*Here is where a critic might count. Putting the pieces together, trying to understand what is novel and adventurous, what is enervated and complacent, can give us an idea of how much room there is in this musical culture, and in American culture—an idea of what a singer and a band can do with a set of songs mixed into the uncertainty that is the pop audience. Looking back into the corners, we might discover whose America we are living in at any moment, and where it came from. With luck, we might even touch that spirit of place Americans have always sought, and in the seeking have created.*

*-Greil Marcus, **Mystery Train***




There's a scene early in Cameron Crowe's 2000 film *Almost Famous* where William Miller, the story's fifteen year-old protagonist and an aspiring rock journalist, is embarking upon his first assignment, interviewing Black Sabbath for *Creem* magazine (for those who haven't seen the movie, this is taking place in 1973. Also, why haven't you seen this movie? Are you still stuck on *Jerry Maguire*?) But when he tries to get backstage through the concert hall's loading dock, he's repeatedly sent packing by the bouncer, as smug and unsympathetic as any filmic gatekeeper. Just when William is about to admit defeat, a tour bus pulls to a screeching halt right behind him. It's Stillwater, the night's opening band, and they're running late. As they bang on the backstage door to be let in, William spies an opportunity. Introducing himself as a journalist, he tells them he'd like to interview them, but they're having none of it. "We play for the fans, not the critics," one member tells him. Another calls him the enemy. So William plays the last card in his hand. Addressing each member by name, he tells them how much he loves the band and praises their latest single. "And Russell," he says to the guitarist, "the guitar sound is incendiary. Incendiary." He turns to leave and the musicians pass a stunned, silent moment before calling after him. "Don't stop there," one says. "Hey, I'm incendiary too, man," says another, breaking into a broad smile. And with that, Stillwater ushers William backstage, no longer the enemy but an honored guest.

The scene is meant to be funny, and it is. But it's also a near-perfect illustration of a dynamic familiar to anyone who has worked as a music journalist or been a success-hungry musician. As it happens, I have been (and am currently) both. But, as the drummer for the ever-so-politely reviewed *Shallow Palace*, I was a musician first and, try as I might, it's not always easy to discard what I've learned from years of touring, gigging, and grinding away in the interest of journalistic objectivity. By the nature of my experiences and the people I've experienced them with, the dividing line between artist and critic will inevitably become frayed now and again through nobody's fault but my own. But that's me. For some, the difference is as clear as that between the sun and the moon. I'm reminded of a conversation I had with a prominent local musician four (five?) years ago when I told him I had started freelancing. He was giddy with excitement and when I asked him why, he said, "Because, man. It's like we just snuck one of our own across enemy lines." I didn't then and still don't share his sentiment, but it didn't surprise me. There's no shortage of bands and artists, from arena-hopping megastars to your local dive bar heroes, who regard the music press like one might an unfamiliar Doberman; it's safer to assume it's hostile unless it proves itself otherwise. And if it's friendly, all the better. Unless an anti-establishment stance is central to an artist's aesthetic or they're so self-actualized as to be totally unaffected, everyone likes to be liked. Right?

But it's the extra-insular artist/critic relationships that are most interesting. They seem to exist predominantly in small to mid-sized urban enclaves where the role of the local music press can often be a subject of debate and where the lines between journalist and subject, "enemy" and "ally," can sometimes become too blurry to see. Of course, these things can only happen in places with enough artistic activity to support regular coverage.

Places like Columbia, for example.



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Few in town have had more first-hand experience with this dynamic than Jordan Lawrence, the Arts & Entertainment editor at Columbia's *Free Times* (and who, full disclosure, is the person I report to as one of the alt-weekly's contributing writers.) He began covering music in 2007 at the University of North Carolina's student paper, *The Daily Tar Heel*. Upon graduation in 2010, he freelanced for several local papers in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Triangle and quickly became a writer and editor for now-defunct *Shuffle* magazine, which covered music in both Carolinas. Unsurprisingly, his view of music journalism's role in its community is pretty clear-cut.

"I think it serves two essential purposes, the first being to the reader—that is, not the artist. I don't necessarily see it as a way to pick and choose what you listen to as much as a way to think about it and to greater understand it. I think that taking in the perspectives and critical opinions of people with genuine knowledge and deep understanding of the work and the way that it fits into associated genres and associated styles can help you understand it better...On the artists' end, I think it's a way to understand and appreciate and take into whatever account a particular artist wants to what kind of response the art is getting."

Noting his desire to have as many different opinions as possible represented in *Free Times*, Lawrence says, "I've built a staff of people who live here and are in bands, live here and aren't in bands, and people who

don't live here and have a different perspective. If we're going to have that hardline critical perspective, it's important to bring in all points of view."

Both approaches are totally reasonable from a journalistic standpoint, but dustups can certainly arise when an artist feels that the critical response they or someone else has received wasn't authored by someone with a "deep understanding" of the work. Such an incident occurred last November, when *Free Times* published separate blurbs about local rock bands Dr. Roundhouse and lowercase gods, written by musician and *Free Times/Jasper* contributor Ony Ratsimbaharison and myself, respectively. Taking umbrage with what he saw as wrongheaded assessments of bands he likes and considers friends, Bubbs Ruebella, frontman of local punk-metal band Pig Head Dog, brought his grievances to social media, where he was joined by a chorus of voices—both musician and not—who agreed that much of Columbia's music coverage was unfair, elitist, and perhaps even doing active harm to the city's music community.

"We need you guys as much as you need us," Ruebella tells me. "Your job is to critique and our job is to listen when it happens to us." But while he sees the critic-subject relationship as largely symbiotic, in his view, seeing a band or artist in a live setting should be a prerequisite for criticism. "I'm a firm believer in live music...you can listen to a CD or whatever's online all day, but you're not getting the purest expression of who a band truly is unless you go see them live."

He's not wrong, either. In an ideal situation, every rock writer would experience the music of every act he or she writes about through every possible medium. This is impractical for a number of reasons, but it's not hard to see his larger point. If, as a musician, you feel the greatest connection to your work when performing it live, it should (*should*) stand to reason that a listener would be best served consuming it the same way. For Ruebella, this isn't just hollow talk. Emboldened by the knowledge that so many others shared his frustration, he organized Fringe Fest, which will take place at Art Bar on February 18 and feature bands he feels have been overlooked or misunderstood by the city's music writers, including garage rockers Turbo Gatto, vintage rock and roll act The Berries, Dr. Roundhouse, and his own Pig Head Dog. Whether or not these bands really *are* victims of an elitist music press is highly debatable, but organizing a show that celebrates inter-band solidarity is just about the most proactive thing Ruebella could have done in response.

But for all of the teeth-gnashing over a shortsighted press, there are just as many artists whose attitudes land somewhere between ambivalence and appreciation. "I think a lot of times people read music journalism as if it's some sort of set-in-stone fact or as if a writer's opinion is anything more than that," says Dylan Dickerson, guitarist and vocalist for kinetic rock trio Dear Blanca. "I feel like music journalism is more supposed to be a sort of cull for conversation. It's not supposed to be the final critique of anything...The fact that people are talking about art at all when there's a lot of things that can distract us from that is something I appreciate whether it's pos-

itive or negative." Of course, the high road makes for easy travel when you've never really been on the business end of a critical thwacking, and from the moment the band's first proper record as an ensemble appeared in 2013, Dear Blanca has garnered near-unanimous praise from local and regional publications. But even though he hasn't received much himself, Dickerson well understands the old adage that there's no such thing as bad press. "If anything," he says, "a lot of people have thrived in the wake of negative publicity. If the press hates your stuff, that's just as much cause for people to listen to you than if they love your stuff. Maybe sometimes if you read something that's really railing against someone, you're more inclined to say, 'I'd better check this out for myself.'"

But the sorts of mini-controversies like the one described above have happened countless times in the past in countless different cities and they're certain to happen again here. Friction and disagreement are baked into not only the artist-critic relationship, but also each faction's unique processes. And if we're going to accept that art criticism is a relevant and worthwhile pursuit, as criticism itself does for the very things it seeks to explore and understand, it's important to remember that the kid who picks up a guitar to write her first song and the kid who finds himself wondering not how the song was written but what it means in a broader sense are doing so for a wildly similar reason—because they, at some point, fell in love with the same thing and want to know all that it's capable of accomplishing, from the pedestrian to the majestic to the incendiary. Incendiary.





# CITY BALLET PRODUCES NEW MESSAGE BALLET

BY KRISTINE HARTVIGSEN



*manuel: Love is the Answer*, a new ballet by Columbia City Ballet, premiered in Charleston on April 1 with performances coming up in Columbia later this month. But years before that sweltering summer night in 2015 when a gangly young man with hatred in his heart gunned down nine parishioners at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, the creative seeds first had been sown for an uplifting multimedia performance imploring people to embrace love and forgiveness.

On the evening of June 17, 2015, the world began to learn through fragmented media reports about the horrific events that unfolded at Charleston's Mother Emanuel Church. "I was just in shock," recalls William Starrett, executive and artistic director of Columbia City Ballet. It was extremely difficult to process the reality of what happened.

Two days after the shooting, when relatives of the victims had an opportunity to address the shooter at a bond hearing, there was an astonishing lack of vitriol. The whole world sat in awe of the amazing composure and grace many of the mourners exhibited.

It wasn't just Starrett who had been taken aback. The whole world sat before their screens in hushed amazement. Then citizens of all races and ethnic backgrounds gathered on the Ravenel Bridge over Charleston harbor in a peaceful display of harmony. And after many decades of intense opposition, the Confederate flag finally was lowered from the State House grounds in Columbia.

Through the ensuing nine funerals and trial delays and the publication of the shooter's

incendiary writings, Starrett gradually arrived at an epiphany. "It all became very clear to me," he explains. The idea that had been incubating for so long finally came together. "The ballet really was inspired by Mother Emanuel. I felt this was a call for the voice of forgiveness."

Still fresh in people's minds were Ferguson and comparable racially charged incidents that sparked violent protests around the country. "Living here for 30 years, I see that South Carolina gets so much negative publicity," Starrett says. "People probably just assumed that there would be rioting and fights here. And I realized this ballet was needed."

Last fall, Starrett approached the Reverend Eric Manning, pastor of Emanuel AME Church, about the idea of a multimedia ballet focusing on Mother Emanuel. "I was concerned about what was acceptable and proper and sensitive to the families and their needs," Starrett says.

"I suggested that he reach out to the families," Rev. Manning says, and get them engaged. So during the holiday season last year, as the community geared up for the shooter's long-delayed trial and sentencing, Starrett attended Bible study at Mother Emanuel in the very basement where the shootings had occurred. He also attended Sunday services at the church.

"I was welcomed by the congregation. There was a feeling of acceptance in general, but you can tell that they are wounded and are healing," Starrett says. "They were very happy and successful, a warm family before all of this happened. That was all disrupted. They have so many visitors now. It is daunting. It's a big adjustment. They want to be accommodating, but they would like everything to go back to the way it was."

## About the Ballet

"The ballet is going to be presented in vignettes inspired by the greatest political, religious, and spiritual leaders of all time," Starrett says. "It will have the greatest music with the most inspirational messages I could find." That includes SC Rep. Jenny Horne's impassioned speech to the Legislature in the days following the massacre, danced by soloist Bonnie Boiter-Jolley to Jeff Buckley's "Hallelujah."

"Jenny allowed me to put her speech to music," Starrett said. "The clothes she wore when she gave that speech will be displayed at the performance."

Starrett adds that the ballet is appropriate for all ages; there will be no violent or upsetting images. The Confederate flag will be represented, he notes, and it will come down.

Other dances include company member Amanda Summey's (see page 70) impassioned solo, "Rise Up," a pas de deux danced to Andrea Bocelli's rendition of The Lord's Prayer, an ensemble piece featuring Colin Jacob titled "Thankful," and a lighter ensemble piece danced to the Beatles' "All You Need is Love," and more.

The scenery and costumes for the performance will be decidedly minimalist, leaving the focus on the messages delivered through dramatic lighting and multimedia passages. Resounding throughout will be calls for unity and love.

"We are deeply humbled and thankful for the Columbia City Ballet to consider Mother Emanuel, the families, and survivors by honoring our loved ones' legacy with such a wonderful tribute," the Rev. Manning says. "We know that the performance will touch the hearts of many and challenge all of us to remember that love is always stronger than hate."

# A Quick with Columbia City Ballet Company Member Amanda Summey

**Jasper:** What is your favorite ballet and who is the choreographer and composer?

**AS:** I'd have to say my two favorites would be Marius Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty*, composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and *Don Quixote*, composed by Ludwig Minkus with original choreography by Marius Petipa.

**Jasper:** What makes you love this ballet so much?

**AS:** What I really love about both of these works is the variety of roles that allow companies and dancers to showcase a wide range of characterizations and skill sets. For these two ballets, in particular, I also love that there are powerful women: whether it's Carabosse in all her wicked glory causing a King to cower, or Kitri boldly laughing in the face of the machismo of her male counterparts and defying what they want her to be or do.

**Jasper:** What is your favorite role from the ballet?

**AS:** Oh man again. For *The Sleeping Beauty*, I mentioned Carabosse earlier and I would have to say it is a role that stands out to me as a favorite. For *Don Quixote* my favorite role, though I love a good Kitri, would be Basilio.

**Jasper:** How long have you been dancing and where did you train?

**AS:** Upwards of 16 years. I started dancing at Columbia Conservatory of Dance from the age of 4 to 18 and then I stopped dancing except for the odd class or project here and there until I was 23, at which time I came back to dance with Columbia City Ballet again.

**Jasper:** You have a college degree, right? From where and what did you major in?

**AS:** I attended Northwestern University where I received a bachelor's degree in Theatre.

**Jasper:** Why was it important to you to get your degree?

**AS:** The degree but the experience of branching out away from home really meant a lot. I learned how to think versus what to think and honed tools that allow me to communicate with others; skills that are vital to who I want to be as both a performer and a person. I think had I stayed home it would have been more difficult to grow.



# THE Man IN THE CHAIR

**DIRECTOR & TEACHING VETERAN  
ROBERT RICHMOND TALKS HIS LENGTHY  
CAREER AND HIS VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF  
USC'S THEATRE PROGRAM**

*By Kyle Petersen*







**R**

**Robert Richmond**, the newly installed Artistic Director and Department Chair of Theatre & Dance at the University of South Carolina, is a man that looks the part.

Nattily attired with a debonair presence and a soft British accent, it's not hard to imagine him playing that role, particularly with a resume to match. A graduate of the Royal Scottish Academy and a longtime member and Associate Artistic Director of the international touring Aquila Company, a group which eventually became a flagship troupe for the National Endowment for the Arts' Shakespeare in American Communities initiative Richmond's extensive credits also include lectures and workshops at prestigious universities across the globe and multiple critically acclaimed productions at the Folger Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C. And despite his roving career, he's spent the last decade in one place—Columbia, South Carolina.



The story of how got here is a long one, but it starts, unsurprisingly, in a community theatre in Hastings, England.

“I started like most kids do,” he admits. “I wasn’t particularly fast or smart at school, but community theatre excited me. I joined every community theatre there was and played them off each other with my availability. I remember being quite difficult to book!”

Richmond was also a musician—he played trumpet—so his path forward was a little uncertain. At 19, he got a scholarship for a junior exhibitionship to the Gilmore School of Music, a weekend program which required him to catch an early train in to London each Saturday. Even though his future was in music, the experience was pivotal for him. “I’d meet up with a group of people who were just like me, it seemed,” he recalls fondly. “Leg warm-

ers, capes—were like the kids from *Fame*, that’s all we really were.”

The brief experience around fellow artists sharpened his ambition, so the next year he applied to several drama schools. He was accepted to a few, but couldn’t afford to make a go of it without a scholarship. “I made some awful mistakes that first year,” he says ruefully. “Eventually, the Royal Scottish Academy let me in.”

Even having waited the extra year, Richmond was among the youngest in his class. Plus, he was an Englishman living on his own for the first time in Edinburgh, surrounded by Scots. It was, by his own admission, a bit of a wild ride. “It was a great three years of growing up,” is how he puts it. “Did I learn anything? Sure. Did I grow up? Yeah, real fast. Let’s just say I learned how to get myself out of trouble on a Saturday night pretty quickly.”

After graduating Richmond did some acting work in Edinburgh before moving to London a few years later, scraping what he calls “an okay acting career” together. He was basically living the life he had envisioned, but something more clearly awaited him. Then, by chance, he saw an advert in a trade newspaper about a company that needed actor/musicians. It wasn’t a huge gig, but it would take him over to the United States for a brief tour.

“A friend of mine who had an audition [with the company] told me I should call the guy, that he’s genuine,” Richmond says with something akin to a shrug. “Well, that seemed like a thing to do.”

Thus was his inauspicious start with the Aquila Theatre Company.

While it’s now a storied and preeminent classical theatre company based in New York City, at the time Richmond joined it was a rag-tag, DIY operation riding by the seat of its pants. The initial tour, performing a play that he no longer even recalls (“although it was probably awful”), was just five guys in a truck barnstorming across America, a place Richmond had never been.

“The first time I arrived, I remember stepping off the plane in Pennsylvania,” he recalls, his accent just slightly more pronounced than it was just a moment ago. “It was the heat of August, and the first stop was

a Denny’s. I had never seen portions of food that big, so I was like ‘oh, I love this place!’”

He describes the tour itself with a distinct blend of nostalgia and ruefulness. “We trail-blazed our way through university campuses in a way that I’m not particularly proud of anymore,” he says now. “But, at the time, it was something.”

When he arrived back in the UK, the travel bug had bit him a bit. Not expecting the Aquila gig to turn into a long-term thing, he set off to Thailand for a few months with some friends. Eventually, word got back that there was chance of another tour. “And I never really looked back from there.”

Richmond gradually adapted to a vagabond lifestyle with a schedule surrounding these six week tours, but eventually the company started to mature. He became a more intrinsic part of it too, playing the part of associate director and taking on a more prominent role in the managerial and educational side of things. To make ends meet they would often end up doing residencies at various universities. They also went non-profit in the late 1990s, allowing them to expand their educational offerings and soak up some needed grant money. In the process, Aquila became established and even prestigious. Supported by the NEA, they’ve had long-running shows off Broadway, performed at the Lincoln Center, and have even ended up performing Shakespeare at the White House on occasion.

By the mid-2000s, though, Richmond and his peers in the company began to tire of the relentless touring. “2006-2007, we went on a world tour that was literally that. And I think we all knew that we couldn’t do it anymore, that we were done,” he says of the decision to leave Aquila. “There’s only so much fried food and Red Roof Inns you can take. And by then many of us had partners and families—life had taken over. Then the [financial] crash happened—it was a funny year.”

When the chance came to join the faculty at USC, even on a limited basis, he took it. Aquila continued under new management.

Richmond had been teaching adjunct at NYU for years and had taught for USC as part of a residency a few times, so he was quite familiar with the school and Columbia itself already and the idea of having employ-

ment as an instructor for a full year was quite appealing. “At the time a year was paradise,” he reminisces. “I could sit and plan for a year. That was ten years ago. A year became three, then I applied full-time.” And now he’s the department’s leader. He brings an immense wealth of experience to the role, and it would be nearly impossible to characterize his work as a director and actor in any general sense. He cites his productions of *Henry V* and *Henry VIII* at the Folger as some of his best work, noting that “the ones I’m most proud of are the impossible ones that turn out good.” He also cites his production of the Scottish play “A Tale Told by an Idiot” at the Lab Theatre as another one of his favorites. “That was a pretty intense and unique thing—it’s all behind a scrim and the actors are lighting themselves,” he explains. “There’s a multi-screen effect, and actors are literally picking themselves up to do it.” The production has since made its way to the Lincoln Center.

He brings an obvious passion for the classics to USC, particularly Shakespeare. “The reason that I’m so passionate about him, in addition to the very human stories he tells, is because language is the only thing that we share. It’s the only thing that unites us,” he posits. “On the page, in spoken word. If we lose it, we sort of lose what it is to be a human being.”

“And theatrically it sits very much in our present and hopefully in our future because the stories are, and this is an overused term, universal,” he continues. “If you break it down to the seven or perhaps nine stories that really exist, he’s really penned the very best of those stories. So even when I get a modern play—which I often do—I look at it and think ‘how did Shakespeare say this? He’s definitely connected to this theme in one play or another. We all stand on the shoulders of him in order to look forward.’”

Richmond wants to make Shakespeare accessible and come alive for that next generation, of course, but he also has larger concerns guiding him in his first year at the helm of the department. He’s cognizant of big technological changes and how theatre is moving and shifting to adapt to that future generation of artists, but the biggest shift he would like to see is in the culture of the department.

Although it’s tough, he wants to build more connections to the industry into the university’s training and provide more useful experiences to students.

“I want to stop the sausage machine,” he says succinctly. He wants graduates of the program to be providing feedback and support, to make it an extension of their professional lives rather than a cordoned off block of their lives. “We want to be a regional hotspot for professional training that is superior to all of the others. That would be the goal,” Richmond argues.

In time, he’d also like to establish a professional theatre company that is in permanent residence at the university and also does its own work, something akin to the PlayMakers Repertory Theatre in Chapel Hill.

It’s an uphill battle, particularly at a time when arts funding is being cut by both schools and governments, but Richmond is keen for a “new renaissance,” as he puts it.

“We produce high-quality, huge production value work. The College of Arts & Sciences should be selling that as an experience a student can have,” he points out. “And we’re picking plays that are relevant, that have a message, that can mean something to the student population. So we need to change the image—not just the potential performer, but the audience, about who is included in this experience.”

Richmond clearly has big plans and a means to do them. With him at the helm, the future of USC’s Theatre & Dance Department should be something to watch.

**“... WE’RE PICKING PLAYS  
THAT ARE RELEVANT,  
THAT HAVE A MESSAGE,  
THAT CAN MEAN  
SOMETHING TO THE  
STUDENT POPULATION.”**

## MAKING THEATRE

# HAPPEN

Q & A with

*Playwright Randall David Cook*

BY ABIGAIL MCNEELY

## W

hen you first hear Randall David Cook, it is hard to imagine him anywhere besides South Carolina – his energetic, southern drawl is charming and he makes you want to listen. Thankfully, he’s been heard by a great many people and has become a staple of the theatre world, writing new work that has premiered both here in the South and off-Broadway. He is currently back in Carolina overseeing two of his projects – *Sharks and Other Lovers*, a serio-comedy about fear and sea creatures, produced by the Jasper Project and opening April, and *Kappa Kappa Scream*, a horror piece about a sorority’s initiation gone wrong produced at Furman University that ran through February 18th. Though he is incredibly busy, he took some time to answer a few questions between rehearsals the day after *Kappa* opened.





**Jasper:** First, how was opening night at Furman?

**RDC:** It went very well, thank you!

**Jasper:** You are currently the playwright-in-residency at Furman. What will you be doing on campus?

**RDC:** I'm here through the Duke Endowment, so the Duke Endowment and Furman commissioned a play. I wrote a horror-thriller called *Kappa Kappa Scream*. It's this big horror piece with lots of technical elements and a cast of 24 – 18 women and 6 men. I'm also teaching two classes here this semester: Playwriting and Dramatic Literature. I'm here for the full semester. My family is also in Columbia – my parents, my sister, my nieces and nephews – and I currently live in New York City, so this was also an opportunity for me to be back in Carolina closer to all them.

**Jasper:** While you're here, you'll also be working on another new work, *Sharks and Other Lovers*, for the Jasper Project. Who all are you working with?

**RDC:** I'll be working on *Sharks* with Larry Hembree, who I've worked with for years now. He directed *Third Finger Left Hand* at Trustus in 2011. He's this charismatic Energizer Bunny of South Carolina.

**Jasper:** Looking back at your work – *Third Finger Left Hand*, *Sake with the Haiku Geisha* – your plays are always based on personal experience. Can we expect the same thing with *Sharks*? What was your inspiration behind this play?

**RDC:** Absolutely. It's set in South Carolina on the beach, the same island where my parents have a beach house. I was about six years old when *Jaws* came out, and it made such an impact on me. My friends and I were in the first grade and I have no idea why their parents let them see this movie. They would talk about it and it would get our imagina-

tions running about what could happen at the beach. That same summer my mom got stung by a jellyfish at Myrtle Beach and everyone left her! I was later stung by a jellyfish in Malaysia and those jellyfish are more potent than they are here. It's this intense pain. At first, you don't know what it is. But then you realize it is an animal attacking you, but you're not sure what animal it is. It is terrifying. All of these experiences, all this fear, is in *Sharks*.

I also love writing for women, specifically older women, women who are no longer the ingénue type, and I want more of those women on stage. I feel like the roles really dry up for women after 30, and it is a pity because these women are so interesting and they have done so much training, so I love publishing great parts for older women. I think women are an underserved group and I want to change that.

**Jasper:** As a Southern artist who has moved away and come back, what do you see a need for? What should Southern artists still in the South be working on?

**RDC:** Well, I'm really proud of the Jasper Project for starting the Play Right series, because regional theatres in New York are doing shows that have an imprint of a New York production already on them, either off-Broadway or Broadway. That community has become much smaller over the years, and it takes so much more to get to that level, and it's about commercialism now, not necessarily about artistic quality. If regional theatres focus only on shows that come from that place, then we have plays that aren't relevant to people in those areas. Sometimes you'll see that a theatre is doing a show and wonder "Why are they doing that? What drew them to that?" I think it is great that the Jasper Project is producing a Southern play by a Southern writer. It's important to do work that speaks to your own people. There have to be more opportunities to create new work. It can be scary and frustrating, but it's worth it. The first night that we open *Sharks*

and *Other Lovers* will be the first time anyone has seen it and who knows what kind of life it will take on! With the country as divided as it is, you have to do plays that deal with race and with class, because they're important. I think great theatre should entertain and inform, but it doesn't have to be didactic. It should challenge you. The best stuff does it without you realizing it.

**Jasper:** What is next for you?

*“It’s important to  
do work that speaks  
to your own people.  
There has to be  
more opportunities to  
create new work.”*

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*– Randall David Cook*

**RDC:** I’ll be back in New York and I want to work on a screenplay of *Kappa Kappa Scream*. I’m also looking forward to developing *Sharks* after we premiere it here. I really believe in this play. I want to see if it’s doable, what needs to be changed, but I think it will have a long life. I’m also working on two musicals with Joel McKneely (best known for his Tony-nominated work on *The Life* and *Smokey Joe’s Café*). These past two years, I’ve been so focused on my work, just on the writing, and not about sending it out anywhere and now I have all this work coming to the surface. *Sharks* is a great example. I’m very fortunate to have two works happening this spring in South Carolina, and I’m working on about seven or eight projects all at once.

**Jasper:** Any tips on how to stay that busy, how to stay working?

**RDC:** You have to focus on the work. If you want to be successful, you have to keep working. Theatre is all about the long game. You have to build relationships and you have to put your head down and get the work done. It’s also important not to create in a vacuum, to understand that theatre is collaborative.

*Sharks and Other Lovers, produced by The Jasper Project’s new theatre project The Play Right Series, will premiere April 28th and run through May 7th at Tapp’s Art Center. The Jasper Project created the Play Right Series to celebrate original work by SC theatre artists by presenting readings and productions of new theatrical works, and focusing on the process of theatre art creation.*

*Abigail McNeely is from Virginia and is currently a senior at USC, finishing up a degree in Theatre. She has been seen in shows at USC and Trustus Theatre, and has performed with TOAST! Improv and The Mothers comedy team.*



# THE EVOLUTION OF COLUMBIA CHILDREN'S THEATRE

by Larry Hembree

*"So many things are possible just as long as you don't know they're impossible."*

from Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*, a Columbia Children's Theatre production, November 2015

## PROLOGUE

In 2005, Jerry Stevenson, a friend and fellow thespian for decades, called to tell me that he and Jim Litzinger were going to create the Columbia Children's Theatre. The first show was going to be a musical version of *Rapunzel*. Of course, I loved the idea of hundreds of young artists creating live theatre. Perhaps it could work as Columbia is a city that proactively nurtures and

supports new arts endeavors. Ah, but here's the rub: their concept was to hire only adult performers to present the work.

Now that might be tricky. Twelve years later, I am blessed to be able to write these few words to describe the journey of CCT, a place that has succeeded due to the vision, flexibility, patience, and passion of two very determined men, a small paid staff, and hundreds of volunteers.





## JERRY

Stevenson was raised in Camden, SC, and was in his first theatre production with the Camden Community Theatre when he was nine. In high school, he became more interested in music, playing tuba in the marching band, eventually becoming the drum major. He later attended the University of South Carolina, where he was also in the band but dropped out when he wasn't chosen to be a drum major for the group. Soon after his departure he landed a role in a USC theatre department production because, he admits, "they needed a guy and I showed up." He graduated from USC with a degree in hotel, restaurant and tourism and continued working in theatre in SC with both the Patchwork Players and the Baille Players. He also spent a few summers as a performer in the outdoor drama "The Lost Colony" in Manteo, North Carolina.

## JIM

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Litzinger was in his first theatre production in seventh grade with the late Betty Herring at Workshop Theatre. Like Stevenson, he became more of a musician in high school, singing in both the show and concert choirs at Dreher High School. He attended Winthrop University

for two years starting as a business major, but later switching to theatre. Eventually, he says he came to realize, "I was a really bad actor." He ended up transferring to the University of South Carolina where he got his B.A. in French.

## JERRY AND JIM

The two met at USC in 1993. After Litzinger graduated, they decided to move out of Columbia. "So we put the names of a bunch of cities in a hat," Stevenson remembers, "and we decided that the first city we drew from the hat twice was where we would move." Chicago won the lottery, and they ended up living there for a decade. In Chicago Litzinger worked as a costumer and was a professional caroler for a year. He also worked for two large firms in marketing and graphic design, learning skills that he later used in his arts administration career. At the same time, Stevenson worked three theatre jobs simultaneously just to make ends meet, mainly with theatre companies that focused on theatre for youth. The work he did with these companies served as a launch pad his artistic career in the theatre.

In 2002, they returned to Columbia. Stevenson got a job teaching theatre at Eau Claire High School; Litzinger had several

jobs, including office manager for Columbia City Ballet and, later, Director of Marketing for the Fine Arts Center of Kershaw County in Camden.

## SARAH NANCE

About the time they moved back to Columbia, Meg Richards, who also grew up in Camden but who had never met Stevenson, was running an arts incubator for the City of Columbia called the Sarah Nance Cultural Arts Center. Located in the former Sarah Nance Elementary School, the incubator provided arts experiences for the city and the surrounding neighborhood, Booker Washington Heights, while also serving as a place for arts groups without a home to do their work.

Thinking that a children's theatre was something Columbia needed, Richards contacted Stevenson and asked if he was interested in coming to the incubator and working with her. And from that, Columbia Children's Theatre was born, soon afterwards obtaining non-profit status. A cafetorium with tiled floors and a small stage was used for productions. Classrooms in the former school were used for rehearsals and classes.

Stevenson bartered for space in the school in return for taking his adult troupe to perform and teach theatre in local city parks.

Richards recalls a CCT performance of *Frosty* at “WOW on the River,” a New Year’s Eve celebration in the Riverwalk Amphitheater when the show was running late. “At the exact same time *Frosty* finally came to life,” she remembers, “fireworks over the city went off. Jerry and I got chills.”

At Sarah Nance, CCT produced four Main Stage shows each season featuring adult professional actors, including some of Columbia’s most loved performers like Jason Stokes, Scott Vaughan, Martha Hearn, Monica Wyche, Robin Gottlieb, Jackie Rowe and Lee O. Smith. Smith, a veteran CCT performer, actually feels nostalgic for those early days. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but sometimes I miss it,” he admits. “Don’t get me wrong, I love all the upgrades and how CCT has evolved, but we were a small group of people who were working to establish ourselves. Now that the operation has been established, that bit of incentive has dissipated. Spoiled by success, I suppose.”

During those early years at Sarah Nance, CCT assembled its first board of directors and started to understand its role in the local theatre community, learn more about its audience and how to connect their art with the business community. During the fourth season, the board realized its next challenge was to find a more permanent venue and figure out how to finance a small administrative and artistic staff in order to solidify the future of the theatre.

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## **RICHLAND MALL**

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Stevenson met arts administrator Carol Baker while teaching at Eau Claire; the two shared a small office/classroom. At the time, Baker was the coordinator of a partnership between the school and Columbia College, and she later became one of the founding CCT board members. Baker and the CCT board realized Sarah Nance was meant to be an incubator, not a permanent space. So she set out to find the theatre’s next venue. Through various connections and the assistance of Forest Acres City Administrator Mark Williams and Richland Mall leas-

ing agent Randy Jones, CCT procured its next home.

All of this quickly led to CCT’s move to Richland Mall in 2009. With a tight timeline to create a new theatre space and prepare for an opening night, a truck was loaded to the brim (most of the set and costumes were stored in the Stevenson/Litzinger home basement), and CCT relocated 2.7 miles up Beltline Boulevard into a former Express clothing store in the Richland Mall’s second level. Initially, the biggest challenge was figuring out how to make a theatre space out of a former retail space with low ceilings and a glass storefront in a huge shared space with a community of shoppers. Some unlikely advantages also appeared though—for one thing, the space already had a large number of track lighting spotlights that could be used for theatre lighting, still integrated into shows to this day. The staff and board worked 24 hours a day for several weeks to create a “cool theatre space,” according to Baker.

“Jerry and Jim and the board about killed themselves getting the space ready for an opening night,” she recalls. Stevenson remembers their first opening night in their new space, when they had no seats until 4:30 that afternoon and the carpet, which they had promised would serve as a floor for youngsters to sit on in front of the stage, was not going to arrive in time. Luckily, that afternoon Stevenson saw some mats on a sidewalk that a Leaping Lizards store was replacing and he asked if he could have them. “They said someone was supposed to have picked them up a month ago so they let me have them,” he recounts. “We hosed them down an hour before the house opened and they are our signature ‘mosh pit’ to this day.”

The first year in the mall space saw a lot of activity. Most importantly, programming expanded to include productions presented with youth for other youth, friends and family. CCT had been offering afterschool classes and summer camps for several years and realized they needed more performance opportunities for their young actors to hone their theatre skills. So with a more permanent

space in place, the YouTheatre program was initiated, presenting full-length or junior series shows featuring students in grades 1-12.

Classes, summer camps and opportunities to tour shows in and around Columbia kept growing, and a partnership began with Richland One School District where every first grader was bused to a CCT show each year. With the growth of CCT, Stevenson was able to leave his full-time teaching job in 2007 to become the paid Artistic Director of CCT. Litzinger followed suit in 2009 as Managing Director.

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## **CURRENT PROGRAMMING**

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In 2008, Stevenson met Cathy Brookshire, an English professor at USC. Brookshire had an extensive history of teaching and producing Shakespeare in high schools. At CCT she began teaching a Shakespeare intensive class for homeschool students who received high school credit for their work. Today, she continues to offer this intensive academic experience where students study one Shakespeare play for the entire semester.

In 2014, CCT received an education grant from the SC Arts Commission enabling Brookshire to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* into a one-hour touring show for high schools. *Romeo and Juliet*, along with two other plays written by CCT staff, *Just So Stories* and *Appalachian Wondertales*, became part of CCT’s touring portfolio. CCT’s staff also began writing and presenting plays written in the commedia dell’arte form of theatre, started in Italy in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, based on improvised sketches and scenarios. The theatre continues to present one new commedia show each season with *Commedia Pinocchio* one of its most popular touring shows.

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## **THE FUTURE**

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The theatre has big plans for the future as it hopes to expand the number of touring productions and classes and continues to build a larger audience for their Main Stage Series.

Not surprisingly, the current location has become too small for current programming



needs. Litzinger says almost jokingly, "There's only so much you can do between two storefronts." That fact, coupled with the mall's questionable future, has precipitated an active search for a larger more stand-alone venue. They hope to spend the next year focused on expanding its facility, whether in Forest Acres or somewhere else in the Midlands.

## EPILOGUE

I happened to stop by CCT on a recent afternoon, and there on the tiny stage was a very crowded but happy group of 26 boys and girls honing their tap dancing skills. As I stood there for a moment, quietly observing, I realized how CCT has valiantly stuck to its original mission year after year, to create experiences to encourage children to change their world through the transformative power of professional live theatre.

A CCT parent recently said to me, "As a parent I feel strongly about surrounding my children with folks who positively contribute to their character, and the staff at CCT has been exceptional at not only influencing my daughters to be good performers, but also to be good people."

*(Editor's note: Since this piece was assigned, Larry Hembree has taken the position of Director of Development at Columbia Children's Theatre. It's such a fine piece of theatre history that we thought it in the best interest of Jasper, CCT, and our readers to run it with full disclosure.)*



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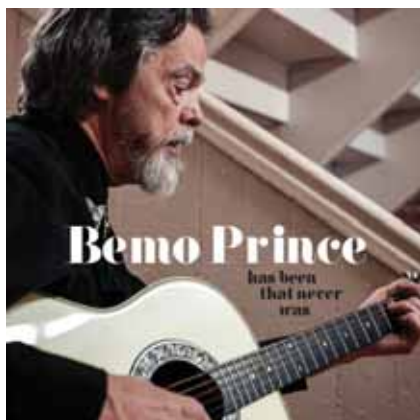
# THE SONGS LIVE

*Ailing “Never-Was” Country Singer Bemo Prince  
Makes His Debut Album*

*By David Travis Bland*







# B

emo Prince won't take to fists if you said to him, "Who the hell're you?" Anybody that happened to walk into the IHOP where he's sipping lukewarm coffee could get a shade of his story. Everything from the various hues of black he wears, paled only by the white snakeskin on his boots, to the trucker-like amount of cups he drinks and his knowingly precise grin to convince a waitress to put on a fresh pot, mark him as an eccentric-but-natural performer. And Prince indeed spent nearly two decades trying to make it as a country singer, but until recently had scant evidence to show for it. Now 68 years old, the thought of his grandkids not knowing his story he made him take an accounting of his legacy. Finally, after seven decades on earth, he's made his debut album, *Has Been That Never Was*. And the years and life it took to get this collection of songs on tape holds the hot energy and tepid disappointment as the black brew he drinks.

"Everything else from here on out is just something that I never did imagine," Prince says.

His path started on North Main Street in 1965 when a trip downtown led to him catching a flick, *Your Cheating Heart*, with the devilishly smooth George Hamilton lip synching the tunes of Hank Williams. It was the power of the music, above all, that kept young Bemo stuck in his seat. "I really had a change of my life — a purpose if you will," Prince says, thinking back to that day more than 50 years ago. "It was a strong moment for me to where my point was on music."

He picked up a guitar and was soon enough impersonating country music's sarcastic devil, Roger Miller. His charm found him married at 18, working at whatever jobs he could find until he found a way to make it as songwriter. He wasn't sure how that'd work, but music became who he was. "My dad was really a big supporter of what my dream was and wanted me to succeed at it," Prince says. "The challenge I had was just to be in the mix and part of that environment. I just loved the lifestyle ... I was there in my mind. I was living the moment."

He started pitching songs to Nashville artists and publishing houses. He played folk at hotel gigs despite his country leaning. But music couldn't keep his two daughters fed. Not even close. Prince took up various gigs — clerking at gas stations, nightclub operator, then driving a truck for Marietta Bread. In his heart, though, he was a songwriter, and to get some skin on the inside he started finagling his way to the greenroom of the Township Auditorium when Music City stars came to town. He found little success in the strategy until one night Bemo found a sympathetic ear in Bill Anderson, the country chart topper and Grand Ole Opry member. "I never got that connection," with people who could help his career, Prince says. "[Bill Anderson] said 'I got time between shows. When do you want to do it?' He shot a lot of my songs down, but one song, 'I Wish I Had You Off My Mind,' he said 'I think we can do something with that, Bemo.'"

With his "in," Prince met the heads of MCA Records and Tree Publishing, one of the premier Nashville songwriting houses at the time. Don Gantt, VP at the company and one of the movers and shakers of the town, saw a serious contender in Bemo. "One time [Gantt] said to me 'Bemo, how old are you?' I told him '28 but I feel 40,'" Bemo says, taking in a sip of coffee. "He said, 'You're going to be real successful in about ten years.' Those words I didn't want to hear. I wanted it now."

By this time Prince needed a break. He was separated from his wife and kids, living in Atlanta and working up to ten hour shifts

at a service station for sometimes sixty days straight. While he convinced his reluctant spouse to come to Georgia, his life floated in this damning circle of failure and unsatisfying jobs, but he still doggedly held to his music. But when the 1980s came around, even his once supportive father began to doubt.

But the new decade also brought Prince a chance at getting his music into 20 million people's homes and landing a record deal with MCA. In 1984 Nashville, every bar on Broad Street was brimming with talk of *You Can Be A Star*, a TNN television show which brought musical hopefuls into competition for the MCA deal. Prince sent an audition tape and the show picked him for their second season, so he packed up the wife and kids and headed to Tennessee. "Here I am and I'm going to prove you wrong. I'm going to prove my daddy wrong. I'm going to prove my mama wrong. I'm going to show my wife that I am capable of achieving this dream I've been dreaming since we've been married," remembers Prince. "This is my moment."

He waited for show time.

"When I walked off from [the rehearsal stage], you could hear talk in the studio, 'Did you hear that guy singing. That was his song,'" Prince says of the pre-show preparations. "Then he got the 'Go' sign. The band hit the first chord and Prince took to the stage, strumming and singing in his twangy croon his song 'Wondering What my World's Coming To.' After thirty seconds or so, the song crumbled. Prince stammered on some lyrics and the band marched on. He tried to catch up but the best he could do was hum a wordless melody. He never got back on beat. 'I came back to Columbia and [just] self-destructed,' he says now. 'My identity was no longer there...I didn't know who I was...Everything in my life has been temporary until I made it in music.'

That lack of purpose hit his work life hard and marriage harder, and Prince fell into your average working man's grind, a routine that kept him busy for over a decade while his guitar sat in a closet gathering dust. But life wasn't done kicking him in the ribs.

Two years into the new millennium and now in his mid-fifties, Prince found himself laid off. The heart attack came only a couple years later. They kept coming over the months. Instead of forcing him into an old

man's bed rest, Prince found his mind wandering to things he'd left unfinished.

"None of us have as much time as we think we do," he says, leaning into the table. "The health issues caused me to realize that my grandchildren had no idea of my pursuit of music. That's what kind of shook me up."

It took a little time, but through a family connection Prince eventually hooked up with Daniel Machado of history-focused musical collective The Restoration. He shared some demos of his old songs with Machado, and the younger musician was completely hooked, ready to produce a full length and make the album Prince had always wanted — that is, if his ticker would let would let him.

"In my condition I did not think I was capable of recording an album," he chuckles. But he also believed in a line from one of Machado's songs, the poignant title track to his band's 2011 debut: "Don't let your songs die with you." Pulling up to the studio that first day, he thought nerves had him short of breath, but when the sticks clicked in and playback came through the headphones he forgot all about his rattling chest. In two days he'd laid down the songs he'd tried to get recorded for two decades. That trouble breathing he had outside the studio? His doctor let him know that was a minor heart attack that Prince's internal defibrillator caught.

Almost a year later, on January 14, 2017, Prince took to a stage at the Congaree Room in the South Carolina State Museum with Machado and a group of Columbia musicians to officially bring *Has Been that Never Was* into the world. He stood in front of a crowd of about 300 friends, family, and would-be fans. The feeling in that room he'll never capture again, Prince says. When he leaned into the mic to sing "Wondering What My Whole World's Coming to" he joked with the audience that this is song that ruined his career. He got through it just fine though, turning what was the most heart-shattering moment of his life into the applause and acceptance he'd always wanted.

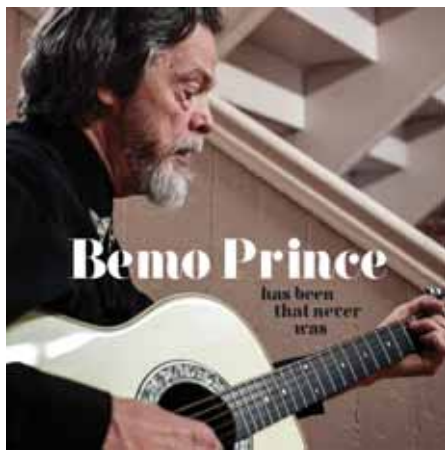
"If you watch the original tape [of *You Can Be A Star*] at the end of it you'll hear me say 'Wonder what my world's coming to,' then I say, 'after this.' That's on the tape," he says laughing. "That's not part of the song."

He's got an answer for that now, and a new story to tell.









**REVIEW:**

***Has Been That Never Was***

Bemo Prince's songs have been to Nashville and Atlanta, they've been stored in closets on cassettes gathering dust, and they've been heard by Music City big wigs. They've been forgotten, remembered, and left unfinished on muted guitar strings. All this over their five decades of existence. Now they've finally made it to tape with his debut *Has Been That Never Was*.

Country has always been about the voice and Prince is one of those rare and gifted singers whose vocals don't need any alteration between talking and keeping up the melody. He's got twang by the bucket load, and while comparisons might fall short, his pipes land somewhere between Guy Clark and Hank Williams, with a bit of Roger Miller's sarcastic phrasing and a hint of Kris Kristofferson's songwriting idealism.

"I'm a bad dreamer," he sings in the opener "Bottle of Wine." "I'm a wall gazer, but I'm a believer. Yes I am. I can throw a party early in the morning, I can feel so good, but I can be damned."

Aside from Prince's voice, what hits you right away is the band. Producer Daniel Machado of Southern concept band The Restoration, along with frequent collaborator Stephen Russ, got together some of Columbia's best musicians to fill out Prince's songs. And they do it as well as any Nashville studio cats. Fiddles wail and laugh, Telecasters cry and smirk, and pedal steels weep and sing.

A lot of country's best tricks get pulled on this record. The second track, "Once Again," is a duet that finds Prince saddling up to the

mic with Charleston's Jordan Igoe. "Mama's Fool" is a Shel Silverstein-style talking ballad that allows for some of country music's humorous side to show. You can hear the grin on Prince's face as he says "She sat down at my table, she slowly crossed her knees. She even gave me glance of what I went in there to see...I even talked about my wife but as my used to be."

"Wonder What My Whole World's Coming To," is classic tear-in-your-beer jukebox material. The song keeps it on the straight and narrow, nothing cluttering in its verses, lining itself up with country from the 50s and 60s. By the fifth track band is on fire behind Prince. "Giddy Up" is a country burner with fiddles blazing throughout. We've ridden a train away from Hank William's home and wound up closer to Hank III's territory. But that train we rode out on takes us pretty far

from Nashville with "Tomorrow." The locked mid-tempo has an R&B edge to it with more leaps and groove in the bass than your normal country hopping. The song throws out a lot of country conventions to dramatic effect. Prince shows a whole new side to his voice, bringing a melodic force that peaks when the song breaks into acapella moment. Electric guitar comes in like lightning, crashing into the cadence with the violin and pedal steel while the low end goes roaring and drums all brash. There's thunder and rain in this one. It might be the least Nashville sound on the record and that gives the song all its strength. We're back in the Bluebird Cafe for the rest of the record, the board cutting "Wish I Had You Off of My Mind" and the poetic "Martha."

Whatever journey these songs took over the years, they served Prince well on his debut and possible swan song.



photo credit: Molly Harrell

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# **CRASH COURSE**

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**FIRST-TIME FILMMAKERS CHRIS BICKEL & DAVID AXE  
REFLECT ON THE PROCESS OF MAKING THEIR  
DEBUT FEATURE THE THETA GIRL**







**S**teven Spielberg once said, late in his iconic career, that the most difficult part of directing a film to him was getting out of the car in the morning—that arriving to set in his car and looking through the glass at all of the crew and cast, knowing that every single one of them depended on him, was an overwhelming pressure. This was well after achieving massive financial success through his films and critical praise for films like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Jaws* and *ET*.

Chris Bickel and David Axe had never made a film before. Together, without any expertise other than one's profession as a writer (Axe) and a Media Arts degree on faded paper (Bickel), they decided to give it a shot. How about that, Spielberg?

**T**he resulting project, the full-length feature *The Theta Girl*, is thus their first real experience production filmmaking. Bickel works at the Columbia record store Papa Jazz and has a long history in the city. From hosting a wildly popular karaoke night to numerous music projects, running his own record store, and throwing epic house parties, Bickel is known for many creative things, but filmmaking wasn't one of them. "I felt like I was just spinning in place," says Bickel when asked why he was just now undertaking such a project, admitting that he felt trapped in a creative holding pattern.

David Axe has written scripts before. He has also experienced the punch to the tortuous road of watching a script get lots of interest only to be left with disappointment. His primary experience, though, is as a journalist and editor. He manages the websites War Is Boring and Defiant and contributes to The Daily Beast and Vice. "I wanted to make a movie, do it cheaply, and use local talent," Axe says.

"This is what I went to school for," Bickel points out. "David approached me and we brainstormed the things we wanted to see in a movie and what we could pull off with the money and locations we had access to." The idea was a story about a hallucinogenic drug dealer who gets mixed up with apocalyptic street preachers. Mayhem, murder, blood and spiritual revelation ensue.

As the idea of going into production became a reality, Bickel reached out to experienced filmmakers for advice. "They all said to shoot a short film first," but Bickel was undeterred. He remembers thinking that "a short film dies but a feature goes on forever." The first result was "Teenage Caligula," a short film shot to be a film trailer used in *The Theta Girl*. For the first time, Bickel was producing and directing for the project. But the experience gained in producing the short was small compared to what was coming his way. "A skill I learned to develop was to articulate more," Bickel says. "But I knew I had to get this vision across and get out of myself."

Casting was completed and production of *The Theta Girl* began in early December of 2016. "Finishing a script is a rapturous intellectual achievement, but very private.

“

**FINISHING A SCRIPT IS A RAPTUROUS INTELLECTUAL ACHIEVEMENT, BUT VERY PRIVATE. PRODUCING AN ACTUAL MOVIE IS AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE—MORE VISCERAL, MORE PHYSICAL, MORE FRUSTRATING, PUBLIC.**

”



Producing an actual movie is an entirely different experience—more visceral, more physical, more frustrating, public,” states Axe. One of the first scenes to be filmed included a band playing at a bar. The small, unknown aspects of filmmaking that experienced filmmakers are intimately familiar with presented themselves quickly to Bickel and Axe. As he looked at footage later, Bickel realized “I had people talking softly” in a scene where a loud band was playing. “Halfway through filming I figured out the process,” Bickel continues, “but there were moments that got hairy. Some shots required 15 actors and we weren’t paying a whole lot of money and you were hoping they would show up.”

Initially Axe and Bickel used their own money to start production. As they moved forward, they both realized that their low budget may have been a bit too ambitious with the script they had in front of them. “Looking back there are scenes that call for 20 characters that should’ve been 5 characters,” he says, but also recalls how technology has advanced to help he and Axe in production. “Back in school I would’ve probably spent \$15,000 to \$60,000 dollars on this film.”

The two turned to the crowdfunding website IndieGoGo for additional funding. After a successful campaign the two raised an additional \$9459 for the film. At first the idea of asking others for money bothered Bickel, but as the idea was discussed he came to terms with creating an online funding campaign. “I eventually thought it would be okay if I thought of it as pre-selling things like an advanced copy of the film.”

On set the two are both learning as they go. “I produced on set,” Axe says, “doing whatever needed to be done. Which is a lot frankly. Movies are complex, fast-changing enterprises with lots of people. Each with their own needs and demands. This shit is hard, especially with no money. If we didn’t already trust each other, there’s no way this film would get done.”

The learning curve for first-time filmmakers is steep. Often times it comes at the expense of the film. “In hindsight, I wish we would have announced the film as a paid gig.” Bickel offers this not as a criticism but noting that he would have had a larger pool of talent, for both cast and crew, to draw from. He also

notes his understanding of the more technical parts of the process has progressed through production. “I realized I needed to get more takes. In the beginning I sped through filming, worrying about time,” He recalls. “Halfway through, I was terrified. I faked confidence to make others feel good.”

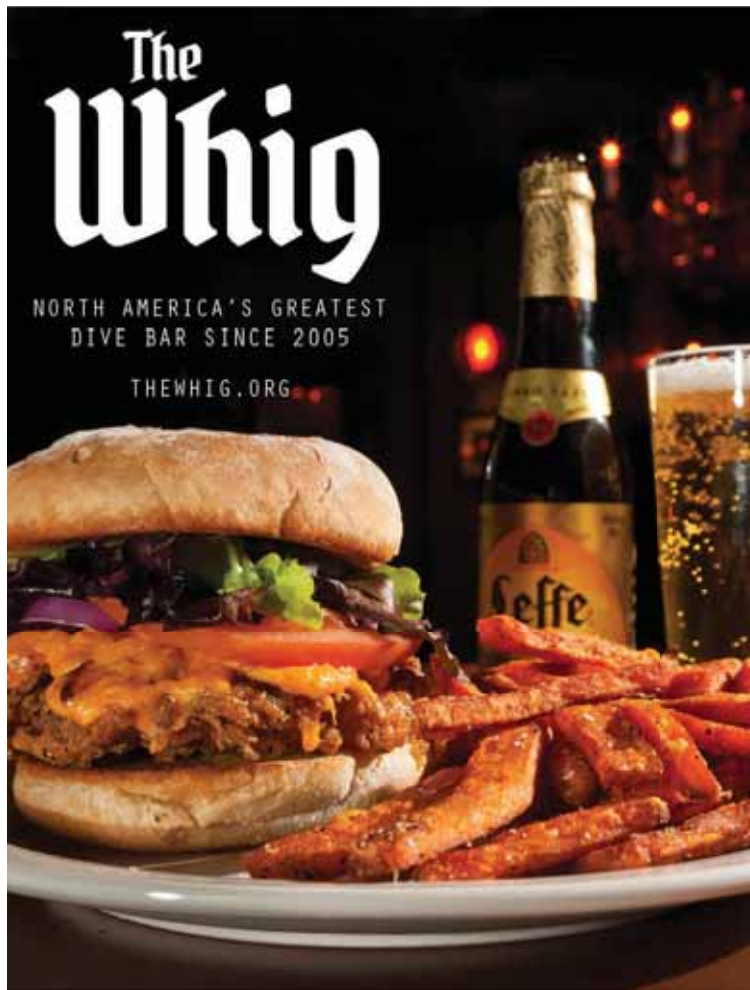
As the experience grew, so too did the duo’s ability and confidence to make creative choices. “The instant anything in the script became even remotely problematic in actual production terms, we hurled it forcibly over the nearest fence,” Axe admits. “Crazy ideas have no place on a movie set unless you can actually translate them into film.” As he reflects on the process now, he says “the biggest positive is we’re making a movie in Columbia and it’s awesome. The negative is that making a movie

really, really hurts. I can’t remember a time when we weren’t making a movie.”

“At times it was one disaster after another,” Bickel says similarly. “Some days you [had] 20 people with their own sets of variables, [and] some days you wanted to walk off.” But looking through the car window, so to speak, at a crew and cast that is so giving of their time and is sharing in your vision is a rare moment to realize. And it’s a moment that can only be understood if you are able to accept an incredible challenge.

“I gained skills I could never have gained in the classroom,” says Bickel now. “Plus, I’m way better at budgeting time in my personal life now because it is a precious commodity.”

*The Theta Girl* will be released at some point in 2017.



# SECRETS TO SUCCESS

## *in Indie Filmmaking*

TWO-TIME 2ND ACT FILM FESTIVAL AUDIENCE AWARD  
WINNER TAMARA FINKBEINER SHARES 5 TIPS



**As an indie filmmaker,** there is much joy to be found in seeing an idea through to fruition, from start to finish. But this joy can also be coupled with a splash of fear and at times a heaping amount of trepidation. Not to mention the constant battle of words bashing about in one's mind: "You got this!" "Oh my God what if they don't like it?" "You're amazing." "What if they hate it?"

Trust your voice. Yea they're gonna hate it. One voice reminds you of who you are, the other seeks to tear down any sense of positive self-esteem you've managed to garner before even beginning. Long story short, it can feel like madness. Well, at least for me it does at times. This up and down and back and forth meandering of thoughts and emotions is something I battle the whole way through. Will my audience hear me? How are we going to get this done? Will this be successful?

When I first began filming, success was simply having the opportunity to film something; anything. We have a camera, let's shoot! Creativity seemed boundless and the sky indeed was the limit. In every short film I've made to date, I see a common thread between what I'm experiencing and what I need to take note of mentally in order to be successful. I then pull on these nuggets each time I have the opportunity to work on a new project.

## 1. FEAR NOTHING

Fear is so gripping there are times I don't even know it is driving certain decisions I make on set or in writing. Trust what your gut is telling you and don't be afraid to go for it, even if it doesn't make complete sense at the moment. Very beautiful moments are birthed when fear is silenced.

## 2. RESPECT EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE

If an idea comes to you, respect it and do not turn it aside as absurd. Go with that creative spark and see where it takes you. Films speak. Most films have an intended audience by genre choice alone but you never know who your film will reach and what it will speak to each person. Also, respect everyone you work with. Each person on your crew whether paid or volunteer, respect them. Hear their voices and respect their time. It goes a long way.

## 3. YOUR STORY IS EVERYTHING

I want my audience to be moved by what they see and hear and in short films this must be accomplished rather quickly. I'm a firm believer that it starts with the story. A film can be beautifully shot but if the story isn't good or at least mildly intriguing you'll lose your audience. Every story is different but the same, when broken down to basics. Beginning, middle, and end. You can go much deeper and delve further into the art and craft of screenwriting and it's an area that I continue to study daily, but give the people what they want. Simple. A beautiful concept or idea wrapped in a simple structure. No matter what the genre, take them on a journey from start to finish.

## 4. CUT IT

Never be afraid of the cut. Whether you are the editor or you've hired an editor, you have to be willing to let things go if need be. If it's not moving the piece along, CUT IT. No matter how beautifully shot the scene may be or how graceful that line of dialogue is, if you don't need it cut it. Let others you trust review your short and offer critique. They may see places where things can be tighter.

## 5. BE EVER LEARNING

I did not go to film school so I make it a point daily to study as much as I can and this translates on set and throughout every point in production. Learn as much as you can from a technical aspect, as well as from your cast and crew. Be ever learning.

***From all of this*** I can say the most important "note to self" is enjoy the process from start to finish. Filmmaking like any other art form is a true gift. For me, the ability to do, be and share the creativity that comes to me through short films brings the success I desire; my audience feels me.

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