

# JANIS SPENCER



PAGE 8

MASTERS OF ART

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## Dear Friends,

It's another new year and Jasper is celebrating the 27th publication of this little arts magazine.

The new year makes most of us contemplative as we look to the past and realize there's another hatch mark on the great wall of wonder. Mortality has played heavily on many of our minds lately as we've lost and continue to lose too many cultural icons who, through their art, helped us create the paths that lead us through our lives.

Lemmy, Bowie, Snape, Glenn.

These recent losses combined with the heavy tolls of 2015—B. B. King, Ellsworth Kelly, E. L. Doctorow, Anita Ekberg, not to mention the likes of Wes Craven, Spock, and Elly May—inform not only the soundtracks, but the scenery and sets of our existence.

On top of it all we still aren't over losing the local lights who shined on us every day.

But this is the way of it, isn't it? On a daily basis we casually brush past the people who give us not only reference points, but also meaning, not noticing until they're gone how much of them stays with us in the passing. We shape each other's tastes. We open windows for one another. We start where our colleagues and mentors and idols stop.

This is what it means to live in the community of art.

So in this new year it is such a privilege for Jasper to honor some of the most influential members of our arts community, the 2016 class of the Jasper Masters of Art: Mary Bentz Gilkerson, Larry Lebby, Peter Lenzo, and Virginia Scotchie (page 10). These individuals—through their art, teachings, parenting, and presence—have both quietly and profoundly guided us to become not only the artists and arts patrons we are, but the vibrant, dynamic community we have become.

Peter, Mary, Virginia, Larry—on behalf of all of us, thank you.

You'll also notice that much of this issue of Jasper is heavily devoted to the literary arts as we acknowledge the inaugural celebration of the Deckle Edge Literary Festival (page 49), a gift from (and for) the South Carolina Midlands in which Jasper has had the pleasure of being intimately involved. We're thrilled to welcome literary artists and patrons to our beautiful downtown Columbia as we gather in groups large and small to converse about the books and poetry and process of writing we so love.

We are particularly pleased to include in this issue Nikky Finney's essay "Ode to the Daystar" from the 2015 Hub City Press collection *Carolina Writers at Home* (page 30).

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*"I am mostly searching for an open spot under the sun, a radiant place where I might look up and see something in a new way. I am looking for a place where I might sit for a long enough period of time in order to say and search for something that surprises or thrills me. I am a writer who keeps writing in order to be surprised and thrilled. I am always looking for a physical place outside, one that I do not have to quickly abandon or quickly rise from or move myself from the shores of, as the light arcs and shifts with the moving minutes and hours."*

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As Finney's words spill over us like the light from the daystar she so honors and cherishes, let's all start this new year honoring and cherishing the light we share with one another as we take our places in this precious gift we give to one another, this community of art.

Take care,

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

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# THE JASPER GUILD

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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,

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# MASTERS OF ART



BY KARA GUNTER | PHOTOS BY FORREST CLONTS

THERE ARE ARTISTS IN ANY COMMUNITY WHO SET **THE STANDARDS.**



Artists whose work others admire, study, and learn from. Their bodies of work demonstrate not only the artist's professional evolution but her or his process of problem solving—the artist's journey from questioning and exploration to a place of accomplishment, control, confidence, and finesse. Studying these artists' work is like reading a book you can't put down or traveling to a place you'll never forget. There is so much there to take in. So much to take away. We call these artists Masters.

In Masters of Art—Jasper's yearly magazine installment—we hope to identify and honor some of the many masters of art in the greater Columbia arts community by focusing not on our own words or our interpretations of the artists' works, but on the work itself, leaving the rest to you, our readers, to sort through, process, and enjoy on your own.

In recognizing these esteemed members of our arts community we acknowledge the old adages that a rising tide raises all boats and that all great people stand on the shoulders of giants—even giants who live next door or work in the studios alongside them. There are many masters amongst us. Congratulations to Jasper's 2016 Masters of Art, Larry Lebby, Mary Bentz Gilkerson, Virginia Scotchie, and Peter Lenzo.

# MARY BENTZ GILKERSON

**A PAINTER, PRINTMAKER AND A TEACHER,** Mary Bentz Gilkerson is a native South Carolinian enthralled by the Southern landscape. Drawn to nature, her paintings and prints of marshes, quiet roads, fields and big dramatic skies, focus on the “tension between the fragility of the environment and the power or the natural forces of earth and water.”

Gilkerson attended the University of South Carolina where she earned her MFA. She is a professor at Columbia College, and frequently teaches workshops in the community. A dedicated educator, she has been recognized for excellence in teaching by the South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities and is the recipient of grants from the SC Arts Commission, the Cultural Council of Richland and Lexington Counties, as well as research grants from Columbia College.

The paint on Gilkerson’s canvases is thick and gestural, applied in large swaths of color, creating an impressionistic snapshot of a moment in time. Her paintings feel like a view caught by the passenger of a moving car, on a drive through rural South





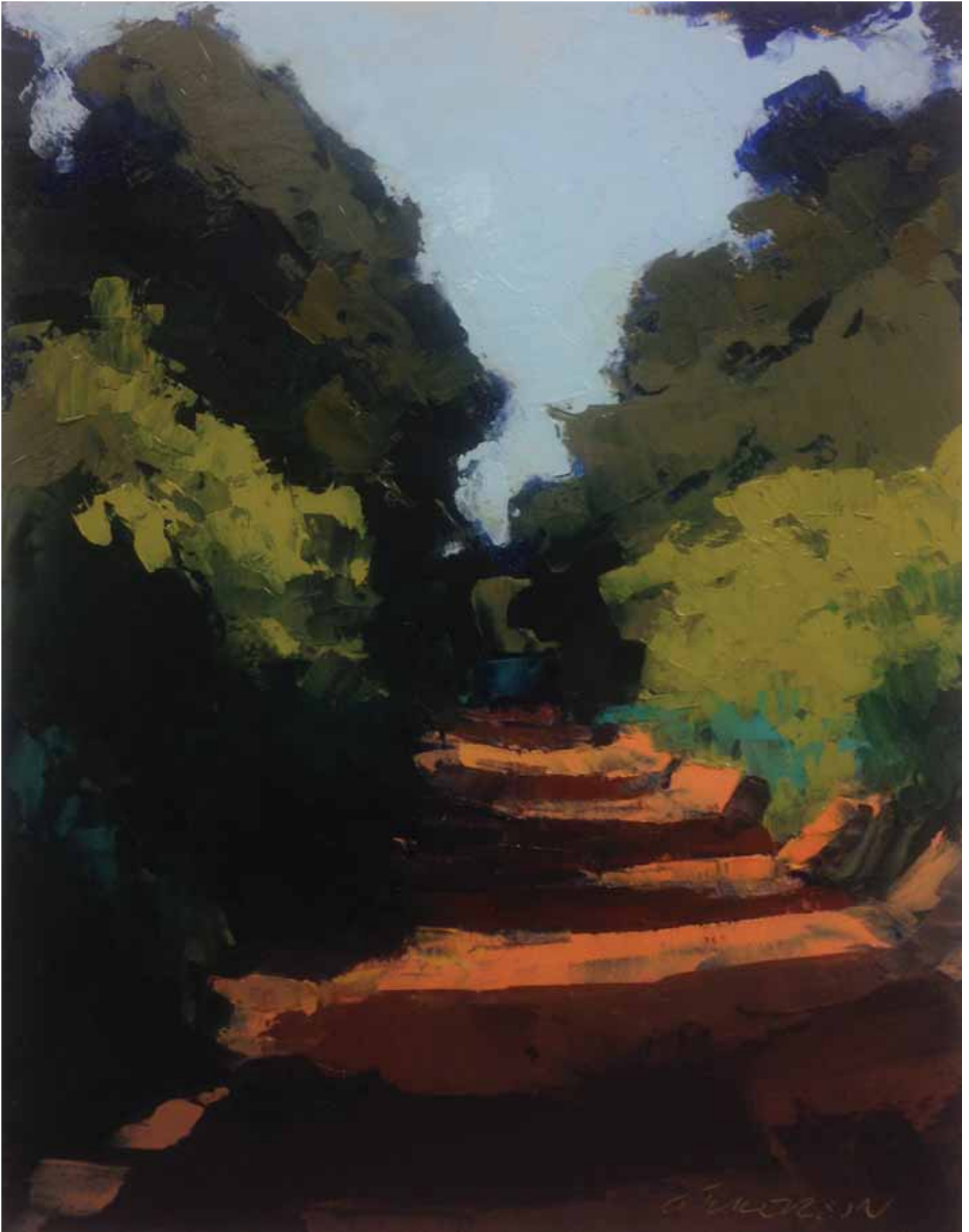
Carolina. Landscape features simplified into basic form, light and color, the viewer has just enough information to conjure a wistful familiarity of place and time.

"I'm interested in the light, in the way that it reveals atmosphere, weather and passage of time through the play of light and shadow. These can completely transform the natural forms of the environment, creating an entirely different emotional and visual response from the viewer." Indeed, Gilkerson's paintings seem to emphasize the particular light of the time of day, and in many of her paintings there is a sense of a lonely and contemplative witness to a day's beginning or ending. One can imagine the sound of grasshoppers and peepers of the late afternoon, accompanying the painter in her Monet-like explorations of the changing light.

Gilkerson says that the "landscape of the Deep South is still one that an individual can be completely immersed in," and to really experience a place she is painting, she will walk the terrain, draw and photograph it many times, at different times of the day and year. She says, "In the process of walking and drawing something about the essence of the place begins to take over, something that is found in the bare bones of the lines that describe the relationship of earth, sky and water, reflection and light."

Gilkerson's advice to aspiring artists? "Practice daily. Show up and work. Create a daily practice around your art-making. It's the only way to improve and develop. Practice every day that you eat. And remember that professional artists are very rarely divas in their professional lives. Behaving like a diva is the mark of an amateur. Act like a professional and that's the way you'll be treated."





# LARRY LEBBY

**DIXIANA NATIVE** Larry Francis Lebbly, is one of South Carolina's most accomplished artists. Born in 1950, he taught himself to draw in the sand, later graduating to inexpensive ball-point pens with which he was able to capture the most subtle of detail. He received no real education in art until he, among other African-American students, integrated Airport High School in the 1960s. There, Lebbly found guidance and encouragement to pursue his talents in an otherwise hostile environment. He attended Allen University and the University of South Carolina, and in 1976 earned his MFA.

Naturalistic portraits, landscapes and vignettes of Southern life are all masterfully rendered by Lebbly. No detail is spared as every fold of fabric and leaf of grass is recorded. Though incredibly realistic, there





is a warmth and soul in Leiby's pieces often lacking in this genre of work. "I carefully compose with threads of fine free lines and gradually develop different grades of value changes," Leiby says. "I do so by employing gradual transitional movements from light to dark because there are many little values in between that allow your eyes to slowly shift from one transition to another. The soft tonal values are virtually limitless."

Leiby's greatest personal accomplishment was being asked to paint a portrait of Dr. Benjamin E. Mays in the 1970s. "I sat with Dr. Mays for a day asking many questions and reaching back into his past to discover all of the reasons he was the strong durable man he became. I learned so much by interviewing him first before picking up any brushes or paint to start his portrait. Because I did this, I discovered a real person that went through some difficult experiences that could have caused many people to simply give up and quit. For Dr. Mays, these ordeals gave him the strength to eventually become a role model for many young men in this country."

Leiby's art has a place in the collections of such celebrities as Oprah Winfrey, Eddie Murphy, Toni Braxton, Vanessa Williams, and the late Gregory Peck. His portrait of President Jimmy Carter hung in the White House as did his depiction of Pope John Paul II in the Vatican when the men held their posts. Perhaps most poignantly, Leiby was selected to paint the portrait of slain Senator Clementa Pinckney this past September. The piece will hang in the Senate chamber in South Carolina's State House.

Larry Leiby will go down in American history as a great documentarian of Southern culture and history.







# PETER LENZO

**WHEN YOU SEE** a face or memory jug by Peter Lenzo, you immediately know it's his. Known internationally for his expressive ceramic sculpture, Lenzo, a New York native living and working in Columbia, SC, has taken a Southern folk potting tradition and turned it on its head.

Lenzo received his MFA from Wayne State University in Detroit and, until frequent seizures resulting from a childhood bike accident made it impossible to continue teaching, he was a professor at the University of South Carolina where he taught ceramics. Lenzo's work has been included in the Triennial at the South Carolina State Museum in '95 and '98, and the 701 CCA South Carolina Biennial of 2011 and 2013. The European Ceramic Work Center in Den Bosch in the Netherlands, the Great American Gallery in Atlanta, Ferrin Contemporary Gallery in Massachusetts, and the Spartanburg Museum of Art have all hosted his solo





exhibitions, and his work resides in the collections of the Smithsonian and the Mint Museum. But when asked to name his greatest accomplishment he replies, “I think society would say being in the Smithsonian ... but for me I think that it happens every day. I don’t feel like I’ve ever done anything better than what I’ve done this morning. I think always believing in your work and always thinking your newest work is the best is that moment is what keeps [us] working.”

Working primarily in clay now, Lenzo is making some of his most expressive work to date, exploring his mind and memory in crowded ceramic sculptures reminiscent of the memory and face jugs of African-American culture. His works stand apart, however. Many pieces no longer read as jugs, piled high with the clutter of doll parts and a variety of small symbolic, and sometimes found objects, Lenzo’s sculptures are anything but straightforward reproductions paying homage to a folk tradition. There is, in fact, a seeming spirituality which resides in each piece—something otherworldly, and as Lenzo continues to work, the pots become even more haunted with that mysterious quality.

Lenzo’s one piece of advice to nascent artists: “If you want to be an artist you shouldn’t get a degree in something else. You should be a cook, or waiter, or gas station attendant ... something that doesn’t define you so that if someone asks you what you do, you can always answer, always identify as an artist. Do something you don’t like. I used to work in kitchens all the time. Long, dirty hours, but I didn’t tell anyone I was a cook. I told them *I was an artist.*”





# VIRGINIA SCOTCHIE

**VIRGINIA SCOTCHIE STARTED OUT** on a very different trajectory, attending the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill to study Religion and Sociology. It was only after participating in a post-graduation trip to Israel to participate in an archeological dig and finding ancient pottery shards that unexpectedly moved her, that she became enthralled with ceramics. Scotchie later earned her MFA from New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University and is now Professor and head of Ceramics at the University of South Carolina. On this divergent path, she is an internationally known artist, regarded for her installations of large spherical forms and brightly colored abstractions.





A well-traveled artist, Scotchie has completed residencies in Italy, Taiwan, Australia, the Netherlands, and has shown and lectured across the US. She has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards over her career including the Sydney Meyer Fund Premier Award from the Sheparton Museum of Victoria, Australia. Her work can be found among the collections of the Asheville Art Museum, Museum Het Kruithuis in the Netherlands, the South Carolina State Museum, and in many private collections.

Scotchie utilizes simplified and deconstructed form, along with rich punchy colors and crackled surfaces, to create an eye-catching impact with her work. Shape becomes archetypal and mundane objects are elevated to the sublime. Her work is meticulously made, and her sculptures retain warmth of character and wit without betraying the hand of the artist. “As I go through my daily life, my travels and artistic journeys,” she says, “I find myself looking for inspiration much like an archeologist who digs in dirt....I don’t always know exactly what I might discover but it is a constant search and activity every day.”

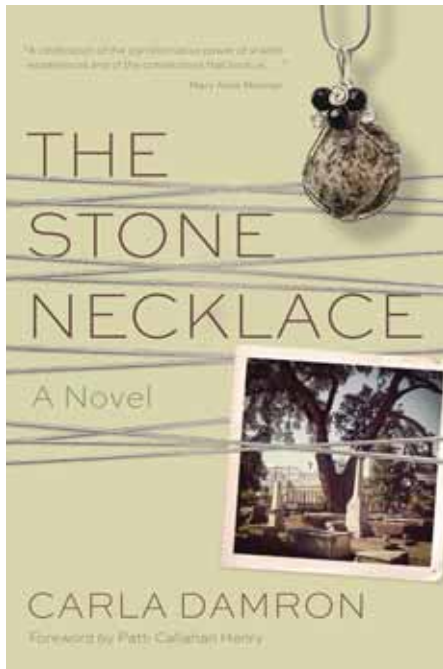
We see this straightforward method of delivery in all of her installation work especially, as form is carefully curated and repeated in groupings, stacks, and rows: “Because I work with objects, I think about the arrangement of these objects in space. I want the space that my work inhabits to serve as a domain that is halfway between the concrete reality of the things I make and that of the meaning objects acquire when they are perceived in the subjective terms of the self.”







# Columbia Buzzes about *The Stone Necklace*



**THERE'S A LOT OF BUZZ** around the city about Carla Damron's new book, *The Stone Necklace*, published by USC Press this month.

For one thing, the book was chosen by One Book, One Columbia as its 2016 selection which means that all of the Columbia and the greater Midlands are invited to read the book together during the month of February and participate in several exciting collaborative arts events as we read and enjoy the novel.

*The Stone Necklace* will also be featured during next month's brand new Deckle Edge Literary Festival (read more about Deckle Edge on page 49) with readings, lectures, and discussion groups.

And finally, One Columbia for Arts and History, in partnership with *Jasper Magazine*, is sponsoring two additional collaborative arts events inspired by *The Stone Necklace*. "Off Page – Photography: Photo Artists Respond to *The Stone Necklace*"

will open on Thursday, February 4<sup>th</sup> at the Tapp's Arts Center and feature the work of photo artists Thomas Hammond, Robert Coffee, and Kristine Hartvigsen. The exhibit will be up throughout February. "Off Page – Music: A Musical Response to *The Stone Necklace*" will feature the husband and wife team of Todd Mathis (guitar and vocals) and Cully Salehi (viola) and will be presented at various times throughout the month of February including the weekend of February 19<sup>th</sup> at the Deckle Edge Literary Festival.

Jasper caught up with author Carla Damron to get more background not only on the story of *The Stone Necklace*, but also on the author's process of writing. Read on for the inside scoop, and be sure to pick up your copy of the novel from any of the Richland Library branches.

**Jasper:** What was the inspiration, the seed, if you will, for your new novel, *The Stone Necklace*?

**Damron:** I remember distinctly the moment when the "seed" was planted. I was with another writer driving back from a writing conference. These conferences are always fertile times for me: new ideas, more energy, and creative freedom all emerge when I'm with my people. The what-if that came to me was this: What if a man who is a hypochondriac [and is] always thinking he's having a heart attack, ... actually HAS one. What if that event triggered an accident?

This seed was planted over five years ago. I started the novel, moved away from it to finish another book in my Caleb Knowles mystery series, then felt the pull to return to it. It grew in complexity as I explored other characters ... I got to the point where I felt like the project required skills I didn't

have yet—the literary form is vastly different than the mystery genre—I needed help. I decided to further my education by pursuing an MFA at Queens University, and often returned to this project during the "workshop" sessions. Workshoping is amazing and sometimes painful. Many, many pages got tossed in the trash during those two years! My Queens thesis was the first two hundred pages of this novel.

**Jasper:** You say the novel grew in complexity, and I was taken by the complexity of your characters, as well. Many, if not most, of them are flawed in ways typical of contemporary culture. Addiction, adultery, eating disorders, and more, plague the characters in *The Stone Necklace*. And you, the author, are a social worker. Did you intentionally set out to write a novel that deals with some of America's most prevalent social issues? Can you talk to us about the kinds of research you did to write this story?

**Damron:** Interesting question. In my mystery novels, I intentionally tackle social issues like homelessness and mental illness, hoping to do my tiny part in reducing stigma. I write to entertain, but I also hope to raise awareness. The best review I ever received was from a reader who wrote me that as soon as she finished reading *Death in Zooville*, she made a donation to a homeless shelter.

In *The Stone Necklace*, I didn't set out to tackle social issues. My goal was to dive into the characters, to let the readers know them in their full humanness. Each of us has our strengths and our struggles, our "growing edges." Recovery is an amazing thing—but it's rarely linear, and that's what I wanted to convey.

In terms of research, my social work career has greatly informed my writing. For

over thirty years, I worked as a clinician in various mental health settings. I have gotten to know some remarkable people who live full lives despite battles with mental illness or addiction. It's hard to articulate what they have taught me. While none of my characters are based on clients, their stories are inspired by what I've learned about the winding path to recovery.

In terms of outside research, I talked with several clinicians who specialize in treating eating disorders to help me get a better grasp on Becca [a character from the novel] and I interviewed a commercial real estate broker to have a better understanding of the ups and downs of that business, especially during tough economic times.

---

**Jasper:** So much of the story of *The Stone Necklace* is grounded in the geography of the city of Columbia. Was this intentional? Did you actually walk these steps yourself?

---

**Damron:** Yes, it was intentional. I feel that Columbia itself is almost a character in my project. Of course, I took plenty of creative license. I moved things. For example, Joe lives in a graveyard behind an Episcopal church. In my mind, it's Trinity Cathedral's graveyard, but I needed the church to be much smaller than the cathedral. That's what great about fiction—you get to do stuff like that.

---

**Jasper:** In reading the novel, I reached for my first tissue in chapter 3 and kept a box with the book from then on so I could have

them on hand. Is writing a cathartic experience for you? Do you cry when you write?

**Damron:** My intention is not to make my readers cry! I want the stories to touch you. I want the readers to connect with the characters, to understand their flaws, to feel their struggles. But I also want them to get to a place of hope. If you are sad in some places, I want you to be uplifted in others. I don't cry when I write, but I do feel something grip in my chest at certain points. As a writer, I feel like I lived with these characters—and I had to avoid the temptation of going easy on them. Recovery happens, but it's often hard. It can take a lot of pain, setbacks, and hard work to get to the other side. I suppose, in a way that is cathartic for me.

---

**Jasper:** Without using spoilers, where do you see some of the characters from *The Stone Necklace* four or five years after the end of the story?

---

**Damron:** What I love about this question is that you asked it. I want readers to sense that these characters went on to live their lives—that they don't cease to exist after the final page. When people ask me this question, though, my response is usually this: What do you think happens to them? I don't want to force a version of a future on Lena, Becca, Joe, Tonya and Sandy—I want everyone who reads *The Stone Necklace* to make those decisions for themselves.

Then again, I may need to write my version of what happens someday! - **CB**

# MACHINE FOR FALLING

By K. LaLima

The body is a machine for falling.

You have your own and may have tested it:  
pausing in a millisecond to take quick stock  
of what shapes the air takes past your ear,  
of which end will hit dirt first,  
of who else might witness your ineludible experiment.

For just a blink in that fast moment you will wish  
that you were suspended mid-air and held  
to complete these calculations  
to harvest every fragment of data  
to reach your conclusion

in a safety that respects the intimacy of science  
and the gravity of human flesh.

Equations are instead done on your behalf  
in a moment too sped to see  
what happens between  
beginning and end  
there might be  
nothing  
until

teeth meet earth

---

K. LaLima is a University of South Carolina graduate, freelance writer, and graphic designer. LaLima's writing has been featured in *In Our Own Words: An Anthology of Poetry*, by haikuniverse.com, and most recently in *Poetry on the Comet*.

# TRIPTYCH ON DEER, LATE

By Bhavin Tailor

I.  
On a country road in Georgia, the deer  
were replaced one night by cardboard  
boxes, flaps high as tucked ears  
drowned in headlamps and shining.

They were a blur, a flash of brown  
or red, torn across the road the way  
paper falls apart when soaked.

II.  
*The deer is asleep, I tell you,  
hiding behind a rotting log.*

But if there is a deer,  
it's lost somewhere so quiet and still  
that all that remains in this world  
are the antlers, tall and proud.

Or maybe there is no deer, just  
shadow-gnarled redwood branches  
twisted and shedding their leaves  
like strands of loosened hairs.

The leaves will not grow back this time;  
the deer is gone and we must sleep.

III.  
Back home the deer are slight,  
knocked around like wind chimes  
through the night until becalmed.  
I heard a story once of a deer

splayed beside the highway  
whose head rolled on for miles  
like a balloon caught  
between two great gusts of wind.

---

Bhavin Tailor received his MFA in Poetry from the University of South Carolina, where he was editor of *Yemassee*. He is currently working on a PhD in Renaissance Literature at USC. His work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, and *Jabberwock Review*, among others.

ODE  
TO THE  
DAYSTAR

BY NIKKY FINNEY



FROM CAROLINA WRITERS AT HOME (HUB CITY PRESS, 2015)

AVAILABLE IN HARDCOVER AND PAPERBACK: AT [CAROLINAWRITERSATHOME.COM](http://CAROLINAWRITERSATHOME.COM)

# O u t

It's not the room or the house or the yard. It's the light. The light that clarifies. It is the light that reveals, that illuminates. It is the light that finally stamps the handwriting down into the skin of the page and changes the work into the Work.

I write by light. Preferably natural light, but artificial light will do as long as it does not back down. Before sitting down to write I am always looking around for a source of light to shine or aim onto the page where I will do my work in that moment. I do not know at what point this conscious search for light began in my writing life or why. Maybe it has everything to do with being born in South Carolina. South Carolina is a coastal state. The mix of the sun's light and clouds, sunlight and sky in South Carolina is grandly and intimately influenced by the presence of the sea—which alters everything big and small. I do not know when I first noticed this about the land and the air of my home. I know that when I left South Carolina I immediately missed, physically and spiritually, what the Palmetto sky could do to me. This hunt for light is not as old as my search for the right word but it is as essential to my work as the sound of my voice reading my work aloud before declaring it ready to be seen in the world.

I write by light and I write in longhand. The longhand and the light on the page are a team. I am an out-of-doors girl. I have been so since the very first time I held a pencil in my hand. Something outside always mixes with something inside my writing and then something else that belongs to me and my writing heart is made in that mix. My favorite and best seat for writing, if season and weather allow, is outside, with my body planted directly under the sky lamp of the sun. I look for a bench or a picnic table, or simply plop down with my back against the long spine of a tree somewhere, the journal book or legal pad in my lap, my torso bowing in reverence to the face of the page that is awash in daylight and longing for a sweep or wave of good words to follow.

If children are playing nearby, then I incorporate their laughter in what I am thinking about, and my thinking becomes well lit. If there is a surprise class of elders doing Tai Chi somewhere across the way then reimagining and incorporating their luminous praying mantis movements, metaphorically, into whatever I am writing will happen, nine times out of ten. Writing, the subject and the physical act, is never "over there" for me. Writing is wherever I am and where I am is all around me in the very sensory-filled moment where I am at work. I pay close attention to how fresh my eyes might be able to see and feel something they have seen a hundred times before. The daystar or a good steady light helps me every time.

I am mostly searching for an open spot under the sun, a radiant place where I might look up and see something in a new way. I am looking for a place where I might sit for a long enough period of time in order to say and search for something that surprises or thrills me. I am a writer who keeps writing in order to be surprised and thrilled. I am always looking for a physical place outside, one that I do not have to quickly abandon or quickly rise from or move myself from the shores of, as the light arcs and shifts with the moving minutes and hours.

Writing is often about being in place when the magic is revealed. I am seeking a well-lit place where I might unearth the half-covered blue marble idea that I have at some point discovered hidden somewhere in the red mud, and avoid the shadows of the day or the warning barking dogs, the barreling-down-the-street editorial sirens, for as long as possible. A place where I might simply nibble and feed on letting the found quotidian jewel be fully colored and slowly surfaced by the good daystar hanging out with me overhead.

# I n

Sometimes the sun is not always available. When it is not, I consider the long-necked, shapely things that I sit beneath that help me reveal the better word, especially on my poetry constellation. I never want to run out of those things that help me clarify the darkness, so presently I embarrassingly own more lamps than I have surfaces to put them on. Some of them are stashed away in closets and others await word and attention from me down in the basement's cemetery half-light. I don't need one more lamp but still I buy them at yard sales and on eBay. On some workdays two lamps may sit on opposite ends of the same worktable waiting to be useful. One off. One on. I will usually move one beneath the cabinet if company comes so that I'm not thought too terribly strange in my habits. Not that I mind being thought of in this way. Not really. When I am working inside at that table I may have both lamps on and blazing like two inside suns. Sometimes, I find that the page I am working on really needs to be brilliantly lit in order to hold what I am about to ask it to hold. It all depends.

Some of the lamps I have close by me have long goosenecks and others are wide-mouthed architectural drawing lamps from another place and time that resemble art from top to bottom. All of them have the ability to direct the light wherever it needs to be on the page before me.

When I am really really writing I feel as if I am drawing, sketching something out first as I draft it down to size. One of the lamps I work beneath is a jeweler's lamp with an attached magnifying glass. I use this lamp sometimes when the diamond-cut words of an antiquarian book are just too small for my eyes to see and soak in. When I pull the thick glass between my eyes, and just over the open page, I am remarkably able to read through the jeweler's glass while keeping my hands free to scribble. This is very important.







# U p


I bought a house near the university when I moved back to South Carolina in 2013. There is a favorite tall floor lamp in the room with the blue couch. I can write in this room by day or night. During the day the natural light floods every inch of wall for almost four full hours before making its afternoon turn. The lamp that I use in the evenings is from the 1950s. At its very top there is a metal tag attached that reads General Electric Sun Lamp. It has an eighteen inch refracting globe that radiates the light down onto the white empty page that usually sits in my lap twinkling for the right word.

There are smaller lamps all around that still take the older brighter bulbs, the bulbs that are not eco-friendly and all but gone now. Bulbs that read one hundred watt, when a watt was a watt was a watt. I hoarded as many as I could for as long as I could and then I stopped hoarding them in order to join the future of mankind.


Once the plane ascends the clouds and I am as close as I can get to the great daystar itself, I know why the window seat has been my only choice since the first time I flew in a plane. I remained steadfast and enamored at how the great daystar streams inside the small rectangular window of the gigantic iron bird taking me somewhere, spilling its light down and around the tiny workspace desk attached behind the seat in front of me. I place my tablet or my pad of words there. I know I don't have much time to produce something so I get right to work. One hour? Three or four at the most? I bow into the streaming sun and feel the work gathering its proper height. Working on a plane feels like an amazing combination of working both outside and in. I am "stuck" inside this marvelous terrifying airborne contraption. My high-up widow seat quickly becomes a workspace filled with unobstructed light that I cannot and do not want to escape from. (One important discipline of writing that is never talked about enough is the act of refusing the quotidian distractions and not getting up from your writing chair in order to finish what you have started.) I am inside but I am also outside. Every time I look out of my plane's window the gleaming beauty of the earth is situated

above, around, and below me. I feel the light coming and going all the way down into my bones of my toes.

This search and desire for the light, the rose-gold light, the persimmon light, the pearl light of night, for the right light, this constant fight for a presence of strong light in my life, directed onto my writing page, inside or out, has less to do with needing to physically see what I am doing and has far more to do with needing to spiritually and sensually feel what might possibly surface if I keep at it and don't back down. As the great-granddaughter and granddaughter and daughter of people who willingly and with great devotion looked up and never backed down, who every workday whispered and thanked the daystar for being there, then boldly and without permission grew what they needed in their lives, people who didn't care much for store-bought things, people who could not have lived without the daystar or without the promise of light, coming in, returning to their lives from somewhere near or far, granting warmth and beauty and direction, this daughter of them, and of the omnipresent daystar above them, did not fall far from their precious forest of twinkle and blaze.



Nikky Finney was born in South Carolina, within listening distance of the sea. A child of activists, she came of age during the civil rights and Black Arts movements. At Talladega College, nurtured by Hale Woodruff's Amistad murals, Finney began to understand the powerful synergy between art and history. Finney has authored four books of poetry; *Head Off & Split*, *The World Is Round*, *Rice*, and *On Wings Made of Gauze*. She holds the John H. Bennett, Jr. Chair in Creative Writing and *Southern Letters* at the University of South Carolina. Finney also authored *Heartwood*, edited *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South*, and co-founded the *Affrilachian Poets*. *Head Off & Split* was awarded the 2011 National Book Award for Poetry.



# Local Record Reviews



## NEWSC

### More Success

*More Success* is the 2<sup>nd</sup> full-length effort from the FatRat da Czar-curated rap group NewSC. Like on last year's *New Success*, these six young rappers bring their own mishmash of flows and styles together in a way that mostly strengthens and invigorates their fellow emcee's skills. The opening track and lead single "Czar 7" launches like the intro music to a particularly rowdy sporting event as a 70s-style soul vamp melds with anthemic synths and FatRat introduces the members of NewSC one by one. Here, as on much of the record, the rappers are careful to lay a thread connecting each verse, with various nods to *Ocean's 11*-style teamwork peppering these battle-style playing of the dozens. From there the record bounces from modernized boom-bap

and P-funk and G-funk homages to direct nods to the current sounds of trap and drill music, all while maintaining a relatable, almost wholesome vibe thanks to the group's surprising lyrical groundedness.

Many of these songs, in fact, seem custom-built for cruising around the streets of a South Carolina city. "Palm Trees," with its catchy-yet-contemplative chorus and stutteringly propulsive beat matches the feel of a warm Southern night, while "Bendin Corners" features one of FatRat's signature rapping choruses that will echo through your head long after you've left your wheels. These songs are balanced by tunes that strive for a bit more, like the dark declaration of solidarity "Made" or the fascinating relationship story-song "Maneater," a track which sees Cole Connor's tongue-twisting eager-to-please persona ably balanced by the savvy cool of Lalisa. On any other posse record "Maneater" might be one of those lamentably misogynistic cuts, but here it only serves to emphasize the understated thematic dexterity of da Czar's rapidly evolving young recruits. —KP

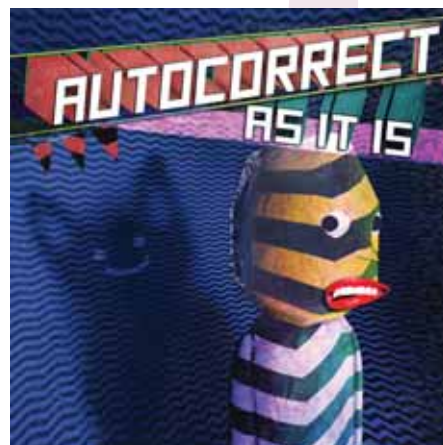
## AUTOCORRECT

### As It Is

Often times Columbia's hip-hop scene can seem a bit more conventional than national trends—but then we have bands like Autocorrect too.

Fronted by Cecil Decker, who has also released experimental noise records and

agoraphobic bedroom hip-hop projects, Autocorrect gets its core sound from some fairly obvious nerd-rap sources—Beck, EL-P, and Soul Coughing are all natural reference points—but what they do with those is truly remarkable. Decker has a tendency towards letting his humanities grad school vocabulary spill out and meet his fascination with the bottom feeder part of the Internet and misanthropic self-loathing, but he seems to intuitively know that all of that can work against him and counters that with relentless inventive flow switches and dense, knotty rhyme schemes. The production work by Decker and his merry band of collaborators is almost always sympathetic to these ends, trading in woozy psychedelia and skittering, paranoia-inducing experimental beats that frequently feel off-kilter yet never wander too far from a dependable downbeat. Choral singer Chris Johnson's vocal contributions are always surprising,



but their net effect is halfway between plaintive Greek chorus and a bizarre sample. Elsewhere Johnson and fellow band members Sean Burn and Moses Andrews III provide semi-conventional rock-rap backing for Decker, helping build intensity and introduce some organic noise into the mix. Highlights and likely live set mainstays are the anti-consumer screed “save less, spend more,” the relationship deep-dives of “Overdue” and “Electric,” and paradigm-smashing social critique of “All Our Progress,” all of which tend towards the more traditional end of the beats created for as it is. What’s most surprising for the record, though, is how quiet and unassuming many of the more experimental tracks are here. On “so many words,” for instance, wandering low-key synths and drum beats are matched by Decker’s voice at a near-whisper, suggesting more of an interest in the full dynamic range of experimental composition than the band’s previous work and rambunctious live shows would otherwise indicate.

**-KP**



## SMALL SANCTIONS

*Para East*

Sadly, *Para East* is likely the swan song for this talented post-punk trio. Grayson

Venters has long been seen playing the sideman role in groups like the Latenights and ET Anderson, but his leadership role in the Small Sanctions is still the best showcase for his taunt, angular guitar playing. Backed by the throbbing rhythm section of bassist John Fowler and drummer Nate Puza, this quartet of songs matches the emotional thrall and rollercoaster riff threading that we saw from the group’s first effort *Feather Habits*. Venter’s big, booming voice fits well in the Joy Division/Gang of Four mode that he writes in, even as the songs themselves venture further afield that that surface resemblance. “Bucholz’ Girl” rides a sunny guitar riff and a giddy, exuberant chorus just barely contained by the hint of anguish in Venter’s delivery. Similarly, “dog devotion” conceals a surprisingly jaunty melody, one that brings to mind the more Shins-like pop-rock of Venter’s former group The Latenights. That the song also features a dexterous bassline from Fowler and a bit of ecstatic falsetto doesn’t hurt either.

It’s truly too bad that Venters is moving across the country and breaking up Small Sanctions when the group is clearly hitting on such a high level. They are (or perhaps were?) one of the truly top flight indie rock bands of the Palmetto State for the brief period they were around. **-KP**

## H3RO

*Between the Panels*

When *Between the Panels* opens, we’re subjected to one of the truly unique spoken-word skits in the vast pantheon of hip-hop mini-dramas. Dropped into what sounds like a nightmarish post-apocalyptic world, possibly within a buddy-cop context, we’re bystanders in a city that is clearly doomed. Survivors are unaccounted-for. It’s *Mad Max* and *I Am Legend*. The world is burning, just as an infamous comic book vil-



lain wished it so. A phone ringing interrupts the background sounds of widespread arson; it’s our hero, H3RO, calling his partner who is nowhere to be found among the destruction that surrounds. After a few rings, his partner answers.

“Bro, were you at?” asks H3RO with genuine concern.

“I don’t know man,” comes the breathless response. “We must’ve got separated in the blast.”

“Word. Well, we gotta try to find a way outta here somehow, man.”

“Yeah, it’s crazy over here.”

“Yeah. Keep fightin’”

“I will.”

Another explosion and then the line goes dead. H3RO panics. “Light Gray? Light Gray, can you hear me?” His pleas continue and the narrator steps in to bring us up to speed: And so, another life is lost in the Gray Area – forgotten to all but the hero he fought with. Will he ever return? Or will he be lost for all eternity...BUT F\*CK THAT SH\*T! It’s time to play Fun and Games! With your host...ME! Suddenly, our H3RO has found himself the contestant of a game show sadistic game-show. The schmaltzy music is bad enough, but the host lays down some pretty harsh

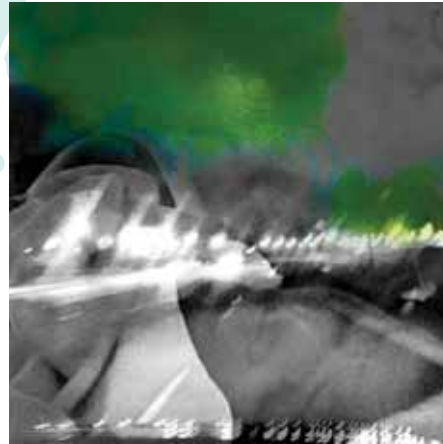
alone makes that clear. But he also possesses a sense of fatalistic humor that he wisely doesn't downplay. "Reset (Outro)" is a perfect example; has there ever been a hip-hop song about its protagonists love for Playstation, Game Boy, and the Backstreet Boys? If he's worried about street cred, he's gaining it on his own terms.

Is there anything more dangerous than an artist actively redefining the foundation of 'cool?' If so, then H3RO might just be Columbia's Most Wanted. **-MS**

stakes as the audience cheers like a pack of starved hyenas. H3RO is introduced, to ever-frothing applause, as a comic book legend that also moonlights as a rapper. He is given a choice: Before him are two panels. The first will send him back to "the real world." He'll get to see his family and dog and live out a "wonderfully boring life" while leaving Light Gray behind. If H3RO chooses Panel Two, the hounds that are hunting his friend will be called off and he gets to spend the rest of his life "here with ME!" But H3RO wants to go between the panels, only to be told in the host's Satanic voice that nobody does such a thing. "F\*ck that," says H3RO, and takes off down the path between the panels.

And so *Between the Panels* begins.

In the interest of space, I could just have easily summarized the record's one-act opening track, but to do so would have done a disservice to the dramatic narrative, the edge-of-death intensity, and, frankly, the strangeness of what H3RO clearly sees as an important introduction to his record. And it is strange. But it also works as a preamble to what is basically the best nerd-rap record Columbia has seen in some time. Justin Daniels – aka H3RO – is one of many young emcees under the tutelage of local kingpin Fat Rat da Czar; what sets him apart from his contemporaries is the way he embraces his love for loner pastimes like comic books and video games. Sure, there's no shortage of obligatory hip-hop tough guy posturing, and I don't doubt at all that, under the right circumstances, H3RO is not one to be trifled with. His aggressive flow



## AHOMARI

*Songs About Boys Side A-*

In *Songs About Boys*, Ahomari gives us lo-fi bedroom ambience that lulls the senses into colorful and welcome daydreams.

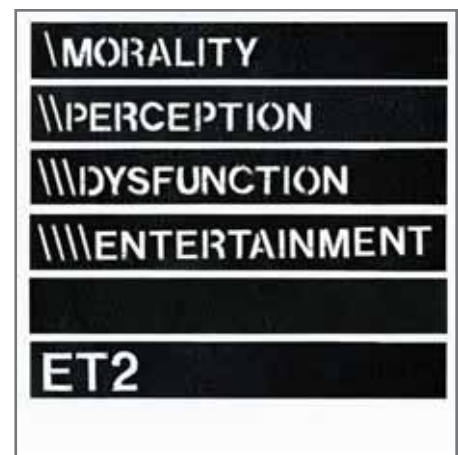
The main attraction is the singer's hazy vocalizations. On the first two tracks, approximations of sprechgesang are delivered in a husky tenor with youthful and idealistic demeanor. The ambient singing, which washes through your ears in waves of rippling stanzas while echoing hip-hop drums, gives a trippy rhythm to pulsing bass and touches of spacious synth tones. "The Good & Bad" is the standout here, upheld by Ahomari's raw emotionalism.

The middle section brings modern hip-hop sensibilities while never sparing the dreamy approach. The vibe is like Drake on acid. Instead of the typical rap bombast, "Down 4 U" and "Interlude" offer vulnerable lyrics and a surprising rap flow which hold up rhythmically, if not necessarily in timbre. The near-whispered delivery, usual-

ly Ahomari's strength, can make the vocals come across as weak in the realm of swagger-filled hip-hop. Even with new lyrics, it's hard to think of "Down 4 U" as more than a lesser cover of Kelela's "All the Way Down." On "Pure" *Songs About Boys* is at its best, distilling the essence of the record with a barebones, vocally rich moment of wavering, layered melodies. It drops any percussion for cool colored aural stimulation.

In all, this latest effort from Ahomari is a short but nuanced release not without some bitter tinges, but nonetheless a potent preview of what this song-packing sandman can offer us in our dreaming hours.

**-David Travis Bland**



## ET ANDERSON

*ET2*

When ET Anderson's debut, *Et Tu...?*, was released last year, it was something of a revelation. Before coming into existence, the project was the stuff of gossip and whispered rumors. I recall a friend telling me – in a conspiratorial tone, making sure I understood that this was to be taken in the strictest confidence – that Tyler Morris was starting a new band and it was going to blow the walls off Columbia's rock scene (I'm paraphrasing here.) Morris still had boatloads of goodwill left over from his previous band, Calculator, and great things were not only expected from this new endeavor, but pretty much demanded. And because the universe can be sporadically fair and benevolent to those of us who need

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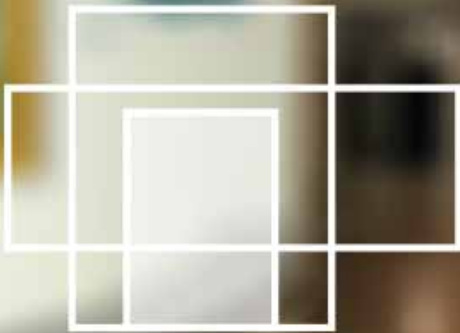
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it most, *Et Tu*\_\_\_\_? was indeed a stellar record.

It was indie-rock in the best possible sense: 'Indie' enough to be idiosyncratic and interesting and sufficiently 'rocking' to kick ass in a live setting. All of the ingredients were there – lyrics clever enough to be memorable and vague enough for a listener to make them personal, guitar lines spacey and drugged-out without losing their ragged rock and roll edge, and a Fox Mulder-ish sense of social paranoia running all throughout like blood in the album's quivering veins.

And then came *ET2*.

In many ways, it's a companion piece to its predecessor. The production fidelity is consistent and the general vibe of aural paranoia remains. But it would be disingenuous, though, to pretend that something isn't lacking. Where *Et Tu*\_\_\_\_? felt like a complete statement, *ET2* harbors the uncertainties of a series of ellipses. I hate invoking something as cliché as the sophomore slump, but clichés exist for a reason. In fairness, *ET2* was largely written and recorded amidst some seriously stressful personal turmoil for Morris and it would be wrong to ignore this fact as a major part of the record's context. One would think, given the nature of his recent troubles (which will not be delved into here), the resulting record would be pissed-off, cynical, and waving no small amount of middle fingers. Instead, the general mood of these nine tracks is one of sadness and disappointment, if not lyrically then in its overall posture. There's anger, for sure; *ET2* isn't a purely passive reaction to anything. But its rage comes muted and is always delivered with a beleaguered subtext.

Morris's talent as a multi-instrumentalist and lyricist is in fine form and no danger of being discredited. But *ET2* sorely misses the gung-ho panache of ET Anderson's debut. The record is by no means a failure, but it's a reminder that while life can inspire and move the artist, it can also be a distraction. –MS

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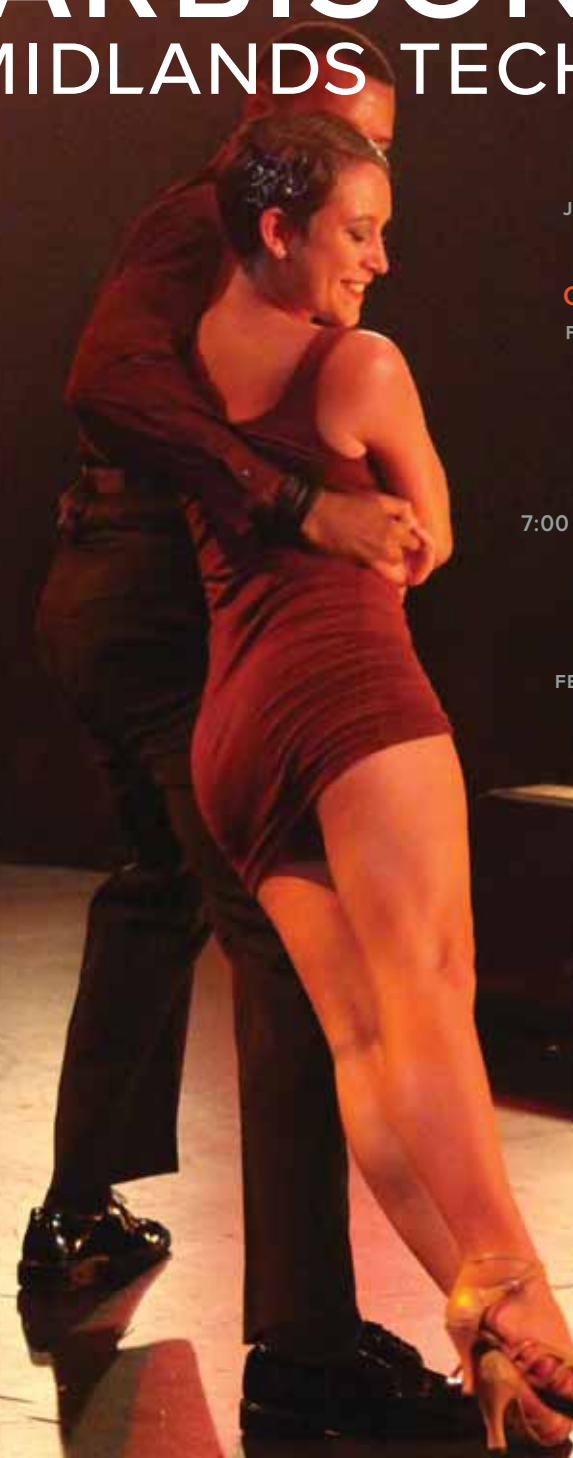
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## ACADEMIA

*Ring Cycles EP*

I suppose I could just ask him directly, but these types of questions are rarely met with warmth (besides, it's more fun to speculate.) Still, it needs to be asked: What does Tyler Matthews want from us?

As Academia\_, DJ/producer Matthews has created an eclectic, sprawling body of work that runs the gamut from electronica to club to trance to trip-hop to what can only be described as steamfunk. His records



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and singles are a maniacal hodgepodge of beats, samples, sound effects, and laptop sorcery – all thrown together to create a sort of musical/pop-cultural gumbo whose intent is initially unclear and therefore demands close listen. His latest EP, *Ring Cycle*, is perfectly consistent with Matthews' fondness for attention-deficit inconsistency.

As with all music that laughs in the face of easy categorization, it seems more natural to write about what *Ring Cycle* represents as opposed to what it literally is (the latter being close to impossible to summarize succinctly.) If we're working under the supposition that the EP is a statement and not a question, that statement seems to be, "I have encapsulated the frivolity of the junk culture zeitgeist in one eighteen-minute digital stream of consciousness. Context is eroding from our lives and I have successfully mirrored this simply by existing. I am the concept of no concept. Now dance, motherfuckers."

Perhaps this is the answer to the original question. Maybe Tyler Matthews doesn't want anything from us. Maybe he only wants to prove that the aural minutiae of everyday life – baby cries, Sega jingles, Tears for Fears, et al. – belongs under the same musical roof, whether strung together with care or crushed up with Viking-like abandon. He is presenting us with the future by effectively mangling the present. He is showing us postmodern nihilism. **-MS**

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[Not all submissions will be considered. Selection for review is determined by quality, space, and relation to the Columbia area.]



## SANDCASTLES

*Flicker EP*

Below the four tracks on Sandcastles' Bandcamp page appears the following disclaimer: four flawed songs about insecurity and depression.

It's worth taking a moment and appreciating how rarely we are faced with such truth in advertising, even if money isn't necessarily changing hands. The four songs that make up Sandcastles' *Flicker EP* indeed appear to deal with insecurity and depression. And, to make matters worse (or better, depending on how you value the power of advertising), they are flawed.

Sandcastles is the musical project of local renaissance artist Bakari Leiby. He's well known to anyone who pays attention to our city's creative scene, be it in the realm of acting, directing, or visual art. He's affable, talented, ridiculously well-educated, and a master of the lost art of intelligent conversation. If James Franco had a Columbia counterpart, it would undoubtedly be Leiby. But, painful as it is to say, this collection would lead a listener to the conclusion that this is not an area in which he excels. Given the lyrical subject matter, it's unpleasant to unpack *Flicker* as a lackluster experiment.

The last thing a depressive needs is to hear that his therapeutic outlet doesn't quite cut it.

If *Flicker* exists for the sole benefit of its creator, then it's an unqualified success. But as a pop exercise meant for public consumption, there are few rewards. Leiby's singing voice is pleasant and commendably honest, but the electronic music on which it rides offers little for the listener not traveling the same emotional path. But as the saying goes, there's no accounting for taste; it's entirely possible that I'm just not picking up what Leiby is throwing down. *Flicker* left this particular reviewer underwhelmed but, as always, even dubious art transcends the hardest-lined criticisms.

My admiration for Leiby's work isn't the least bit diminished. But *Flicker* left me confused and wondering where the gusto faltered. **-MS**

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# AMONG THE RUINS

## CRAFTING A LEGACY IN THE MODERN WORLD

BY JANE GARI

What contributions, if any, from our era will stand alongside the world's great collection of cultural artifacts? Will we only add our selfies and Instagram snapshots of fast-food dinners to the background noise—or will we contribute mindfully? On February 27, the Performance Incubator at Midlands Technical College's Harbison Theatre will present *Ruins*, an ambitious piece of choreography by Columbia-based dance powerhouse Terrance Henderson whose title evokes apocalyptic and archaeological themes, entreat- ing us to ask of ourselves these questions, and more

*Ruins* chronicles the process of crafting identity and legacy despite the fragment- ing forces of history, race, politics, and technology.

The piece tells the story of an artist's three distinct senses of self and the journey toward unification. The Earth Self, played by the multi-talented Kendrick Marion, is governed by physical and social needs. The Artistic Self, played by Henderson, craves poetry, music, and expressive movement. The Spiritual Self, played by vocalist Katrina Blanding, is eternal and motivates the other two. The first act illustrates the struggle to attain harmony in the face of societal pressures. The second act conveys how the Artist, in touch with his earthly needs, and informed by the spirit, then crafts a legacy.

Katie Fox, the Executive Director at

Harbison Theatre at Midlands Technical College, reached out to Henderson about participating in the Performance Incubator, which invites a different artist every year to cultivate and then perform a new work. The choreographer had already created a ten-minute version of *Ruins* which he and a core group of dancers had performed at the USC Alumni Choreography Showcase in the spring of 2014. The Incubator gave him the opportunity to expand the piece.

Fox is thrilled with the results. "Some of the music is funky with an Indian Bollywood sound," she shares, expressing surprise at how upbeat such an introspective piece of performance art can be. *Ruins* is a complex narrative, difficult at times, but in the end it feels celebratory. "I don't know why I was so surprised by the joy," Fox says. "The overall journey to leave your legacy isn't one straight line, just like your life isn't a straight line. And the music reflects the levity that comes from ultimately forging an identity and then a legacy."

The two-act piece begins against the backdrop of the Temptations' "Ball of Confusion"—a choice meant to echo the chaos and discomfort of not having the answers to difficult questions. The dancers are all corralled into a clump. "You need to be uncomfortable," Henderson says. "This is where the hard conversations have to happen before we can find peace." This peace is delivered in Act Two and echoed in the music of Balkan Beatbox, the part of the score Fox calls "funky." The choice is a deliberate

evocation of the fusion and multi-cultural- ism the project represents.

In December, Henderson met with several female dancers from the *Ruins* company to discuss the preview performed for a select audience earlier in the month. "I want the piece to be accessible to non- dance audiences. I want people to take a journey with us. What do you think?"

Meghann Padgett was the first to respond: "I trust you Terrance. I trust where you're going with this work," recalling an earlier rehearsal in a confined space where they were able bring a woman to tears. "I have confidence we'll make an emotional impact on any audience after that." Padgett also acknowledges an undercurrent of narcissism in *Ruins* she chalks up to a reflection of the narcissism in us all. "We apply our own perspective to everything because that's the only lens we have. It's natural, but we have to be cautious so we're not self-absorbed. We get so caught up in finding ourselves we forget the larger context. There's more than just us."

Henderson admits he didn't anticipate how the dancers would think about their own versions of themselves as they danced through the three visions he had of his own compartmentalized identity. But he loves the introspection the piece evokes in the dancers and hopes it opens that same reflection in audiences. Monessa Salley, another dancer in the piece, professes she has more than three selves, "one for every aspect of my life."



When Henderson first began crafting the choreography, he thought he was telling the story about a group of people, but realized it was about his own quest for a unified self who seeks a place among larger social and historical constructs, a self who longs to add to the human conversation. For Henderson it became clear—personalizing a narrative lends authenticity. “If you don’t insert yourself into the story, you run the risk of saying, ‘this is how the world should be’ and it comes off as preachy.” He had to answer the question of what mattered to him. “When you find how much you matter to yourself and love yourself first, then you can find your place in a larger context, bring something to bear artistically, find your legacy. A legacy is about organic connections between you and everything else around you, including the past.”

The dancers mirror Henderson’s sentiments as they express how they feel connected to each other personally, and even spiritually, after working on this project.

Salley describes how the dancers were invited to be collaborative and were given, “the power to be vulnerable with Henderson and experience the choreography with him. We were touched and transformed by the process.” Elizabeth Howell, expresses gratitude for the “group energy. This piece makes me live in the moments. It’s about transformations.” Her counterpart, Ashlee Daniels Taylor says, “We want to convey the dynamics and connections between people.”

Technology is a conduit for communication, but it’s loaded with potential to distract us from self-examination and genuine connection. “When we record our sacred moments with our phones and post it, we distance ourselves from the moment,” Henderson says. Padgett adds, “This piece is about finding personal legacy among humanity as a whole, especially now in our crazy world where technology magnifies everything we do.” The whole company seems to ask for a return to

organic soul-searching on individual and cultural levels.

Dancer Howell explains that “*Ruins* as a fusion of dance and theater”—a creative and collaborative undertaking about living in the moment and conveying spontaneity and active invitation to the audience. In this way, Henderson feels the piece is in motion—“If art can move it can last. It’s then a kind of social activism.” *Ruins* is a commentary on the importance of cultivating individual identity and the pressures race and technology exert on one’s journey. Bringing this piece to light as a fusion of dance and theater is a subversive act, as Henderson feels, “fusion is what the current powers that be fear most. It’s harder to control what can’t be identified or contained.”

Marion’s depiction of the Earth Self jumpstarts the performance by speaking directly to the audience: “Is time a ticking clock or a wheel of fortune spinning through cycles of mankind?” The Artist Self then races against his own ticking clock to figure out who he is and how he will step into, and then shape, history. This is a question we all face—how do we act once we’ve found ourselves and we interact with societal problems? For Salley, “it comes down to the virtue of reflection. We are reflections of each other. Reflection plus action. How do reflection and action bring about thoughtful change? This is what *Ruins* is asking.”

For Henderson, this reflection was impossible without taking race into account. How does an artist go about creating a legacy when he feels the paradox of a black artist who simultaneously belongs to an artistic community, but does not fully belong to the culture at large? Gathering a core group of dancers with whom he already shared personal connections, Henderson began workshopping the choreography, and *Ruins* began to take shape.

Shortly after they started working, fellow dancer Elizabeth Howell conducted an “Angel Card” reading for Henderson that crys-

tallized the racial and historical themes of the finished piece. During the reading, the Osiris card presented itself with all of its paternal and ancient Egyptian weight. For Henderson, the card meant to continue forward—the legacy came into focus. He had been feeling caught between the worlds of theater and dance and wanted to fuse those identities on a larger scale to address his concerns about society, race, and the actual process of forging identity. The Osiris card connected him to the old structures and legacy of past civilizations—those were the ruins he was sorting through. “What will last, what will last from me?” he asked. “I want my life to matter. I don’t want the circumstances of the world to have made me and my work not matter.” He feels strongly that artists have a responsibility to have a conversation with their community that can reach beyond an immediate community to comment globally, “to step into history and become a part of it marching forward.”

*Ruins* also addresses the contemporary history of the Black Lives Matter movement through choreography and spoken dialogue during which dancers vocally repeat the phrase “black lives matter” in both a declarative and interrogative tones. Henderson wants the piece to allow for a conversation. Rather than talk past and around the difficult issues, he invites us to talk and dance through them.

Further encouraging the exploration of the ‘black lives matter’ dialogue is Henderson’s experience as the artist in residence for the past fifteen years at Logan Elementary School. He asked himself, “How can I tell a classroom of young black men that they can be anything?” He then answered the question in the context of self-discovery and legacy that informs *Ruins*: “Just by virtue of who I am is a salve for the wound these boys inherit. I feel responsible for how I add to the conversation about race. We can’t be colorblind, so we might as well be color-conscious.”



# DECKLE EDGE LITERARY FESTIVAL

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## A FORUM FOR DIVERSE VOICES

BY KRISTINE HARTVIGSEN

I W R I T E  
T H E S E W O R D S  
A L O N E .

I N A N  
U N R E M A R K A B L E R O O M .

I N S I L E N C E .

W H I L E A  
L I G H T R A I N  
F A L L S O U T S I D E .

# IT'S UNIVERSALLY TRUE THAT WRITING CAN BE A **LONELY BUSINESS.**

M

any writers are perfectly content to work behind the scenes, outside the greater social rigmarole. Book lovers, likewise, relish a cozy nook to lose themselves in a story. Even if we enjoy our solitude, there is something innate in us that seeks – that needs – connection. Hence we witness the growing popularity of writers groups and book clubs. Yet these gatherings are characteristically small – and homogenous.

The Humanities Council SC in 1997 launched the first of what would be 19 annual statewide book festivals – all in Columbia – to connect readers with writers and books. The South Carolina Book Festival (SCBF) had a successful run over those years, but its leaders decided that, beginning this year, their format would change to a less-centralized portal for literary ex-

change, bringing smaller events year-round to more communities across the state, including rural areas. That meant that the beloved SCBF, in its previous form, was no more.

The news caused a stir in the Midlands literary community, which was reluctant to see the festival go. So a coalition of people and organizations led by PhD student (and, full disclosure, Jasper Operations Manager) Annie Boiter-Jolley and writer Darien Cavanaugh – with the Humanities Council's blessing – stepped in to plan and raise money for the inaugural Deckle Edge Literary Festival to be held the weekend of February 19-21, 2016, in Columbia.

Other individuals working to bring the festival to fruition include: Lee Snelgrove, Executive Director of One Columbia; Jonathan Haupt, Executive Director of the University of South Carolina Press; and Cindi Boiter, Editor-in-Chief of Jasper Magazine and Co-Owner of Muddy Ford Press in Chapin. Supporting organizations include the Humanities Council, Richland Library, Spartanburg's Hub City Books, Tapp's Arts Center, Historic Columbia, the Columbia Museum of Art, and the South Carolina Arts Commission.

Jasper Magazine editor Cindi Boiter, who received an Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Award in 2014, suggested the name Deckle Edge, and the group ran with it.

"We wanted a title that was both edgy and new yet still implied a hand-hewn concept, a title that would create interest and let folks know we are creating a new beast – a literary festival for the 21st century, with all the niches and multi-arts collaborations that implies, from international bestselling

authors to the equally important and often ground-breaking DIY community," Boiter explains. "As you may know – and we hope everyone will know from now on – a deckle edge is created when the pages of a book are not cut evenly. To me, a deckle edge is both raw and elegant, which is exactly what we want this festival to be."

"We all recognized the need for a name that was decidedly literary, evocative of history and tradition, and yet still with a bit of a hook to it, as well as something that wasn't limited by genre or geography," Haupt adds.

"I like that it makes reference to an actual, physical book," Boiter-Jolley says. "Personally, I like that it's a literary term. We wanted something that was unique but did not necessarily limit the scope of the festival."

With an engaging concept on paper, the collective's imperative morphed from the creative to the pragmatic.

"City officials said it was possible for us to access H-Tax (hospitality tax) funds," Snelgrove says, "and that made it a lot easier decision." The non-profit One Columbia agreed to serve as the fiscal agent for the festival, which is still in the process of obtaining non-profit status. The City of Columbia contributed \$25,000 to One Columbia for Deckle Edge. Other funding, approximately \$15,000, came from Richland County, the SC Arts Commission, the Humanities Council, and donations raised through an online IndieGogo campaign.

"From the beginning, there was an understanding that Deckle Edge would become its own organization," Snelgrove explains. "One Columbia is a bridge for this year. We are the fiscal sponsor for the festival. We

are helping connect the dots for funds from the city and county.”

Snelgrove, a Spartanburg native who has lived in Columbia for 10 years, says he has seen a change over the years in people’s general awareness about what is going on in the arts in Soda City. He says crossover audiences are growing as people step outside their usual genres.

Boiter-Jolley, who will co-chair the festival this year along with Cavanaugh, says there has been a consensus among organizers to be as inclusive as possible to attract the most diverse literary participation possible. “From the beginning, we wanted to reach people who hadn’t necessarily been reached by the SCBF in the past. We didn’t want it to be just the SCBF with a new name,” she explains. “We still want to retain the die-hard attendees, but we have been working consciously to build panels and workshops that expand the notion and understanding of what should be part of a literary festival.”

In addition to the traditional fiction and non-fiction reading and writing sessions, Deckle Edge will include more poetry than usual, songwriting, comics and graphic novels, writing for film and video games, as well as playwriting.

“We will include programming that brings in more young people and people of color, people who may have felt marginalized by literary events in the past,” Boiter-Jolley says.

“We would like to see an edgier literary event that speaks a little more to the location of Columbia, that focuses on the Columbia experience and its literary community,” Snelgrove adds. “One of our goals is to include writers at all levels and all ages and all genres, making it not so much a book festival (as before) but a literary festival. We really want to attract a broader audience.”

Many authors both new and familiar will be featured at Deckle Edge, including three poets laureate: SC Poet Laureate Marjory Wentworth, Columbia Poet Laureate Ed Madden, and Edgefield Poet Laureate Laurel Blossom. Cassandra King will be back in Columbia for this event, as will Mary Alice Monroe. Carla Damron, author of *The Stone Necklace* – the 2016 One Book One Community reading selection – also will be on

the program, as will journalist and graphic memoirist David Axe. SC First Novel Contest winners Matt Mathews, James E. McTeer II, and Susan Tekulve will lead a Saturday panel discussion.

USC Professor Nikky Finney, esteemed author of numerous poetry collections and winner of the 2011 National Book Award for Poetry (for *Head Off & Split*) will be among those participating in the festival. Other USC professors on the program include novelists Julia Elliott and Elise Blackmon, who had a joint book release in October 2015 for their latest works, *The New and Improved Romey Futch* and *The Lower Quarter*, respectively.

Because Pat Conroy has been a fixture at the SCBF in the past, fans are asking if he will make an appearance at Deckle Edge.

“Pat is putting pen to paper every day on a new novel, something all of this friends and fans can look forward to reading,” Haupt explained. “That means, in trade, that he has very limited availability for events at present, so Pat is not scheduled to appear at the inaugural Deckle Edge festival. But his wife, the outstanding novelist Cassandra King, is among the pantheon of writers who have been scheduled for this year’s festival. And writers from Pat’s Story River Books imprint at USC Press will be participating—including Carla Damron, Ellen Malphrus, Michele Moore, Eric Morris, and Mark Powell.”

Groups including Girls Rock Columbia, The Watering Hole, Poets of Color, and LGBT poets also will conduct special readings and panels, and Jasper will be hosting a day-long bier hall with more casual programming. For the most up-to-date session and presenter information, visit the Deckle Edge website at [deckleedgesc.org](http://deckleedgesc.org).

Designed to be a walkable downtown event, Deckle Edge sessions will be held at multiple locations on or near Main Street, as well as at several Historic Columbia properties. The Columbia Museum of Art will host a local authors’ showcase on Sunday, February 21.

Boiter-Jolley says the main “headquarters” of the Deckle Edge Literary Festival is still in flux, but the goal is to have downtown close to the other reading locations. This to be determined space is where the

festival’s Exhibition Hall and book signing tables will be located. “Having multiple, walkable venues will give the festival an *Indie Grits* kind of feel,” she says, referring to Columbia’s massively popular annual film festival.

“It may not have that centralized feel to it, but it will get people out and spread throughout the city,” Snelgrove says. “It will indicate that something big is happening in the city.”

Organizers hope to build on this first festival to make Deckle Edge a favorite. “Out of both personal and professional interests, I attend about a half-dozen southern literary festivals every year. Like those festivals, Deckle Edge is a gift to the literary community,” Haupt said. “My hope is that Deckle Edge will be embraced in its first year by its host community here in Columbia in the same supportive way that Savannah, Decatur, Nashville, Winston-Salem, and so many other great southern cities have fostered their respective festivals. Some of those festivals are comparatively new while others have been steadily growing for decades. They all started as something smaller but ambitious and well-intentioned in their first years, and that’s what Deckle Edge is in 2016. What it becomes thereafter is ultimately up to the public to decide through their continued support of the festival.”

“We really didn’t want a whole year to go by without a festival,” Boiter-Jolley says. “This first year will be a transition year. ... We are trying a lot of new things.”

In her book on writing titled *Bird by Bird*, author Annie Dillard weighs in on the writer’s need for fellowship and sharing: “We are social animals, and we are trying to communicate with others of our species, and up to now, you have been alone in a hole getting your work done. You have no idea whether it sings to anyone but you. ... An occupational hazard of writing is that you’ll have bad days. You feel not only totally alone but also that everyone else is at a party. But if you talk to other people who write, you remember that this feeling is part of the process, that it’s inevitable.”

Whether you write novels, scholarly papers, comic books, poetry, songs, or screenplays, the new Deckle Edge Literary Festival is the place to be in February.

# THE RAP ON MARK

THE WANDERING JAZZ CAT RETURNS HOME TO STAKE HIS CLAIM

BY MICHAEL SPAWN

*"Funny story," Mark Rapp says, not bothering to hide some of the whitest teeth I've ever seen. "I went to a party at Marsalis's house in New York, like I did a lot. You know, I'd come over a lot and we'd play chess and shoot the shit. Anyway, Laurence Fishburne is at this party. And I'm talking with a group of guys, you know, jazz musicians, we're talking about girls. Laurence Fishburne overhears and walks over to us and says, 'Young men, let me tell you a story.' Of course, we're all like, 'Of course, yeah, Mr. Fishburne. What do you have to say?' I won't go into the whole thing, but basically he was talking about how to treat a woman with respect to the point where she will not let you leave that apartment. Like,*

*she's gonna throw you on the bed and just ravish you because of how lovingly and respectfully you've been treating her. And one point in the story he's like, 'And then what you do, you get a bubble bath going and some flowers and stuff and lay her in the bed and kiss her goodnight.' Then he leaned in and kissed me on the forehead to demonstrate. And then he walked away. And we're all like, 'Wait a minute, you don't make love or anything?' He just turns around and says, 'That's the point. She will never let you leave that apartment again.'... Laurence Fishburne kissed me on the forehead at Wynton Marsalis's house. That might a pretty good opener for your article, man." I nodded. **When you're right, you're right.***

PHOTOS BY THOMAS HAMMOND





The lighting is dimmed, as it always is. Highball glasses clink lazily in the background, as they always do. Conversation and voices are muted but undeniably present, per the venue's unspoken code of conduct. It's a Thursday night at Delaney's Speakeasy and local jazz music is the evening's main attraction.

In the open floor space before the fireplace, in clear view of anyone lounging on the plush sofas and chairs or simply hanging around the bar, Mark Rapp is leading his band through an interpretation of John Williams' "Imperial March," better known as Darth Vader's leitmotif within the *Star Wars* universe. Before the piece begins, Rapp admits with self-deprecating humor that the concoction he's been drinking has got him feeling a little tipsy. Perhaps because of the drink or the improvisational nature of the genre, the selection doesn't begin with auspicious grandeur. There are false starts that elicit good-natured laughter from the band, but audience hangs in there and, undeterred, Rapp charges through and conducts his backing trio into completing the introduction. When the music finally lands, it lands with authority. The rhythm now firmly secured, Rapp joins in on his trumpet. Vader has arrived from a galaxy far, far away as a jazz cat of the highest and darkest order. The shakiness of the past few moments are forgotten and we're now faced with a piece of music and a performance that perfectly exemplifies the sort of artist that Mark Rapp is. He's a conductor, a composer, an interpreter, a reluctant perfectionist, and, above all, a

ravenous fan. Put bluntly – and in the most respectful way possible – he's a mega-talented, over-enthused jazz geek.

From my seat, drained glass in hand, I am consumed by two thoughts: 1) Drinking is way more fun when we pretend it's illegal, and 2) Mark Rapp plays his trumpet the same way he eats his lunch.

This might sound like a strange analogy, but bear with me.

Hours earlier, Mark Rapp and I are seated across from one another in a corner booth at Delaney's, the Irish Pub companion to the jazz joint where he will later perform. Rapp is hungry and he requests a turkey avocado wrap.

When his food arrives, Rapp leaves it untouched for what seems like an unnecessarily long time – about twenty minutes. Finally, he reaches down and picks off the smallest possible piece of the wrap. He chews slowly and waits several more minutes before repeating the action. We're nearly a half hour into our conversation and he still hasn't taken a proper bite. At the risk of sounding petty, it's driving me nuts. *Dig in, man! I'm screaming inside. Life is too short for this nonsense! The planet is in peril!* This pick-and-chew routine is repeated until finally, to my pathetic relief, he picks up the wrap and tears into it like a man unhinged. Watching him play later, I realize that this is how Mark Rapp operates in performance as well as mundane activities like grubbing down at lunchtime. He begins with caution, getting a feel for the piece (or turkey avocado wrap, as it were). He settles into his groove, letting the music evolve, develop an identity. He lets loose a few notes, letting them gel with composition at large. Then, and only then, when he's satisfied with the state of things, he picks up his trumpet and plunges in, diminishing

any doubt that he came not to play around, but to *play*.

Two distinct features define his overall demeanor. Physically, he has the horn-rimmed humility and clean-living aura of Rivers Cuomo. Combine that with the sardonic eyebrow gymnastics of *Heathers*-era Christian Slater and you've got a very interesting character indeed. Make no mistake--as talented a musician as he is, Mark Rapp is also a consummate raconteur. He delivers his career's trajectory with a mixture of uber-adult self-awareness and an impossible-to-fake sense of boyish enthusiasm, despite the fact that he's a healthy-looking forty-three years old. The chronology of his life and career, as with many musicians began humbly. He was born in Rockledge, Florida and his family moved to Florence when he was three. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Music Performance from Winthrop University. It was during this time that Rapp had his 'ah ha!' moment, that moment every artist has when the clouds part and you can see your goal just ahead, out of reach for now but very much in sight.

"A buddy of mine had a funk band," he says, those eyebrows bobbing and weaving, "and he was like, 'I want some horns in my funk band,' so I came to a rehearsal and I'm looking for the music, like, 'What do I play?' He goes, 'Naw, man, just improvise; just make it up.' I'm like, 'What are you talking about?' I had no idea. So he said, 'Alright, man' and he took me back to his house and says, 'You ever heard of Louis Armstrong? Miles Davis? John Coltrane? Dexter Gordon?' He started playing all this music for me and I was like, 'Wow, this is incredible.' That's how I fell in love with jazz, man."

This revelation led to what would become the most significant musician relationship of Rapp's early career. "So I dove in head-deep...and started digging jazz. That's

when I met Wynton Marsalis. Man, anytime he was within an eight-hour driving range I was at his shows. I was following him like crazy. I would sneak back stage, meeting the band. I was constantly doing that."

In fact, it got to be such that Rapp and Marsalis developed something of a mentor-protégée relationship, though Rapp is quick to downplay it more as Marsalis just humoring a young trumpeter trying to make the scene. The elder musician dispensed advice and encouragement; the two even jammed together on occasion. Encouraged by Marsalis, Rapp moved down to New Orleans. He spent about five years in the city playing music, partying, and working on his Masters degree in Jazz. He recalls the period fondly. "It was an incredible time in terms my foundation in jazz. Good lord, man. New Orleans has such soul, it's incredible."

After the Big Easy, it was the Big Apple, where he lived from 2000 to 2008. "That first year in New York...it was just dark, man...I remember the first jam session I went to within the first few weeks I was there. I remember it clear as day. The guys in there, they're *burning*. And I'm still thinking I can hang. This little kid walks over to a trombone that's taller than him, this dorky looking kid, and I'm like, 'Well, if he's sitting in I'll give it a try.' And this kid just plays the f\*\*\* out of it. So I put my horn away and went home and cried for the next hour. I literally cried, man. I said, 'There's no way I can hang here. I'm not gonna make it.'"

But the lean times weren't to last. After a brief mental breakdown which included a period in which Rapp literally 'lost his lip' (couldn't play a damn thing), he eventually found a band and a regular gig in a Manhattan cigar bar right behind Carnegie Hall. In the parlance of the jazz world, he had successfully made the hang. His first album,

*Token Tales*, released in 2009, was followed by collaboration with Don Braden under the name The Strayhorn Project. Amid this musical productivity, Rapp met, fell in love with, and married a European woman. They moved together to Geneva, Switzerland. The marriage collapsed and Rapp returned to the US and took refuge in Columbia. Dependent, Rapp gave up on music and it was only through much therapy he regained the confidence to get back out there and make a positive contribution to the Columbia jazz scene, a scene of which can't speak of highly enough and has found inspiration to champion the myriad jazz artists that play a substantial role in our city's musical spirit.

"I got this idea. I want to record all these bandleaders, all these bands... I want to highlight the talent we've got here in Columbia. Really just some world-class talent living and playing in Columbia...We've got everyone from Bert Ligon, Dick Goodwin, Skipp Pearson - these legends of Carolina jazz - to current cats like Reggie Sullivan, myself, Robert Gardiner, Jay Ware, Amos Hoffman...there's twenty-seven musicians we've recorded and thirteen bands."

Co-produced with Jangly Records' Paul Bodamer, *Cola Jazz 2015* will be released soon, though Rapp isn't certain of the exact date.

As a man whose lived and played in some of the US's greatest jazz communities, and even some abroad, his love for our local scene isn't up for debate.

"The scene here is small, but it's strong," he says. "There are a handful of players here that I would put up against any player around the world. There's some world-class talent here. And I'm hoping with the compilation CD...there will be a trickle down effect to have more venues supporting live jazz. Even if it's just a restaurant gig with a trio in the corner, that helps. For the size of this city, we're doing really great."

# The Watering Hole

Providing a Network of Support and Community  
for Contemporary Writers of Color

BY JAKE MARGLE

**T**he role of poetry in today's world is a curious one. To the average civilian who pays literary works no more attention than a passing glance, poetry might seem superfluous, a quaint tradition from a bygone era. For those who thrive in the presence of jam-packed stanzas and thought-provoking verbiage, though, poetry is quite a bit more than that, and very much alive. For verse-lovers, poetry is both a reflection of the world in which it is written, and yet it can also reflect back on the world. Poetry can be low-key and fun, but can also soothe the soul. The right poem read by the right person can, indeed, change the world.

The Watering Hole, a Southern collective of poets and contemporary writers of color, is a group well-versed in the intricacies of poetry. The lovechild of Candace Wiley and Monifa Lemons, The Watering Hole recognizes the importance that group discussion and interaction can have on the effectiveness of reading and writing poetry.

After the conclusion of Cave Canem South, a three-day poetry workshop held at the Columbia Museum of Art, Wiley and Lemons felt the need to keep the momentum going. The Watering Hole was born to fill a gap that made its presence known after Cave Canem South.

The Watering Hole not only brings together poets of color, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, or religion, it provides a support network of sorts. By fostering a sense of community between writers who have so much in common, albeit with different messages, The Watering Hole is providing stepping stones for those who desire to see their work published and their voice heard. It's also more than that. Wiley hopes that the group goes beyond something as simple as a writer's workshop and instead encourages the poets to become activists of sorts.

"Poetry and literature can do but so much on the page. There comes a point when the poet has to be in the streets, the poet must be in the class to teach [and] do the work in her community," Wiley said.

The group recently returned from their annual retreat in Santee State Park where the focus was on how their work can enact change in society. The retreats are designed to bring the online community together in a physical space, face-to-face, and break down any remaining boundaries. And it's this symbiotic relationship between ideology and environment that enables poetry to be so effective. Given the current racial climate following the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and Tamir Rice, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the nation can and should have an ear turned towards people of color. The Watering Hole recognizes the importance their work has in this time and place.

"There's a long tradition of Black poets responding to the racial injustice. This generation is no different," Wiley said.

The group has their eyes fixed on the #BlackPoetsSpeakOut movement, developed by fellow poets Amanda Johnston and Mahogany Browne. The movement encourages contributions to Black Lives Matter in the form of literary commentary with the hope that diverse modes of dialogue will make the movement as comprehensive as possible.

"We call this community a tribe. We are family beyond blood, we love one another, and we support one another," Wiley said. "When one of us wins, we all win."

The Watering Hole finds itself in a time that is extremely pertinent to their cause, a time when the voices of poets and authors of color are in dire need of being heard.

"We will continue hosting our annual retreat and pushing black voices into publications and onto the stage," Wiley said. "We want to have a residency and continue building a poetry community for poets of color."

In a time where the literary and political landscape is parched of creative voices calling for action, The Watering Hole aims to quench.

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For more poetry from The Watering Hole, please visit Jasper's online magazine at [www.JasperColumbia.net](http://www.JasperColumbia.net).



# HOW TO MUTATE

*For Tamir, the alchemist who transformed matter and age*

An adj is what it is.  
Sometimes a noun is but nouns can be      iffy.  
The verb is never itself,  
verbing along to old school      Hip Hop  
in an adj noun with the noun adj or  
in a new Mustang with the top down  
just verbing.  
Mostly what a verb wants is to be  
but even that's hard  
They can      do,  
They can never      exist.  
Once the doing is done, so are they.  
They will never be linked with a being.  
X-Men's Storm, Wonder Woman,  
and Luke Cage  
argue over drinks if they are a verbing adj or a noun  
the named  
or the modifier the prisoner  
or the latch  
the thing or the place it is put in  
another black child smokes  
reggie in heaven deciding  
if it was the monster or the demon  
the black or the blackness  
the n or the word  
the calling or the describing  
that verbed them dead.

---

*Candace Wiley is co-founder and director of The Watering Hole. She received her MFA in poetry from the University of South Carolina, and now teaches at Clemson University. In 2012 she was recognized by Jasper Takes Notice, Jasper's periodic features on emerging and exciting artists.*

# Fierce and Funny

## Debra McQueen's *Bad Girlfriend*

BY KRISTINE HARTVIGSEN



commands a Harley many times her size – with confident badassery – is just one of the qualities that make her a “bad girlfriend.”

McQueen's debut poetry collection, *Bad Girlfriend*, published by Singing Bone Press, is a girl's night out, sitting around the fire pit swilling cheap wine and dishing about our loves, losses, and conquests. These generally autobiographical poems depict the self-deprecating McQueen in exploits that wittily redefine what it means to avoid commitment while feeding one's adrenaline habit.

“I'm the Harry Houdini of love,” she writes in the title poem, bringing to mind all manner of kinky instruments the famous escape artist used in his stunts: handcuffs, straitjackets, chains. In many ways, McQueen has mastered the art of escape – from relationships as well as the persistent tedium of daily life. In the book, she explores her own thrill-seeking wanderlust with startling insight, softening the edges with easy humor. In “Serial Monogamists Anonymous,” she exposes love for the heady addiction it can be. It emerges spontaneously at the end of the support group meeting: “Wanna go for coffee,/ or pizza,/ or anonymous sex – / but not a relationship – / definitely not that.”

This theme continues in “Flipping Houses,” as McQueen deftly uses metaphor to describe the habit of treating love interests as projects. “It's easier than you think. / Just fall in love with his potential,” she writes. In “Café au Lait,” she ponders the difference in sexual prowess between her less-attractive French lover and that of her large-breasted girlfriend who “always gets the cute ones.”

From adventures living in San Francisco's hipie-chic Haight Ashbury to years on a sailboat on the Gulf Coast, McQueen pays homage to one of

her earliest influences – the poet Li-Young Lee – with the humility and lyric quality of her narratives. In “Night Mood,” she writes:

---

*If the power went out all over the City,  
the night's sky would be blotted  
by the dying squid's ink.  
We would see land's contours  
only by masthead lights atop  
sailboats and the headlamps  
of cars streaming across the bridge.  
Away from the monstrous dark.*

---

Perhaps inadvertently, McQueen seems to channel Carl Sandburg with the lines from “N Judah”: “I scurry down the steps / of my black house / and sniff the fog / like a terrier off leash, / fresh fish and eucalyptus. / Steam rises from the tracks.”

While feistiness prevails throughout this book, McQueen is not so bawdy as to be invulnerable. In “I Am That,” she recounts a story from her surfing days: “I just walked a mile across this desert, / carried my longboard / on my head like a tribeswoman.” Venturing where relatively few women dare, she almost immediately concedes that she is absolutely petrified. To gather strength, she summons a comforting Buddhist mantra yet ends up pleading with the deity to send her the perfect wave, one she can comfortably manage. But the men in their wetsuits are watching. Horrified by the epic wave heading straight for her, McQueen carries not only her own dignity but the pride of all womankind on the board with her. And while she weighs maybe 100 pounds soaking wet in the surf, McQueen distinguishes herself as a true poetry heavyweight.

It's hard to miss Debra McQueen when she walks into a local poetry venue. Though small in stature, she makes an entrance in her black leather riding jacket, a motorcycle helmet tucked casually under one arm. Silvery blonde hair falls in waves about her shoulders. She strides in wearing colorful cowboy boots. She has swagger. Best of all, she has the goods on those delicious, dangerous men who sometimes undo us. She knows how to surmount her fear and paddle into a colossal breaker. And

you can be damn sure she is going to rock the open mic.

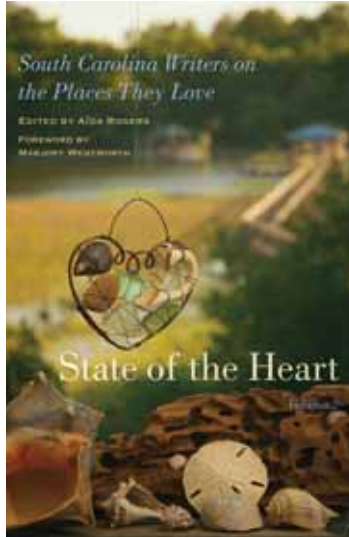
A special education teacher by day, McQueen is a lively adventurer and traveler on her own time. Exactly how the diminutive Columbia poet



# Places to Love

## Aida Rogers' *State of the Heart* Volume 2

BY KYLE PETERSEN



literary giants—James Agee, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O'Connor among them—frequently striving to divine its essence.

This second volume of essays in Aida Roger's *State of the Heart* series for the most part is not concerned with such abstract understandings of place though. For these writers, it isn't so much about what their sense of place represents as much as how they have experienced it. Asked simply to write about a place in South Carolina they love, these writers take us down paths seemingly familiar—the dirt roads of their childhood (Ray McManus' "Ruts"), the unlikely flummoxing peculiarities of rural living (George Singleton's "Strange Love in a Small Pasture"), and the cozy confines of a local produce market (Vera Gomez's "Avocados Are Always Ready to Use")—but also somewhat unlikely, like the decrepit Capital City Stadium (Ron Aiken's "Capital City Stadium and the Writing Life") and the posh luxury boxes of Williams-Brice Stadium (Patricia Moore-Pastides' "The Passion of Eighty Thousand in One").

While a reader might expect to be alternately fascinated by the unlikely spaces and a little nonplussed by the more predictable paeans, what is compelling isn't so much the spaces themselves as the sto-

ries we tell about them. For instance, Shani Gilchrist's affection for her childhood spent on a farm in Eastover might be a little pro forma, but it's enlivened both by her reflection on adolescent angst and on her parents' experience as transplants who both embraced and then discarded the romanticism of agrarian life. Similarly, Tommy Hays' lament for the "old" U.S. 25 might stem from an overly sentimental affection for "back roads," but the beauty of the essay lies in the fact that the story of the "old" highway is of his childhood and youthful romance, while the "new" highway tells the story of his fatherhood.

In addition to thematically grouped short essays, this collection also features a wealth of archival photography and epigrams placed strategically before each section, as well as images that specifically complement the individual essays that lend a scrapbook-like quality to the volume that works in its favor. There's a difficulty inherent in any creative non-fiction so self-conscious about its own storytelling function, but the attentiveness by both Rogers and the contributors here allows the collection to largely overcome that hurdle and tell stories that find the balance between "place" and "heart" to which the collection's title aspires.

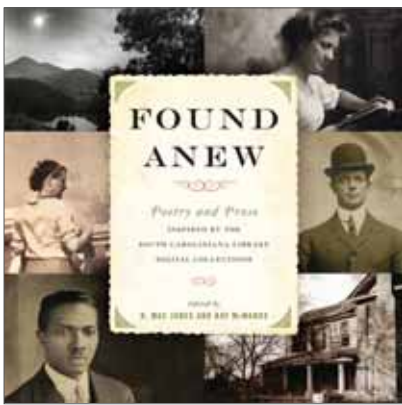
Since almost the very moment its regional identity was formed, writers of the American South have pondered the special "sense of place" so indicative of their cultural upbringing. While this specific preoccupation is hardly unique to denizens of the former Confederacy, it is a preponderant one, with some of our most famous and accomplished



# Reimaginings and Renderings

## R. Mac Jones and Ray McManus's *Found Anew*

BY ALEXIS STRATTON



In *Found Anew*, the reader is invited on a journey through South Carolina's past, as depicted through unexpected snapshots, carefully posed family pictures, and photos that are decayed by time—images of the past that are slowly becoming ghosts of themselves. Each of these photos, found in the University of South Carolina's South Caroliniana Library's digital collections, is paired with poetry or prose that it inspired, written by authors with a South Carolina connection.

Grounded in the literary traditions and landscapes of the South, writers string together narratives that are both familiar to the Southern ear and yet achingly unique. Julia Elliot's "August 1886" tells the story of a young woman teetering on the precipice between her competing desires for independence and connectedness and the social and economic pressures of marriage and family. Terrance Hayes' "Antebellum House Party" draws our attention to a black servant in a photo called "Coffee after dinner" with the opening line "To make the servant in the corner unobjectionable / Furniture, we must first make her a bundle of tree parts," highlighting the erasure and objectification of people of color in Southern history. In Pam Durban's "The Cure," a mother and daughter from Georgia migrate around the country in search of a cure for the daughter's tuberculosis—heeding their doctor's warning to steer clear of the humid Charleston in favor of the dry, sandy soil of a town called Aiken. Terri McCord responds to a decaying photo of a Huguenot church with a poem that mirrors the fracturing of the photo in her own form. The stories and poems range from the hauntingly melancholic to drily satirical, from the familiar perspectives of voices within the photos to the foreign gaze of those looking in from the outside.

Reimaginings and renderings can be tricky work, but through their efforts, these writers help connect us to the ghosts of a past that still haunts the land we walk on. The images themselves are fascinating glimpses at a not-so-distant history, and the writers help suture us to those faces, and voices, and possibilities. We are both drawn in to these photos and stories and alienated by them—made aware of the distance that time creates and yet brought strikingly close to the lives of those within these images. And through their beautiful prose and poems, we are asked to take a moment to remember the hands that took the photo or the face whose serious eyes stare out at us while being challenged to imagine what the world looked like through those eyes.

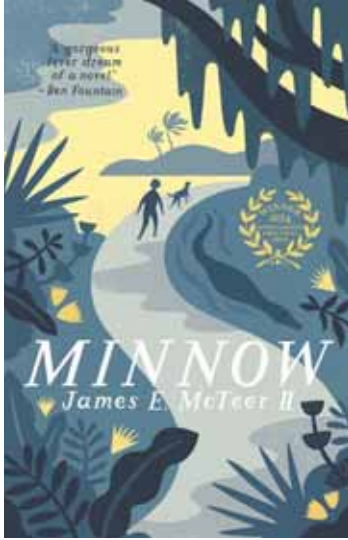
These are images that tell their own stories and, through the work of these writers, take on a life of their own. Perhaps that's the best way to offer these images to the world. As Will Garland writes in his prose piece, "The Art of Telling a Story about a Southern Family Living in a Small Southern Town," "when it's all said and done, and you sit down to tell your story—don't hold back on the important stuff. Go ahead and let that spill out. After you do that, you can let the story tell itself. Let it take on a life of its own. It will want to do it anyway."



# A Quest for the Ages

## James McTeer's *Minnow*

BY CINDI BOITER



fear, and very little fortune, reminding the reader of the bravery required to accomplish even the simple tasks that become increasingly complicated throughout the passage of time.

Don't get me wrong, *Minnow* is a tale.

With an ailing father, the title character embarks on what seems to be the uncomplicated mission of fetching needed medicine from the local pharmacy. Armed with his father's old leather wallet and a single dollar bill, Minnow sets out to prove his worth by running a fairly mundane errand. But nothing is simple in this particular portion of space and time.

Minnow's mission grows increasingly intrepid as he ventures along paths that lead to murky waterways and eventually to smoky villages deep in the jungles of South Carolina's barrier islands. In the finest tradition of quest stories, we accompany the boy across a landscape filled with all the attributes necessary to a proper Southern adventure including stray dogs, wild boars, thrashing swamp monsters both large and small, hostile weather systems, ne'er do wells with guns by fireside, and both indigenous culture and an ecosystem none-too-pleased with the meddling of humanity. Do not make the mistake of thinking the obstacles the boy faces could not get any worse. They can and do.

While written to take place at an unspecified time in the past the reader must

assume a period prior to the 1960s, and McTeer certainly makes use of language from a less enlightened period in Southern history, using the term "Negro" frequently and casually, once even referencing "a little colored boy." While this terminology may seem jarring in 2016 it may be argued that it successfully plays a role in transporting the reader to another place and time. And though the author occasionally uses the word "white" as a modifier there is surely some irony that in a setting like the South Carolina Sea Islands where the vast majority of the population are people of color, these characters are consistently the ones othered by reference to their skin color.

While the many characters Minnow encounters may be written a bit slightly—due primarily to the exigency of the challenge before him—they are rich with the prospects of the stories they could tell, and each gives Minnow an intangible gift sure to not only help him complete his quest, but to help make him into the kind of wizened adult the reader knows he surely will become. A boy who began his journey listening to the tales of his friends and hoping to score a soda from the soda fountain at the pharmacy, ends it by barely making it home alive and bringing with him a riveting tale of his own, fully saturated with mysticism, salvation, and the salty atmosphere of the South Carolina Sea Islands.

James McTeer uses a soft voice to tell the story of a young boy named Minnow. With words and tone that are both melodic and hypnotizing, the author confidently takes the reader by the hand and gently leads her deeper and deeper into the ambience and mythology of the South Carolina Lowcountry being sure she doesn't miss a sight, sound, or taste on the wind. Like other great stories that unfold via the mechanism of a young person on a journey, *Minnow* is a tale that transports through adventure, mayhem,



# Trustus Theatre Welcomes **Leila Ibrahim**



**T**HE NEW FACE YOU see at Trustus Theatre may seem young and enthusiastic, and Leila Ibrahim is both those things and more, but most of all she's completely confident that she is taking over the job she has always been meant to have—executive director of a ground-breaking regional theatre that is on the verge of making itself known to the greater world of theatre in the southeast and beyond.

Born and raised in Georgia, Ibrahim cut her theatrical teeth working backstage before moving to box office work and then on to theatre administration. After earning an undergraduate degree in business she moved to Philadelphia where she continued to work behind-the-scenes in theatre while earning her master's degree in Arts

Administration. "I went to Philadelphia for the job and the education but I always knew I wanted to come back to the South," she explains.

Ibrahim took the job of executive director of Florence Little Theatre in February 2015, full of plans and ambitions for what she calls the "robust community theatre" she adored. But when the job came open at Trustus Theatre, she found herself in a conundrum. "I had always heard about Trustus Theatre and what a great reputation they have," she says. "My plan had been to be at Florence Little Theatre for a while longer and accomplish more. But sometimes when a certain job becomes available you just have to take it. I'm excited to be working with such a progressive repertoire and a board of directors who want to grow this amazing theatre."

Ibrahim is also excited about working with an artistic director, having worked primarily with a board of directors at Florence Little Theatre who selected the production season themselves. "I have tremendous respect for [artistic director] Chad Henderson," she says. "Chad and I have strengths in different areas and I think we're going to work together very well. I'm really good at the business of art, but I'm not an artist myself, like Chad is. I still love being part of it."

Henderson responds equally enthusiastically. "I'm looking forward to working with Leila. She comes to Trustus with experience in the areas that, when coupled with the artistic elements, will serve the theatre's goals for the future. I expect we'll have a wonderfully productive relationship as the leaders of this organization. This is truly the start of a new era at Trustus, and there are great opportunities ahead." - **CB**

# WE NEED NEW STORIES AND NEW WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT RACE

BY KYLE PETERSEN



"Cassidy: Who is Emmett Till?  
River: I don't know."

**O**N THURSDAY, January 29<sup>th</sup>, Trustus Theater opens the play *Appropriate*. Written by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and directed by Jim O'Connor, this Obie-winning drama does something that is as time-honored as it is subversive—it depicts a bunch of white Southerners talking about, and around, race.

The play centers on three estranged adult children who reunite at a weathered and beaten Arkansas homestead where the patriarch of their family has recently passed. The three siblings and their assort-

ed families are both familiar and distinct, and Jacobs-Jenkins takes care to give his characters detailed, if unflattering, personalities, but the real meat of the story comes from their reactions to gradually discovering mementos and keepsakes in their old man's house that suggest he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

The idea of having a play about race in American history without any black characters initially seems odd but, as with many left-field decisions this young playwright has made in similarly challenging works like *Octoroon* and *The Neighbors*, it turns out to be heavily revealing, if not necessarily for the reasons one might assume. You see, Jacobs-Jenkins is one of the most celebrated young playwrights of his generation because his work is, in the words of the *New York Times*, "is, and is not," about race. In this case, the absence of black characters and race as a central conflict between its main characters demonstrates something remarkably different than, say, Bruce Norris's *Clybourn Park*, a spin-off of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* that appeared on the Trustus stage a couple of years back. Instead of placing white and black characters in an unusual, tense situations together, the play instead explores racism in its more common and insidious contexts—in a homogenous racial setting among friends and family members where it is treated as (quite literally) an object instead of a complex system of discriminatory power relations.

So, aside from the fact that this is exactly the kind of exciting and cutting-edge

play one hopes to see a professional theatre company like Trustus tackling, there's something particularly worthwhile about *Appropriate* and Jacobs-Jenkins' work in general. In a time when racism has once again been pushed to the forefront of our national consciousness with the Black Lives Matter movement and the deaths of unarmed black men and boys at the hands of police, we owe it to the better angels of our nature to re-examine, again and again, how racism functions and exists in new contexts and with new questions.

*Appropriate*, in its own way, is trying to get at some essential truth about how racism operates today. From the OJ Simpson trial to the state-sanctioned homicide of Michael Brown, it's clear according to polls that white and black communities have markedly different stories and conversations about race-permeated incidents. The vast majority of black art, stories, and characters in America can hardly escape racial realities, but race is rarely invoked directly in all-white stories and artwork. Essentially, only one-half of the grim story is being told, something Jacobs-Jenkins seeks to correct with this play.

Try as I might, I have difficulty not writing and thinking about this play specifically for a white audience, something I'm sure the playwright would hate. That very reality, the too-easy elision of one community or another when we talk about race, is exactly what he's critiquing here. But, I'm sure, he would like that the play made me aware of that difficulty as well.

# February 19-21, 2016

Downtown Columbia, South Carolina

## SCHEDULED TO APPEAR

Kim Wright~Tom Turner~Betsy Teter~Susan Tekulve~George Singleton~Greg Shemkovitz~Nicole Seitz~Banned Books Burlesque  
Metta Sáma~Emily Rosko~Mark Powell~B. Andrew Plant~Joe Oestreich~Eric Morris~Mary Alice Monroe  
James E. McTeer II~Matt Matthews~Ellen Malphrus~Ed Madden~Cassandra King~Ron Hogan~Sasscer Hill  
Hastings Hensel~Jonathan Bohr Heinen~Thomas Hallock~Kristen Green~Richard Garcia~Julia Elliott~Hank Phillippi Ryan  
Stevie Edwards~Richard Dansky~Liz Countryman~Ron Cooper~Julie Cantrell~Daniel Buckman~Justin Brouckaert  
Kim Boykin~Laurel Blossom~Al Black~Nathan Ballingrud~Julie Buckner Armstrong~Samuel Amadon~Aida Rogers  
Ray McManus~Jillian Weise~Marjory Wentworth~Joni Tevis~Ashley Warlick~Susan Laughter Meyers~Len Lawson  
David Joy~Nikky Finney~Elise Blackwell~Carla Damron~David Axe~Dan Albergotti~The Watering Hole~and more!

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