jasper

THE WORD ON COLUMBIA ARTS

JAN // FEB 2012
VOL. 001 NO. 003

what's love six

input/output

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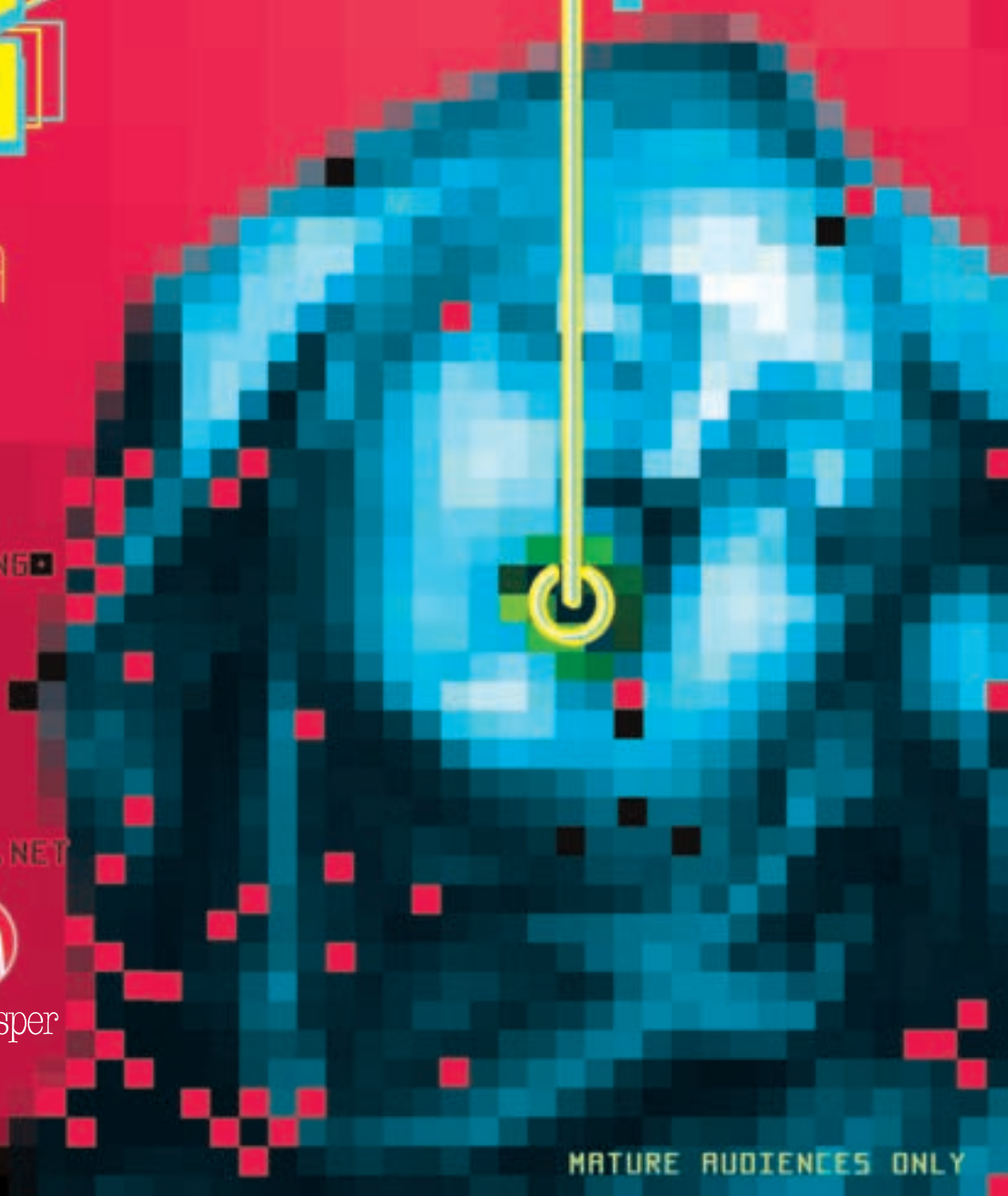

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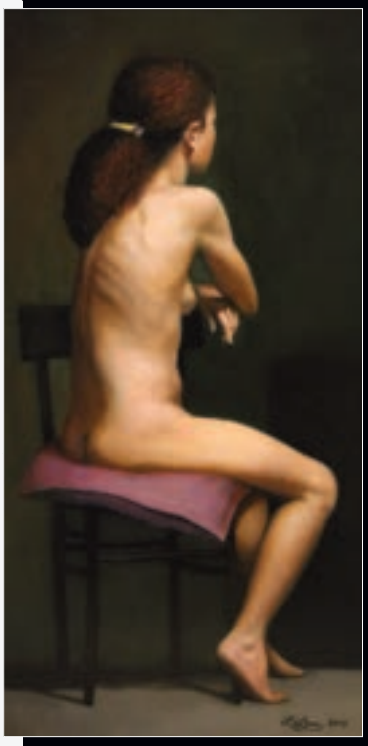
CENTERFOLD // Eileen Blyth



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"Nicoletta"

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Preach Jacobs covers local hip-hop
wizard blessed with the Midas Touch

JASPER **IS**

Cynthia Boiter // editor

W. Heyward Sims // design editor

Kristine Hartvigsen // associate editor

Michael Miller // associate editor

Ed Madden // literary editor

Kyle Petersen // music editor

Mark Green // photography editor

Lenza Jolley // technology maven

Margey Bolen // public relations

Bonnie Boiter-Jolley // staff writer

August Krickel // staff writer

CONTRIBUTORS

Michaela Pilar Brown
Lynn Braham
Forrest Clonts
Howard L. Craft
Fred Dings
Celeste Doaks
Nikky Finney
Kristin Freestate
Belinda Gergel
Thomas Hammond
Preach Jacobs
Ray McManus
Evelyn Morales
Tonya Russ Price
Ron Rash
Jonathan Sharpe
Alex Smith
Randy Spencer

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A MESSAGE FROM **JASPER**

Dear Friends,

Endings and beginnings of everything, especially years, are a time for looking back and forward, realizing regrets and taking pride, learning lessons and patting one's self on the back, being sad and being optimistic. At Jasper, we asked a group of artists and arts lovers what kind of New Year's resolutions and wishes they would make for the Greater Columbia Arts Community, particularly if money was no object.

As it turns out, money, of course, is a *huge* object given that almost everyone wished for an abundance of it for themselves and their brothers and sisters in the community. Not money for lavish purchases or conspicuous consumption. But money for paints and canvasses, money for spaces to create and demonstrate their arts, money for equipment, advanced training, and communication.

Our artists didn't want *money* as much as they wanted *funding*.

And almost without fail, they wanted a state government that valued their contributions to our culture for the integral building blocks that they are. Unfortunately, the lack of these two things – funding and institutional respect – goes hand in hand. It's an ideological problem that grows out of the lack of arts education and appreciation in our public schools and ultimately blooms into paralyzing fear and greed, and no-win situations for anyone.

There's not a lot that any one individual – artist or arts lover – can do to remedy this kind of situation, but our well-wishers thought of that, too. In the absence of proper and appropriate funding, most of them also wished for the kind of unity and community support that can overshadow and, in many ways, overwhelm such negativity. As performance artist Natalie Brown, who is featured in this issue of Jasper, says, "This is our town. This is our movement. This is our renaissance. Protect it. Nurture it. Help out your fellow artists. Share information and advice. And don't just leave your energy at the studio door, either. Watch and participate in what is happening in politics and in development. Know your local issues and help spread awareness. Something magical is happening. Let's keep the energy going."

At Jasper, we'd like to serve as a catalyst for doing exactly what Brown and so many other artists and arts lovers have suggested. We want to be the coffee table you gather around to discuss ways to make our community stronger, efficacious, and sustainable. In the coming months, watch for our sponsorship of a series of arts community forums where we will invite the activist-minded artists amongst you to come together to (briefly) complain about, deconstruct, celebrate, and finally, meet head-on the challenges local artists face. Be thinking about problem solving, creating opportunity, empowerment, and taking the destiny of the Greater Columbia Arts Community into your own hands. Claim this moment in time as your own.

Until then, we hope you enjoy the arts coverage we've assembled for you in this issue of Jasper. From taking a look at Columbia's choral arts, to exploring the studios of the Arcade Mall and two of its artists; from learning about both a ballet dancer and a belly dancer, to getting to know the author of the 2012 *One Book, One Columbia* selection; from the bookish tunes of a local band, to the credibility Columbia is gaining on the national Hip-Hop stage, at Jasper, we're excited to share all this and more with you.

Happiest of New Years from all of us at Jasper.

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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Poems About Race and Region

National Book Award winner Nikky Finney (see review page 59) is one of several award-winning poets to appear in the recent anthology, *Home Is Where: An Anthology of African-American Poetry from the Carolinas*, edited by Kwame Dawes and published earlier this year by Hub City Press of Spartanburg. Indeed, the first thing to note about this anthology is the number of amazing poets who call the Carolinas home and whose work appears in this collection – including award-winning writers Percival Everett, winner of the Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (as well as numerous other prizes); acclaimed poet A. Van Jordan; and Columbia-born Terrance Hayes, also a National Book Award winner.

This book offers a lively range of voices – from the established to the self-published, traditional poets and spoken word performers, blues and jazz voices, even a surprising set of dialect poems. There's a reflection on President Obama's inauguration, an awkward womanist paean to vaginas, an interrogation of Harriet Tubman, and Howard Craft's witty vision of an elderly black woman as a martial arts master. Diverse and lively, the book also feels markedly uneven, given the uneven quality and polish (and sometimes editing) of the work, but this is a necessary anthology despite its flaws, one that belongs in every library in the Carolinas.

The book was launched at an African-American literary festival at the Columbia Museum of Art in November, which featured a day of readings by many poets included in the anthology. Highlights for this reviewer, at the festival and in the anthology, were Earl Braggs and Sharan Strange. Originally from North Carolina, now a poet and professor of English at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Braggs has an extraordinary stage presence, and his recursive narrative poems – often marked by unassuming but quite clever wordplay – attain hypnotic intensity in his performance. (Braggs will be back in the state in March leading workshops for young writers.) Strange, who grew up in Orangeburg and now teaches at Spelman College in Atlanta, is the author of Ash, which won the Barnard Women Poets Prize. At the reading, Strange said it was the first time she had had the chance to read poems about growing up here here in South Carolina. The poems are devastatingly beautiful, rich, and it seems a real mistake and a shame that it took this publication to bring her back to the state.

Other highlights of the book include Evie Schockley's precise lines of shifting intensities; the retold Redshirt tales of Gary Copeland Lilley; and Indigo Moore's blues-inflected and nostalgic (but unsentimental) family poems, including a beautiful poem about a dead coyote, "Pull," which ends, "Everything / that lives on is trapped in love." This reviewer especially loved the surprising work of Mendi + Keith Obadike – inspired and experimental pairings of lyric poems with what seem to be impossible scripts for performance art: "Make a list of all your ancestors in a checkbook register," for example, or, "Hold coins in your hands until they sweat. Rub the sweat on your bare arms. Repeat until you reek of money." This is powerful stuff, and the juxtpositions of image and performance, lyric and script, amplify the effect.

A blurb on the back says region and race are the scaffolding for the anthology, but luckily the book, for the most part, escapes the magnolias and sweet tea clichés that could limit a regionalist anthology – one thinks here of that popular 2005 anthology, *My South*, full of trite poems about the South, a collection tempered by a few bracing and cliché-resistant poems like one by Columbia poet Stacy Smallwood (a voice strangely absent from this collection – as are any other openly lesbian or gay voices). In "Say Carolina," Glenis Redmond blows up the hoopskirts of regionalism to reveal the wicked contradictions and racism behind all that nostalgia: "She's a complicated Lady / look beyond the magnolias and mint juleps / she all plantation upfront & Middle Passage baggage behind."

In Glenis Redmond's "Authors' Conference" in Greenville, a student named Jamar says to her, "You don't look like no author." He's reading the same books she read, three decades ago, reading about daffodils and nightingales

"that unfold and sing, but not to me." There's no "gospel and jazz thrum" in those anthologies, "no cowrie, crow or drum" – and by implication, no black voices. If this collection were in school libraries, there might be some voices that sing for Jamar, voices that sing true, and it wouldn't be difficult for him to imagine that a black woman (or man) looks like an author. // ***EM***

Spaces for Theatres to Grow

You may not have noticed, but for the last two years Workshop Theatre has been operating in two locations. While six or more full-length productions are mounted each season at the familiar corner of Bull and Gervais Streets downtown, rehearsals and classes have taken place at the local non-profit's new space at 635 Elmwood Avenue.

Nestled where the Elmwood residential community meets the edge of the Congaree Vista and the Arsenal Hill Neighborhood, a block down from Logan Elementary School and just past Wayne Street, the new facility's official title is "Workshop Theatre's School of Performing Arts, located at the Kristin Davis Studios." Davis, star of films like Couples Retreat and the HBO series Sex and the City, performed at Workshop as a child, and her parents remain active supporters. Her gift, along with support from numerous local donors and hospitality tax funds, enabled the 2007 purchase of the new property, formerly a cabinet-making business. Board President Jack Jansen looked at over a hundred possibilities on the market, before deciding on this space, attractive not only for its proximity to downtown but also for its easy accessibility for theatre-goers coming from Irmo and Northeast Columbia via 126 and 277. Workshop owns the space free and clear, a first in the organization's distinguished 44-year history. In June of 2010, an adjacent parcel of land was added, and the total area is now a little over an acre.

The Kristin Davis Studios include two full-size dance rehearsal rooms, complete with mirrors and Marley floors – sprung floors that absorb shock providing a safe footing for dancers. A smaller rehearsal room is also used for acting classes. The back half of the building is comprised of three large storage areas, one for costumes, and two for set pieces. Previously, storage space had to be rented, as well as rehearsal space for shows with larger casts and more complex choreography, requiring additional room to move. Out front is a reception area and lobby, with tables and chairs. In the evenings, volunteers, often parents of young performers, staff the reception desk, greeting visitors and answering phone calls. All shows since 2009's The Producers have rehearsed here.

Acting classes are offered in the fall, spring, and summer for all ages, 4 and up, and for all levels, novice to advanced. They range from 1-day seminars and weekend workshops to 8-week long courses. Specialized topics include dance, improvisation and audition techniques. As generations of supporters of community theatre have learned, theatre classes are often helpful to children in building confidence and social skills, and learning the value of teamwork, even if a child isn't planning a professional career.

Meanwhile regular Workshop season productions continue, as they have since the 1970's, across the street from WIS-TV. The block is owned by the University of South Carolina, which plans to build a new Law School complex there. Workshop has until at least 2017 to work on relocation and the construction of a permanent performance facility, and a capital funds drive has met with initial success. Additional events and community-wide appeals are in the works, and Kristen Davis plans to continue her involvement when possible. Executive Director Jeni McCaughan (it rhymes with "Vaughn") is enthusiastic about all that the future has in store. "The Bull and Gervais site is so great, and in a perfect world we would stay here. But when people talk about where they think we should move, they don't always understand how much space a live theatre truly requires." She looks forward to the reminder of the current season: "We have a mix of classics like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and recent shows like *John and Jen*, and Andrew Lippa's *Wild Party*." She adds: "I'd like to see every show sell out and be held over, but more importantly I want our patrons to come and enjoy a night at the theatre with their family and friends." She is also happy to see some new blood. "We're excited to have some new directors working with us. Amy Boyce Holtcamp (is coming) over from USC this season to direct *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and Chad Henderson (from Trustus) is directing at Workshop for the first time with *John and Jen*."

Founded in 1967 by some young Turks from within the local theatre community, Workshop Theatre has established a significant niche for itself in the ensuing decades. Now with a slate of sure-to-please shows scheduled (this coming summer will see the first local production of the musical *Legally Blonde*) and with its new rehearsal/studio/storage space fully operational, the sky is the limit for this popular community arts organization. // ***AK***

Cedric Umoja, Street Artist Extraordinaire Photo by Mark Green

Street Art

Cedric Umoja cuts a regal figure when he walks into a room. "This is the problem nowadays," he states, surveying a not nearly crowded coffee shop – its inhabitants are spread over ample space with book bags and laptops, etcetera, leaving no available seating for anyone else. "A few people take up everything so the rest of us don't have anything," he continues. I point out to him that it's always been that way; only lately those of us doing without are actually saying something about it and he smiles and laughs, a young, boisterous, decidedly non-regal laugh. "You're right," he says, grinning, "That's the problem."

That laugh is a key. It helps explain the ebullience and the freedom felt when looking at Umoja's work. There is a sense of wide-open space in his compositions which, combined with his deft technical hand and literally brilliant use of color, makes viewers gravitate toward his work, and then discover the metaphorical depth that exists there. A non-graduate of the Art Institute of Atlanta, Umoja has developed a loyal following of fans in Columbia who watch for his work both in galleries and on the street. In addition to exhibiting his work throughout the city, Umoja has shown in Charlotte and Abbeville, as well as Art Basel Miami.

Umoja's primary influences have been pioneering graffiti artist, the late Dondi White, expressionist Max Beckman, abstract expressionist Hans Hoffman, and the man he refers to as "my teacher," Tony Cacalano, a Yale-educated artist who Umoja studied with for three years in Irmo. Cacalano's work offers a clue to what makes Umoja's work resonate so in that the two share an unusually similar color palette. One might presume, looking at Cacalano's work, that he is a contemporary of Umoja's, no older than 40 or so. "He's, like, 85," Umoja says. The Cacalano paintings convey pure, unabashed youthfulness; a quality also abundantly present in the work of Umoja.

When asked what Street Art is to him, Umoja rolls his eyes and then speaks. "It's not graffiti," he says. "Street Art is art that's done in the street – from a smiley face, to a sticker, to found art sculpture..." Indeed, at any of Umoja's shows, you might find some of his pieces painted on closet doors; others on skateboard decks, and still others on old vinyl L.P.'s, which add texture and even more story to his art pieces.

By definition, Street Art – specifically visual Street Art – is any kind of art developed in a public space, typically, though not always, unsanctioned by local authorities. Street Art is often referred to as post-graffiti art as a way of differentiating it from vandalism or territorial graffiti art, or tagging. Internationally recognized Street Artists include Shepard Fairey of the "Andre the Giant Has a Posse" sticker campaign fame, and political and social commentator-slash-street-artist, Banksy from Bristol, England.

Ultimately, what may be most compelling about Street Art, and Umoja's work in particular, is the sense of playfulness and adventure. Umoja has a willingness to put it all out there without spelling it all out; to take it all very seriously without taking it very seriously at all.

A writer, musician, former body builder, a commission painter, and one of The Izms Of Art – a Columbia collective of artists who produce for both creative and commercial purposes – the list goes on. Umoja may fall easily within the parameters of being a street artist, but artists as incisive and talented as he is tend to transcend labels of any sort.

Look for Umoja's work in April at S & S Art Supplies on Main Street. *// Alex Smith*

Classical Roots

Twenty some-odd years ago, Radenko Pavlovich was something of a big deal on European ballet stages. He had grown up in Sarajevo and started dancing at the age of eight, and then moved to St. Petersburg, Russia to train at the Vaganova Institute where he perfected the Vaganova method of training, a strictly codified and sequentially taught curriculum of ballet technique. As a still young man, he moved on to study at the Royal Ballet School in London before beginning a dance career that would send him to the Austrian and Croatian National Ballets, the London Festival Ballet, the Munich State Opera Ballet – where he became a principal dancer, the Ballet Casa Della Cultura in Ecuador, and finally, the Atlanta Ballet. While in Atlanta, Pavlovich had the opportunity to dance and teach in Columbia for Carolina Ballet's Ann Brodie. Upon retiring from stage performance a few years later, he moved back to Columbia, started his own school and, eventually, his own ballet company – Columbia Classical Ballet.

This season, Columbia Classical Ballet is celebrating its twentieth year of being what some people reference as the *other* ballet company. Interestingly enough however, some of the best dancing the city has seen over the past twenty years has come from Classical Ballet. While not always performing at its full potential – witness *Nutcracker* 2011 and, note, too, that City Ballet is just as inconsistent as is Classical – Columbia Classical Ballet is outstanding when it does what it does best – pure dance on a bare stage with minimalist costuming and very few bells and whistles. It's only when Classical tries to emulate the other larger and much better resourced company that it falls short.

The reality is that Radenko Pavlovich is, by far, one of the most experienced and best trained dancers, coaches, and artistic directors in South Carolina. What he lacks in business savvy he more than makes up for in talent and training. He works best when he has a choreographer – a real choreographer, not someone who is just trying their hand at creating dance – whose work he can tweak and polish and make amazing; someone like Milena Leben who worked as resident choreographer, instructor, and ballet mistress with Pavlovich for years before moving to Texas to teach and be near her son. Since Leben left, unfortunately, Classical Ballet hasn't always had the financial resources to bring in guest choreographers. And make no mistake; the lack of allocation of resources to this other ballet company hurts Columbia dance audiences more than anyone.

Washington Ballet Dancer Brooklyn Mack studied under Radenko Pavlovich

Because as much as families love the tradition of the *Nutcracker*, and as hot and bothered as *Dracula* makes us all – and rest assured, good dance can certainly be found in both of these productions – serious dance lovers want the kind of productions that make time freeze on stage. They want that amalgam of ephemeral precision that makes the heart fly during a grand jeté and not beat again until the dancer finally touches toe to ground. Pavlovich has given us these types of moments over the last twenty years. We sometimes find them during his yearly presentation of *LifeChance: Gala of the Stars*, in its sixteenth year now, when he brings artists from throughout the world to perform a mixed repertory of classical and contemporary dance for charity. But more often, we find these moments when Pavlovich is true to his training and his authentic aesthetic – the one he developed all those years ago when, as a young man, he danced for audiences in Zagreb and London.

Pavlovich and Columbia Classical Ballet have given Columbia, and the larger world of dance for that matter, a great deal over the past twenty years. Brooklyn Mack, a young dancer, well-known on international competition stages, who trained first in the Classical Ballet studios and now dances for the Washington Ballet, is just one of several ballet stars who come back often to dance when Pavlovich invites them. True to their roots, they keep the touchstone of home. Happy anniversary to Columbia Classical Ballet and, especially, Radenko Pavlovich – may he hold dear the touchstone of his artistic roots, as well. *// CB*

Lovely, Lusty Holidays

Unbound Dance Company Performing at What's Love Festival 2011

Whether you're looking for love or just to flirt with some thoughtful, suggestive, even titillating art, get your search engine primed for Valentine's Day 2012 and the annual What's Love show at 701 Whaley. What started out as an alternative for folks who didn't want a traditional Valentine's night out has become a major annual event that combines visual and performing arts with themes that challenge ideas about sex, romance, intimacy, and love. And while it's become one of the city's most talked-about parties, it is, first and foremost, a major exhibition by South Carolina artists.

The 2012 theme for What's Love, appropriately enough, is "input/output" – i/o – an exploration of how technology has changed the ways we do things like flirt, have sex, love, and "friend" one another (not necessarily in that order). Along with the use of technology by artists, attendees will be invited to participate in exhibits using social media and their cell phones.

More than 30 participating artists will play with the technology theme, expressing various ideas through visual, performance, literary, and media arts, as well as music. *Jasper* will be hosting an upstairs literary salon, with poetry, spoken word artists, and short film – featuring good writing that we hope will move you, make you laugh, make you think, or even make you hot. *Jasper* is also producing a small, limited-run chapbook of poems for the event, with sexy and romantic poems by Carolina writers.

"Packed with over 30 visual and performing artists, as well as 'interaction stations,' What's Love i/o is gonna have plenty of RAM in its sixth year," says Lee Ann Kornegay, one of the event's founders. "Everybody needs to make sure to bring their cell phones with them for some special messaging that night!"

What's Love: i/o runs from 7 p.m. to midnight on Tuesday, February 14, 2012, at 701 Whaley Street in Columbia. In the past, What's Love has attracted nearly 1,000 attendees, so get your tickets early. Admission is $15 in advance and $20 at the door. Tickets can be purchased online at 701whaley.com. *// KH*

Living Life Artfully

Ever seen a dog walking upright, wearing a purple vest with Mardi Gras beads, and playing a trumpet? Jasper hasn't either, but there's always hope. Krewe members of the canine variety will be out in force on Saturday, February 18, for "Gone to the Dawgs" -- Krewe de Columbi-YaYa's second annual Mardi Gras Parade, which will raise money that will be split between The Animal Mission and the Krewe, which will donate it to a deserving agrarian-based cause.

"We want to sponsor an upstart local farm. As a charity our Krewe will always promote agrarian values and local sustainable farmers who need recognition and a lift," says local attorney, musician, and Krewe co-founder Tom Hall. "We will continue to support the agrarian philosophy of the Krewe membership and its origins." Last year, the parade raised money for Wil-Moore Farms in Blythewood, a family run sustainable operation that lost a poultry barn and some 1,000 chickens in a fire. Funds raised went toward helping the family rebuild and restock.

March with the Krewe, and bring your little (or not so little) dog, too! Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin will be the Grand Marshall for the parade, and marchers will be accompanied by the famous Benedict College Choir, Band, Pep Squad, and Step Team, as well as at least two drum corps. Others invited to take part include the Columbia Quad Squad Women's Roller Derby Team, The Carolina Kudzu Queens, and Columbia's Alternacirque performance troupe.

Of course, it's much more than a parade. It's a full day of fun and frivolity at City Roots Farm, 1005 Airport Boulevard, Columbia (near Owens Field Downtown Airport). Hall is putting together a great lineup of bands to perform, beginning around 11 a.m. Confirmed bands at this writing include Whiskey Tango Revue, Say Brother, The Get Wets, Jackaroe, and Hall's ensemble, the Plowboys.

Folks are invited to bring a blanket and picnic lunch and make a day of it. Area food trucks also will be on hand cooking up delicious fare. There will be craft beers available for purchase as well as $2 economy PBRs. The parade from City Roots through the Rosewood neighborhood begins around 3 p.m., with everyone reconvening at the farm afterward to continue the party.

"It's about doing what you can until you can't do anymore," Hall says, adding that commemorative posters will be available for purchase around town in the weeks leading up to the event, as well as at the event. "We have posters I made that are going up across town. The Half and Half is producing a screen print that will be our official poster. It's by my mother, artist Lois Hall, so there will be two posters" to choose from.

Tickets for the Krewe's "Done Gone to the Dawgs" Mardi Gras Party and Parade are $5 in advance (via PayPal online at mardigrascolumbia.org) or $10 on the day of the event. Admission for canine marchers is $5 per animal, with all dog-related proceeds going to The Animal Mission. *// KH*

Roll Dawg by Tom Hall

Lucas Sams

There's really nothing like young art. Be it raw and edgy, or crisp and clean, fresh art offered by fledgling artists, especially when the work is ***good***, holds the promise of potential; the possibility of even better things to come. Jasper takes notice of new artists on the Columbia arts scene and strives to be sure everyone is aware of the energy their new art brings.

This issue's Newly Noticed Artist is **Lucas Sams.**

A young artist exploring both abstraction and realism, Sams was born and raised in Greenwood, South Carolina where he attended a local Christian school, but received no formal education in art or arts appreciation. In 2006, Sams left home to live and study at the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities in Greenville. Prior to attending the Governor's School, Sams had worked primarily with illustrations, graphic arts, and ceramics. But his new environment and the influence of innovative instructors, such as artist and teacher Paul Yanko, opened up fresh ideas to Sams and he soon began to work with oils. "I had never really considered working with paint until I took Yanko's class," Sams says. "He made me want to paint."

Upon graduation from the Governor's School, Sams traveled to Tokyo where he studied painting at the Temple University Tokyo Campus. His major professor there was the Brazilian-born eco-artist, Walderedo De Oleveira. De Oleveira taught Sams the technique that he most often uses in his work today. After returning to the US in 2008, Sams enrolled at the University of South Carolina and began working on an undergraduate degree.

"During the first half or so of my career at USC I didn't enjoy the department or feel like I fit in at all. It wasn't until my senior year that things finally clicked and I started doing installation, particularly Site Specific art," Sams says. Site Specific art is any artwork that is created to exist in a specific space, typically exploring themes and relationships within the conceptual environment. Sams also began working with found objects, which he says helped him with his painting.

"Goddess" by Lucas Sams

"Lilith" by Lucas Sams

Sams credits his major professors David Voros and Sara Schneckloth with huge leaps in his growth as an artist. Of Schneckloth he says, "She was the first person who told me to do whatever insane thing I could come up with to do. I had said that I wanted to branch out and experiment, and she said, 'do it.' Now I do a fusion of classical painting and abstraction – I prefer working with oils, but I also use a lot of unorthodox mediums like toothpaste and bodily fluids."

Sams' versatility caught the eye of Jasper; that, and his ease with full round strokes. He has shown his work in Columbia at the Tapp's Arts Center, Gallery 80808, 701Whaley, Anastasia and FRIENDS, and the McMaster Student Gallery and the McMaster Gallery on the campus of USC. Outside of Columbia, Sams has exhibited at the McCormick County Artists Guild and the Lipscomb Gallery at the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities.

Jasper is watching you, Lucas. **No pressure.**

" I prefer working with oils, but I also use a lot of unorthodox mediums

like toothpaste and bodily fluids."

Page Left: Photo by Mark Green

The Lush World of Tish Lowe

By August Krickel

A stroll through the Italianate Arcade Mall is a trip back in time. Take the stairs to the second level on the Washington Street side, turn left, peek into the first studio space, and your journey to an earlier era is complete. Rich oil paintings of dusky Latin beauties adorn the walls, along with ballerinas frozen in mid-pose, intricately detailed nudes, lush still lifes, and rakish gentlemen in elegant garb. You almost expect to find a flamboyant Venetian from the Renaissance presiding over an artist's salon, palette in one hand and perhaps a rapier in the other, a courtesan hidden away somewhere in the back. What you don't expect is to be greeted by a petite, bespectacled lady, welcoming you with Southern graciousness and magnolia blossom charm.

Letitia "Tish" Lowe has made Columbia's Arcade her studio home for a little over a year now. Classically trained artist is only the latest in a series of careers that range from playing organ and directing a 100-voice church choir to overseeing $5 billion in assets for World Bank, to touring rural Thailand on the back of a scooter driven by a guide nicknamed "Indiana Jones," stopping along the way to ride elephants and brave river rapids on a bamboo raft.

Growing up in Jackson, Mississippi, Lowe's goals were like those of many of her generation: to become a wife and mother. Both her father and grandfather took up painting as a hobby later in life, the former actually considering a career in art in his youth and serving as chairman of the local opera company and the symphony, so appreciation for culture was something learned early on. As a music major specializing in pipe organ at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, Lowe also took a couple of classes in art and art history and spent a summer as an exchange student in Mexico, studying local art and language. "I considered being an artist," she recalls, "but the career options at that time were graphic design and commercial art, which didn't interest me."

Post-graduation found Lowe married to a Presbyterian minister and serving as church organist and choirmaster, while maintaining a day job as a computer operator for IBM. Fast-forward a few years, and she was living in Knoxville and working in the computer department at the University of Tennessee. Seven years later, she had earned a doctorate in biological anthropology and was working for the Tennessee Valley Authority as both systems analyst and anthropologist. One door began to open onto another and then another in her career: an MBA at Yale, a move to Washington, DC, and a professional foray into international development and private-sector environmental work. As an executive with the International Finance Corporation (part of the World Bank Group) she ran a training program for international bankers on environmental risk management. Corporate downsizing brought about an early retirement and a compelling question from a career outplacement counselor: "What would you be doing if you didn't have to work?" Her answer was instant and spontaneous: she would move to Italy and study art. A generous severance package allowed her opportunity to explore a dream.

"Every barrier I put up got knocked down," and so in perhaps the best example of serendipity that one could imagine, Lowe spent the next six years in Florence, five as a student at the Angel Academy of Art. "I planned on a year," she explains. "Once I got there and discovered what I could learn, I decided to stay for the four-year program, and then opted for another year focusing on portraits and composition. The sixth year I had planned as a year to enjoy traveling in Italy, since 12-14 hour days in the studio precluded much sightseeing. But I received some important portrait commissions and spent the year working instead. I still get inquiries from Italy from people wanting portraits."

The Angel Academy's method is seriously traditional and highly structured, the type used by 19th century French academies and by Renaissance painters. Focusing on the figure, "students must master specific techniques before moving to a higher level," the thought being that if one can master the intricacies and details of the human figure, one can handle just about anything. "Students make pencil copies of academic drawings developed in the 1800s by Charles Bargue for the French academies; each day a half day is spent on pencil copies, and a half day is spent applying what one has learned to drawing of the figure from life in pencil. Second, when pencil has been

Photo by Mark Green

mastered, students draw plaster casts and figures in charcoal. Third, after mastering charcoal, the student then begins to paint in oils from plaster casts. The plaster casts are white, so the student becomes familiar with oil painting techniques using a limited palette. Finally, color is added to a student's repertoire through painting still lifes and the figure in oils. Students proceed at their own pace, and each student is different," Lowe recalls "I spent two years on drawing before I was allowed to pick up a paint brush."

Lowe's final pencil drawing copy took 14 weeks to complete, and she drew and painted from live models daily for five years. People often ask her how long it takes for her to create a piece of art. "It depends on where you want to start," she says, laughing. "First there's five years of training to get to that point. Then there is buying the canvas, stretching it, priming it, waiting for it to dry. ... Then there's your composition, the sketching, then actually putting the paint onto the canvas." If pressed, Lowe will point to a still life of pink roses in a jade-green vase, which took about five weeks from start to finish. For her work, she utilizes imported Belgian linen primed with gesso vero, the traditional type of canvas used by the old masters.

As much as Lowe loved Italy, she never planned to live there permanently. In 2009, wanting to ensure that her new career would be based in the United States for visa and tax purposes, she relocated to Columbia to be near family. Irene Simons (of the I. Pinckney Simons Gallery, now in Beaufort) was an early contact whom Lowe had met in previous visits to the area and was a great help in answering questions about galleries and the art business in general. After her first two years in Florence, Lowe returned to show Simons some of her work. Simons contacted a client, Charlton Hall, who was interested in Lowe's style of work, and he became her first customer, purchasing her first nude and first still life works, thus helping to finance the rest of art school. Word of mouth remains a major source for Lowe's referrals and commissions. A chance encounter with a frame shop owner in Florence led to two important portraits of heads of major Italian corporations, one a Knight of Labor (the equivalent of nobility, Lowe explains, in the post-aristocracy, socialist Italy of today). She feels that "drawing from the live model is

Photo Left: "Laura" by Tish Lowe

Photo Right: "Summer Bouquet" by Tish Lowe

critical to maintaining one's skills." Soon after her move, Lowe found the Columbia Museum of Art's "About Face" program, which led in turn to a referral for a portrait of Dr. Charles P. Teague, President of Spartanburg Methodist College, who drove down to Columbia 10 times to sit for Lowe. In an ideal world, she prefers the chance to see a model for 20-30 hours, and painting from a photograph is her least favorite method.

"What makes a good photograph is not necessarily what makes a good painting," she reflects. "A painting has to stand alone, beyond simply a likeness. It's an impression of a person that you convey with paint." She is quick to point out that however natural and lifelike her paintings may seem, she is nevertheless a classical realist, not a photo-realist. "A photograph captures a single instant, while painting from life is a composite of poses, with a different energy that both artist and model bring to the session each day. There's a skill to capturing what transpires, and what then flows onto the canvas. Great art goes far beyond that and reflects a greater truth, beyond just the person and their experiences." Clearly a

"Lady in Lace" by Tish Lowe

" A painting has to stand alone, beyond simply a likeness. It's an impression of a person you convey ***with paint."***

topic she has put thought into, Lowe explains it further: "There is a point well into the portrait that everything falls away. We meet eye-to-eye, soul-to-soul; our souls connect, and then it flows out of me."

Still life compositions are among Lowe's most eye-catching work (her painting "Spanish Bowl" took an Award of Merit at the South Carolina State Fair in 2010, and "The Pram" was awarded the Chairman's Choice Award at the International ARC Salon in 2007), but she remains especially fond of the human figure. "I have always thought that the human body, in all its many variations, is the most fascinating thing in the world." With figures, she sees no ugly people. "Everyone is beautiful in their own way, although the outside may become a package that we judge people by," she says. Lowe's goal is simple: to express that beauty through her work. Among her many influences are Velasquez, Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and John Singer Sargent.

Lowe is aware that, once a painting is finished, in some way an artist has to let it go, because each person brings his or her own life experience when viewing a work of art. Her stark piece "The Pram," for example, conjures an atmosphere of romance for some, often women, who note the vivid red roses, white candle, and hymnal in the foreground. Others, often male, tell her that they get a creepy, Tim Burton-esque vibe from a shadowy baby carriage. She points to a traditional rendering of a bottle of Chianti in a restaurant setting, which naturally suggests good food and good times. Yet if a viewer associates negative connotations with wine, perhaps due to some tragedy suffered, the exact same image can be one of sadness.

Since relocating to Columbia, Lowe has made a big splash in a small amount of time, participating in an About Face exhibition in conjunction with the opening gala for the Turner to Cezanne exhibition at the Columbia Museum of Art and in an About Face show at 300 Senate, followed by a solo show there. Jan Swanson got Lowe's name from the waiting list for Vista Studios when she and other artists were contemplating a move to the Arcade. When Lowe walked into the building, she felt right at home, as if she were back in Italy. She participated in the October 2010 First Thursday event, and visitors quickly told their friends further up Main Street, "You have GOT to come see this artist!" Faith Mathis, currently studying art at Columbia College, was one who was dragged by friends into the Arcade to see Lowe's work. "Her paintings hold an Old World elegance long abandoned by today's digital media artists," Mathis says. "Her art holds true to the fact that the human touch will always be greater prized, and much more appreciated, because of the years of skill and discipline it takes to learn master artistry." Faith's mother, watercolorist Barbie Mathis, sums it up more simply: "The Columbia Museum of Art needs to build an extra room to hold the works of Tish Lowe, because she is a true master."

Lowe also recently participated in the annual Unearth event at Saluda Shoals Park, recreating a challenge from her undergraduate years, in which she drew using natural objects instead of pen or pencil, i.e. sticks, rocks, leaves, berries, and other natural objects she picked up along the trails. "It was an exercise in both perspective and variety of lines," she says. Having worked in the environmental field, "it was great to be back in nature, combining two of my passions, art and environment." Music remains another passion. Lowe serves on the board of The Palmetto Opera; its goal is "to have a full season of grand opera in Columbia within five years." The organization's next project is partnering with the acclaimed Teatro Lirico D'Europa, an international touring company with more than 4,000 performances worldwide, to bring Verdi's La Traviata to the Koger Center on March 3, 2012. Lowe points out that "Teatro's production of La Traviata sold out this fall in Paris and other venues in France, Italy, and Spain, and in Baltimore last spring, so we are very excited about the upcoming production."

As a relative newcomer, Lowe has found Columbia's arts community "to be diverse and unexpectedly vibrant." She notes that it was "not until I moved my studio from the suburbs into the Arcade Mall downtown that I became aware of all the opportunities available in this city. A wide range of visual artists, ballerinas, poets, folk and rock musicians, actors, photographers, and art aficionados have passed through my studio doors and shared their enthusiasm with me. The arts community needs to reach out into the suburbs better with information and marketing about what's happening."

With her background in business and her experiences in Italy, Lowe realizes that "one of the reasons the arts flourished in Florence during the Renaissance was that, being good capitalists, the city's leaders used competition to raise the standard of excellence. They also were aware of what was happening in the arts outside their city. We can learn from their example. Columbia is fortunate to have a mayor who is supportive of the arts and recognizes their contribution to the city's welfare." She makes a good cheerleader for the importance of the arts in commerce: "To attract high-quality corporations, businesses, and professionals, cities and states need a strong cultural milieu that includes opera as well as symphony, art museum, ballet, and theater."

Along those lines, Lowe also hopes to accomplish some goals for the greater good via her artwork. She recalls that artists of previous centuries began to paint more and more from life, reflecting poverty and the hardships enduring by the working classes and the poor in their work; wealthy patrons purchased these works for their inherent beauty and craftsmanship, but gradually had their eyes opened to bigger issues in society that they might not have seen in person. Lowe wants to focus more on "important issues of the spirit" in her work, everything from the compassion and caring shown by the staff in a nursing home setting, for example, to darker issues that confront society, like the exploitation of children. Her hope is that "the beauty of a painting will attract viewers' attention and, in so doing, force them to see what they would normally ignore and compel them to take action."

Her loftier and long-range goals notwithstanding, Tish Lowe continues to be a working portrait artist, available for commissions. Just take a turn off Main into the Arcade, hang a right at the first cherub, head upstairs, and prepare to enter Lowe's lush world of classical realism. For more information, visit www.tishlowe.com.

Photo by Mark Green

Arcade Mall

By August Krickel

The Arcade Mall, aka The Equitable Arcade Building, is an architectural gem hiding in plain sight, right in the middle of Columbia's central business district. While many downtown building facades are adorned with fascinating flourishes recalling the Main Street of a century ago, only the Arcade Mall continues that turn-of-the century look when you step inside, from one of two entrances located in the 1300 block of Main St. (next to Bank Meridian and the Meridian Tower) and the 1200 block of Washington St. (diagonally across from the Sheraton.)

Built in 1912 and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, the Arcade, as it's informally known, was a state-of-the-art commercial center, the ancestor of today's shopping malls. An arcade is defined as a succession of arches, supported by columns, or a covered walkway enclosed by arches, and is popular in Italian and Mediterranean architecture. That feel is replicated in Columbia's Arcade, which is lushly decorated with marble columns, terracotta pilasters, tile floors and ceramic tile friezes that depict urns, vegetation, garlands, and playful cherubs. Originally designed as an L-shaped, open-air walkway in the Italian-influenced Renaissance Revival Style, the building was enclosed by the 60's, and now an imposing skylight tops the two levels of shops and offices. Sturdy light fixtures hang from above, while smaller lantern-like lamps dot the walls below. One is instantly reminded of the great enclosed malls and gallerias in Europe; that continental ambience, and the novelty of so many small spaces in one central location, helped establish Main Street on the north side of the State House as the city's premiere focal point for business and commerce. The building has been home to successive generations of retail shops and professional offices though much of the city's history, and in the 1970's, its basement was briefly home to a popular nightclub, restaurant and entertainment destination venue known as both Underground Columbia and Columbia Down Under. Many baby boomers recall getting their glasses from Murray C. Hicks, Dispensing Optician, whose shop was located in the Arcade for decades. Tenants still include a diverse mix of hair salons, a dress shop, a tailor, a shoe repair businesses, and assorted one and two-person professional offices.

Now the Arcade, a work of art in and of itself, is attracting new attention as a center for artists' studios. When Robert Swanson opened Swanson's Deli in 2008, he noticed plenty of empty spaces in the historic building. His mother Jan Swanson, who formerly operated the Bus Stop Gallery, was meanwhile looking for studio space, as were several colleagues, some of whom previously took art classes with her from Frances Nelson, and some whose work she had shown at the Bus Stop. As she describes it, one thing led to another, in by late summer of 2010 the artists' invasion had commenced. Using those ornamental cherubs as a collective logo of sorts, the artists of the Studios in the Arcade have made an impact over the past year, participating in events like Columbia Open Studios, the Urban Tour, First Thursdays on Main, Mingle and Jingle on Main, and hosting their own events and receptions. Each month, the work of one of the Arcade artists will be featured in the display window at 1216 Washington Street.

The Artists in the Arcade currently include:

Eileen Blyth and **Tish Lowe**, whose work and careers are profiled in this issue.

McKenzie Seay is a USC graduate with a degree in studio art, and works mainly with acrylics and oil pastels. She enjoys experimenting with shapes, patterns, and colors. She shares space with **Leah Avery** , a Columbia native who also studied art at USC, and who also works mostly in oils and acrylics. She shares a love for handwriting and lettering passed down to her from her grandfather.

Walton Selig graduated with an art degree from the University of Texas, but says she "went on to bake and cook," then started back painting four years ago. She loves figure drawing, color and oil paint.

Suzy Shealy works in watercolors, oils, acrylics, pastels; she batiks using watercolors, and hand paints the papers used in her collages. Her work includes portraits, still lifes, and is known for wildlife, pet and military paintings.

Bettye Rivers also revived her interest in art after marrying and raising children. She dabbled with drawing, and painting with acrylics and oils, but became inspired after taking classes in watercolor, and is now known for her vibrant colors.

Martha Thomas paints landscapes of the beauty of the Lowcountry, as well as portraits and still lifes; she works in oil on linen and pastels.

Jan Swanson is a self-taught artist working in oils. She describes her work as very colorful, sometimes humorous, and definitely non-representational.

Page Morris uses a combination of hand painted papers, acrylic paint, oil sticks, pencils, and fabrics to create her work. Her art is shown at Verve, Mack Home, and Finleaf Gallery.

Richard Lund has been painter, photographer and sculptor for over 25 years. He discovered the Arcade while photographing spots around the city for a series of work focused on Columbia, and immediately fell in love with the funky 70s renaissance vibe of the building.

Debra Paysinger paints in oil, exploring a variety of subject matter and moods. She is also affiliated with Corley Mill Artists' Group. Her daughter Meredith Paysinger majored in art at Sweet Briar College, and is a first year graduate student in theatre design at USC. She is inspirited by the natural beauty of the surrounding world, and gravitates towards oil painting.

Sylvia Ady-Potts left a successful career in advertising to pursue a BFA in graphic design at USC, then began work as a free-lancer. She says she now "claims clay as her cherished partner."

Beth West describes painting as a precious blessing. She writes that she is able to tell a story by "artfully placing shapes of colors on a canvas with focused attention to lights and darks, and warm colors next to cool and creating sharp and soft edges." She will join Swanson, Morris and Shealy (who all met while taking various painting classes) for a show entitled "Uptown Girls," beginning February 9th at Gallery 80808.

Terri Hutto formerly operated Wink Studio and Gallery on Lady St., and is the Arcade's newest addition. Her works which are mainly contemporary acrylics, but she also explores drawing and expanding mediums using oils, pastels and watercolor.

Buzz about the Arcade and its new community of artists is spreading throughout the Midlands. Boyd B. Jones, Exec. V.P with NBSC and incoming Board Chairman of downtown's Center City Partnership, spoke fondly of memories of the Arcade, where his grandfather once had an office. He sees limitless opportunities for growth and partnership between business and the arts. At the organization's annual meeting in November, volunteers and outgoing board members were presented with special awards; one was a special painting of a Main Street scene, created by the Arcade's Suzy Shealy, and special note was made of the renewed vitality of the space, and the contribution of the arts to Main Street's overall revitalization.

What's next? Expect the remaining vacant spaces in the building to be gobbled up soon, and there's no doubt that more special events will take place. With its Renaissance look and feel, the Arcade is truly helping to bring about a rebirth of Columbia's downtown.

Choral Arts in Columbia and Beyond

By Evelyn Morales

Choral singing has come a long way from the days of Ancient Greek repertory and the Gregorian chant. Columbia itself has a rich history of vocal arts, which is exemplified in the works of the Arpad Darazs Singers, the Sandlapper Singers, and the Palmetto Mastersingers, among several other choral groups in the area. While these three choruses share a love and appreciation for singing as a group, they have different influences that make them both unique and inviting to audiences. For example, the Palmetto Mastersingers, formed in 1981 by the late Dr. Arpad Darazs, is an all-male chorus with international renown. The Sandlapper Singers, a group formed in 1996 by its director, Dr. Lillian Quackenbush, focuses on using the works of American composers. And the Arpad Darazs Singers, formed in 1987 by former USC students, emphasizes a more accessible, community-based chorus. Together, these choruses represent great diversity and range.

Walter Cuttino, Music Director of the Palmetto Mastersingers since 1998, uses a familiar term, "E Pluribus Unum – out of many, one," to describe the dynamics of a choir: "I have lots of friends who are artists, painters, and poets, and that's great. The thing I like about choral singing is that it's a unit. It's an ensemble. It's teamwork. You have to be a part of the team, and you have to do your

Palmetto Mastersingers Photo Courtesy of the Palmetto Mastersingers

Sandlapper Singers Photo by Linda Braham

role within the team, which makes it more challenging, but I find it makes it more powerful."

The Palmetto Mastersingers have toured in France, Germany, Russia, China, Canada, and Italy and look forward to an Alaskan/Canadian tour this summer. Known as "South Carolina's Musical Ambassadors," the group has performed at the White House and the Notre Dame Cathedral. Collaborations with local jazz musician Dick Goodwin and his band have resulted in albums focusing on beach as well as Rat Pack music.

Quackenbush, Director of the Sandlapper Singers, is excited about the group's first international excursion to Ireland at the request of Music Celebrations International. "It's a 10-day tour of Southwest Ireland, beginning July 15th through July 24th, 2012," she says. "We will be performing with Irish groups as well, an opportunity to get to know the locals, so to speak." The Sandlapper Singers' focus on American music is a testimony to the abundance of national music available to them.

Perhaps more inclusive are the Arpad Darazs Singers. Bill Todd is both a member of the group and serves on its Board of Directors. He recognizes that choral singing may seem intimidating to some. "I don't read music, but when I do, I read it very slowly," Todd explains. His laid-back presence puts novices at ease.

"I really think that there is a belief that you really have to be, if not professional-grade, at least really good, and it's really not true," Todd says. "If you enjoy singing in the shower and can carry a tune and hear the notes, you can sing with the choir, and it's a lot of fun. We do it because we have a good time. We don't get paid anything. It's a substantial commitment of time. Nobody would do this if they didn't enjoy it."

Choral singing does not immediately come to mind when people think about "the arts." However, a chorus is as much a musical instrument as a violin or a piano. The integration of musical and vocal instruments can move people to great emotion, just as a dancer or a painting can. Indeed, recent performances by the Sandlapper Singers have featured the paintings of local artist Eileen Blyth as well as the grace and athleticism of Vibrations Dance Company. "They did some choreography with several dancers that went on during the music. It's not just one element, just singers and piano; there's a lot more going on," Quackenbush explains. The Sandlapper Singers notably presented the late James Dickey's poem, "Falling," in its choral performance.

"We had to jump through a lot of hoops to get permission from his literary estate to use the text," Quackenbush recalls. "We commissioned a woman out of Minnesota, Libby Larson, an internationally recognized composer, and she took James Dickey's poem and put it to music.

We performed that at the Koger Center on September the 8th, 2001, three days before September 11th."

Stereotypes of choral singing elicit predictable images of older citizens and staid church congregations, and Quackenbush admits this may be true – to an extent. "Typically the people that are interested in choral music have been white-haired, and that's not untrue of us," she says. However, the addition of the Young Sandlapper Singers to the Sandlapper Singers family is challenging the public's perception of what a choir can be. The Young Sandlapper Singers gave their first concert on December 2, 2011, and Quackenbush hopes they will "draw their families in, so we'll have a broader range of ages, as well as a bigger spectrum of ethnicity so we can broaden our demographic."

Cuttino is also familiar with the stereotypes but insists that a chorus is capable of performances beyond the religious variety. "If you're going to church, you're looking for a religious experience, and the choir enhances that experience. If you're going to a Mastersingers concert, you are going for a musical experience, and hopefully it becomes an emotional musical experience," Cuttino says. "We try to vary our repertoire so we can appeal to a lot of people. I'm very proud of that."

Adult choruses can range in age from 15 to 80, with older members making up the majority. In order to appeal to a larger audience and to continue the choral tradition, recruiting a younger demographic and reaching out to more accessible public venues is important. Todd laments that the Arpad Darazs Singers do not have a formal outreach program to recruit younger choral candidates. "We would like to make a stronger effort in that direction," he says.

The Arpad Darazs Singers embrace a lighter side of their Hungarian-born namesake. "I think he wanted everyone who had the ability to be able to carry a tune to have an opportunity to sing choral music, and that's why he found so many different groups," Todd explains. "I think we are more of a community group where people just like to get together and sing."

Each choral group has its own audition schedules and requirements. Those interested in auditioning for the Sandlapper Singers can expect to audition directly with Quackenbush. "I audition on demand," she says. "When people are interested, I'm interested in hearing them. I don't always have a position open for them, but I want to know what they could bring to the ensemble." The all-male Palmetto Mastersingers hold auditions for the first three rehearsals of their concert season. While knowing how to read music is preferred, Cuttino is willing to work on a diamond-in-the-rough. In addition to being able to sing, the group seeks people who can match pitch and sing in tune. The community-minded Arpad Darazs Singers cast a wider net and are highly approachable to the novice vocalist. "If they have a nice voice, we'll take them," Todd says with a smile.

The Columbia-based choruses typically perform three to five main concerts a year, along with intermittent special events. They frequently perform at Christmas concerts at venues such as high schools, churches, colleges, and community centers. Some upcoming performances include:

"Songs of the Spirit" by the Sandlapper Singers, Friday, March 30, 2012, at 7:30 p.m. at Dreher High School Performing Arts Center.

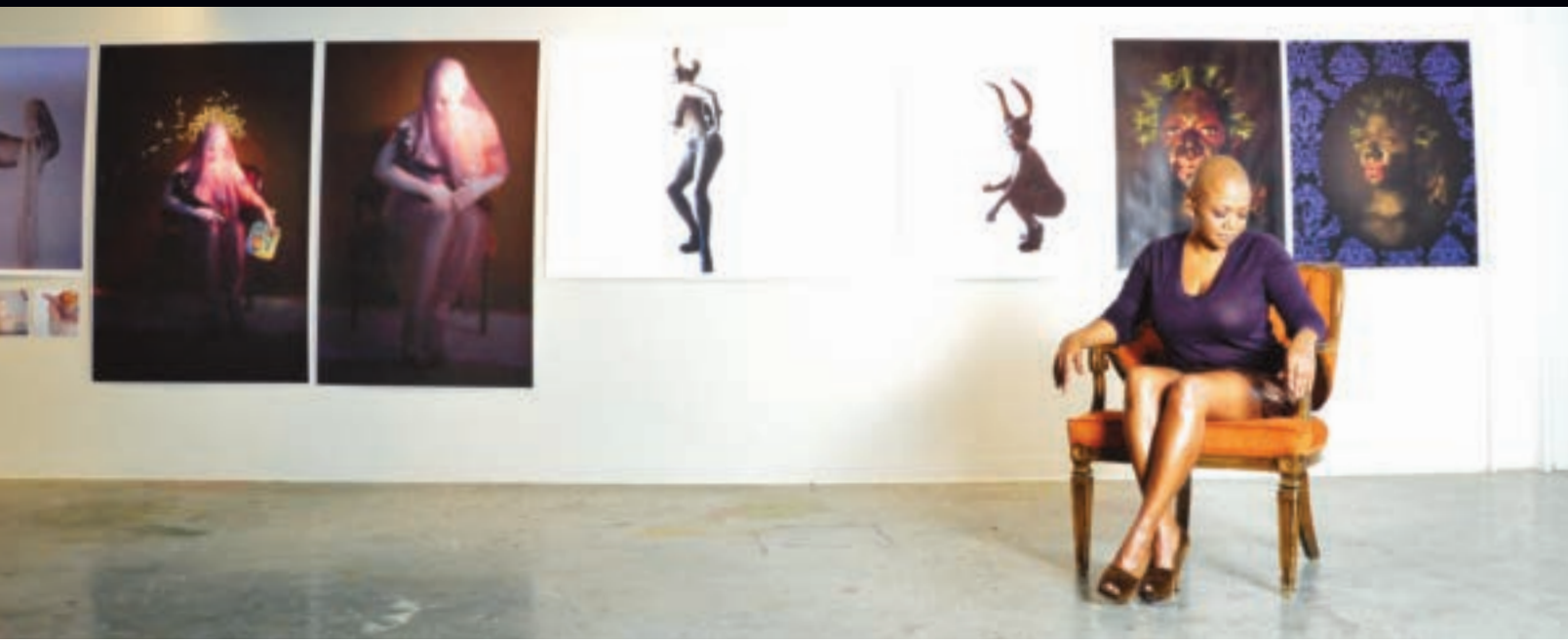
Tickets are $15 for adults and $5 for students. Details online at sandlappersingers.org.

A concert by the Palmetto Mastersingers, Sunday, January 15, 2012, at 6 p.m. at the Sun City Hilton Head Community Association in Bluffton.

Tickets are $20 for adults and $10 for students. Details online at palmettomastersingers.org.

The Arpad Darazs Singers' 2012 concert schedule has yet to be announced, so check the group's website at adsingers.org for updates. Admission to all Arpad Darazs Singers concerts is free, and donations are accepted.

Young Sandlapper Singers Photo by Linda Braham



Michaela Pilar Brown Photo by Tonya Russ Price

Service is the New Muse

By Michaela Pilar Brown

There is a singular kind of magic that occurs when you witness someone being transformed by an experience with your art. It is a singular moment when you understand that you as an artist have the power to invoke meaningful change in the life of another. For most artists, choosing art as a career is a different kind of singularity. It is often a choice to live inside one's own head, to spend endless hours alone with your materials and tools. It is a decision to forgo social activities, lovers, family, and friends in favor of a very demanding mistress, to incubate what you believe in your youthful arrogance will be earth-shattering answers to all of humanity's questions. Artist residencies are advertised as an opportunity for just this kind of singular experience, the brooding artist alone with her work. There is lip service given to the idea of producing in a community of like-minded individuals, but the real selling point is time alone with your art, away from your usual distractions.

Enter the McColl Center for Visual Art, in Charlotte, where I just spent the fall rediscovering myself as an artist, as a human, and as an activist. The McColl is part of a growing trend in residency communities embracing the idea of art as service. The McColl requires each of its residents to commit to community outreach during their residency, in addition to being available in studio with an open door to greet the public three days a week. The McColl has, over its 13-year history, partnered with hundreds of community groups as diverse as the resident artists. Their open-studio policy allows the public direct access to artists in the thick of their work.

I was attracted to the residency for the traditional reasons of time and space to create, but for me it afforded the additional opportunity to have conversations about my work with new audiences. Tired of preaching to the choir, and wanting to improve my own vocabulary for discussing my work with people from all walks of life, the open-studio policy forced a hard look at how successful or unsuccessful certain symbols and narratives have been in my imagery. Engaging the public in this very direct way served to improve my communication skills but served the larger purpose of educating the public about contemporary art. This is part of the magic of the McColl experience. It serves to connect artists and audiences, keeping artists grounded in real-world experiences with people across the social and cultural spectrum.

Mothers of Murdered Offspring (MOMO) is a Charlotte-based group connecting the families of murdered individuals with wraparound services needed to help them cope with the loss. I became aware of a Florida-based version of the group in May, following the untimely death of a young man in my family. I became aware of it at almost exactly the moment I was accepting the residency at the McColl. Partnering with MOMO was a natural extension of my personal grief and an outreach opportunity. I worked with five women from MOMO: the program coordinator who combed through the thousands of family stories and pulled those she thought

would most benefit from the experience; Saundra Jackson, whose daughter's was murdered by professional athlete Ray Carruth; Dee Sumter, the founding mother, whose daughter's murder more than 20 years prior had been the impetus for starting the group; Angela and Mika Taylor, a mother and daughter mourning the loss of their daughter and sister, respectively.

For my outreach, I proposed a series of portraits telling their stories. Experience with portraiture for a body of work focusing on unconventional beauty had exposed me to the transformative nature of the experience for the model. Portraiture is an act of shedding invisibility, of acknowledging the existence of the sitter. The portrait space is a confessional, providing a narrative that in a successful capture comes through in the images.

With each of these families, we were connecting on a human level using art as the bond. They told their stories, and I listened and captured the narrative with my camera. For Angela Taylor, whose daughter was murdered by her child's father, the murder was fresh, less than six months old. Her grief is palpable and very present in the images. We shot for just less than an hour, and a remarkable thing happened. The more she talked about the experience, the more emboldened she became. Her posture changed, and before the session ended, there was joy.

Continuing in the spirit of transformation, I photographed a breast cancer survivor. We met in a pizza parlor not far from the Center. Amy is strikingly beautiful. At first glance, she is simply a beautiful bald woman. When I spoke to her, I saw her scars. She agreed to sit for a portrait in the coming week. During the session, she talked about the experience of finding a lump while breast feeding her then 7-month-old baby. She went through chemotherapy and was preparing for reconstructive surgery when the cancer returned. It seemed to her to be a sign that she needed to get comfortable with the body she had. She agreed to sit for a portrait believing it would help fuel her confidence, perhaps even empower her sexuality. Since having a double mastectomy, intimate moments with her husband had always involved her wearing a camisole to cover the scars.

The session started with the predictable timidity of one who is new to modeling, but as Amy danced and talked and held the props (multiple long strands of pearls, a recurring symbol of feminine beauty in my work), she was transformed. In the images, she is otherworldly and powerful. The McColl Center experience was a catapult to more directly tie service to my art production, but there are shining examples of artists and arts organizations throughout the city of Columbia with service at the core of their missions.

The NiA Company is a 14-year-old theater arts group with service at the heart of what company members do. Its mission is to bring professional theater experiences to underserved populations as new audience members, new actors, and in other volunteer capacities. Members perform as a gypsy troupe, bringing theater to audiences outside of traditional theater walls. The NiA Company recently partnered with the Columbia Housing Authority, Marion Street High Rise for Seniors, C.A. Johnson High School, Eau Claire High School, and the Historic Columbia Foundation to develop a theatrical production to disseminate newly found information about the Celia Mann cottage, a Historic Columbia Foundation property. The partnership culminated in a work presented at the Jubilee Festival in August 2011, and a lasting relationship has developed between the NiA Company and the Marion Street Seniors. The seniors are now regulars at NiA performances and together are developing new works. For more on the NiA Company, please see page 50.

Khaldoune Bencheikh is an MFA candidate at the University of South Carolina. His MFA thesis is focused on social justice and art. Bencheikh's Reliquarium Garden, a large mosaic mural project, is providing artistic experiences to Columbia's homeless population and school-age children. The experience has provided opportunities to get involved on all levels. A repository for ceramic donations was installed at the Columbia Museum of Art, giving everyday citizens the opportunity to contribute to a work of art. The first six panels of the mosaic were unveiled at the Columbia Museum of Art in November 2011. Bencheikh's project is an example of the myriad possibilities for community connections. Columbia's artistic community is growing, thriving, and leading the charge toward a new model.

Amy, breast cancer survivor with Brown's signature pearls
Photo by Michaela Pilar Brown
[Please turn publication clockwise to view work as intended by the artist]

Michaela Pilar Brown is a multimedia artist living in South Carolina.

See her work at these upcoming exhibits:

February 14, 2012
What's Love Festival
701 Whaley, Columbia, SC

February 15, 2012 – March 9, 2012
FAB Gallery, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC

March 2012
Vermont Studio Center, Artist in Residence
Burlington, VT

October 2012
Goodall Gallery, Columbia College, Columbia, SC

Eileen Blyth and Object Lessons

By Kristine Hartvigsen

The police officer took the report with poker-faced professionalism, but Eileen Blyth suspected there might be a few snickers back at the precinct. She had arrived at the artist's Elmwood Park home responding to a reported robbery. The thieves did not break into Blyth's house to steal heirloom jewels, but they did make off with priceless items from her yard. Could the officer, or any average person, really comprehend the value of rusted machine parts?

"I got robbed, and someone took all my junk in my yard," Blyth says. "There were some completed pieces of art. Some were finished sculptures. You could call it artistically placed yard art. They stole tons. I had water wells that I was using as planters, an old cash register that I was taking apart, old tricycles, and bicycle parts – great stuff. It was all gone. ... I know I'll never see those things again. I hope it was someone who really needed it."

For the past several years, Blyth's work has focused on repurposing found objects into unique, multimedia works of art and thoughtful installation works. The inspiration came shortly after she moved to Columbia from her native Charleston, where she had earned a bachelor's in studio art from the College of Charleston but had struggled to sell her art on the street. To improve her marketability, she was taking courses at the University of South Carolina in graphic design and illustration. Homesick and missing her friends, she would get into her sporty 1970 regatta blue Karmann Ghia and motor back to the coast every chance she got.

"It's such a boring ride along the interstate," she says. "My car is my church, and I would just completely zone. I started to see tires on the side of the road and noticed the contrast of black tires on white concrete. I kept watching until one time I just stopped and picked up a piece of shredded tire. Soon I began collecting the tires and they started stacking up in the garage. Then I started painting on them and making constructions."

As she picked up tires and tire parts, Blyth began to notice other objects on the roadways and started expanding her "junk" collection. Her late husband, Wayne Allen Webb, and two children, Russ and Rachel (now grown), were drawn into the odd treasure hunt, making it a family affair. "It was fun, and it was something that we shared," she says. "They were always involved in my work."

"Sunday's Child" By Eileen Blyth

An avid cyclist who enjoys 40-mile weekend rides, Blyth sometimes would find treasures while out riding. Of course, there's not a lot of pocket room in one's riding jersey. "I have been known to stick stuff in my pants," she quips, adding that she finds 12th Street in West Columbia a fertile hunting ground.

The bounty Blyth collected from Interstate 26 blossomed into a body of work that she calls the i26 Series. Her constructions soon incorporated even more found elements, and she came to add wood as a canvas, combining acrylic paint with various pieces of found metal and other objects placed on wood.

Photo by Mark Green

Meanwhile, with new graphic design skills under her belt, Blyth was hired by a couple of companies willing to train and develop her talents to serve their information technology missions. It was the mid-1990s, and "the Internet thing started happening." Blyth, who has a strong drive to figure things out, was more than happy to focus on website development in those early days when others were intimidated by the evolving technology. That eventually led to Blyth partnering with some of her colleagues in founding Mainspring Interactive, a web design and consultation firm that operated in Columbia for about 11 years before dissolving in 2010.

In 1991, Blyth illustrated a book, titled To Whom the Angel Spoke: A Story of the Christmas, by Terry Kay. Released by Peachtree Publishers, the book was a critical success and "delightfully illustrated," according to the Miami Herald. Blyth still has the original paintings used in the book.

In addition to her fine art, Blyth still performs freelance web design and illustration work. "I have to. I depend on that income as well," she says. A seven-month freelance gig provided resources for Blyth to secure studio space in The Arcade on Main Street, from which she has worked for about a year now. "I have always loved this building. There's just something about it."

Since moving into her studio at The Arcade, Blyth has changed her focus from found object assemblages to her primary calling – painting. Her genre is abstract expressionism, and she believes the found object work was simply part of the journey. "I am a painter first," she says. "I have been working toward the painting part. ... I never quite felt like I was the painter that I was supposed to be. I love those found object pieces, and it was fun. But it was definitely a way for me to get to here."

Blyth calls veteran artist Laura Spong her mentor. She met Spong about 20 years ago, when Blyth joined an artist's group, called Osmosis, that met regularly in Spong's home. Others in that group included then-emerging artists Jeff Donovan, Eleanor Craig, and Tom Ogburn. Together the group critiqued one another's work and participated in group shows. "I have so much respect for Laura's work ethic," Blyth adds, "and I also like her work."

Last spring, Blyth joined Spong and others being featured as Leading South Carolina Women Artists at the Southeastern Institute for Women in Politics 2011 Leading Women dinner and reception at 701 Whaley. The recognition was enormously satisfying, especially if you consider that, starting out, Blyth very nearly took a radically different path.

Blyth's parents were supportive of Blyth's early artistic endeavors, for the most part, until it came time to declare a post-high school plan. Her father, an electrical engineer, didn't see art as a career path. Her mother, who also painted, was more receptive to the idea.

"My father was always proud of my artwork and took it to the office and showed it to his buddies. But in his head, he didn't really think about it like it could be an actual job," Blyth explains. "He thought I should be a dental assistant or something. When I told him I wanted to go to the College of Charleston and major in art, it didn't go well. At the time, I was enrolled at MUSC (the Medical University of South Carolina) and was supposed to start dental school the following week. But my mother, she shook her finger at him and said, 'Just write the check.'"

Blyth's older sister, Cathy, who earned a degree in studio art as well, also encouraged her to follow her dream. "She was the one who really told me I could do it," Blyth recalls.

Now Blyth is indulging the painter she always was meant to be. Her current body of work, collectively themed "Not What I Meant to Say," explores the concept of selective expression. It examines the censor in all of us by drawing attention to choices about what we keep and what we discard – a process of elimination, which inescapably corresponds with our values. In creating these new paintings, Blyth might make a mark on the canvas, only to erase all or part of it.

"What if life were like that," she posits, and everyone found such ease in editing themselves to achieve the most favorable result. Using dry brush acrylics, Blyth literally will "scrub on, scrub off" various elements on the canvas. "I was getting excited about making the marks and then discovering that erasing them gave me a similar feeling. It was cool that the act of removing the line was equal in some way to making it. The process of pushing it back, taking back my words, so to speak, was very satisfying. That the lines started looking soft and ghostlike was very appealing to me."

The artist understands that some audiences don't "get" abstract art, and that's just fine with her. "There is some art that I don't get and that I don't care for," she says. "I think my work is not intimidating. It is not highbrow. I really love sharing it and watching people's expressions and hearing their comments," even when some comments gravitate toward a dismissive opinion that "a kid could do that." Blyth takes it all in stride.

Page Right: "Gathering Rain" By Eileen Blyth

"Just learning to draw those lines, it's so hard," Blyth asserts. "People might say a child can do it, but children grow up. Children haven't been knocked down yet." Adults basically have to relearn the carefree sensibility of the unprejudiced child's hand, and it is not particularly easy.

Blyth began practicing meditation last year and believes in trusting one's calmest inner voice. Years of experience have brought renewed peace and confidence to her work. "Meditation is very hard for me. I have a hard time keeping my brain quiet. But it has helped my work," she says. "You need to trust your gut, learn to recognize the feeling, that knowing that you are right. We are all striving for that place inside us."

For example, vivid images from a recent meditation compelled Blyth to go to her studio and draw in a 15-minute creative frenzy on the white painted walls with a graphite stick. She did not remove the paintings already hanging there but drew around them. To the casual observer, the markings might look like scribbles. But to Blyth, they are a very specific representation of that meditative vision. "Sometimes you make a mark," she says, "and you just know it's right."

Along the theme of "Not What I Meant to Say," Blyth knows that some people don't seem to have internal censors and may say insensitive or off-the-cuff things. In a field where one constantly is exposed to public and professional scrutiny, the affable artist enjoys wide support from fellow artists, family, and friends. "I kind of wear my heart on my sleeve," Blyth says. "There are a few people I don't like, but that is their fault."

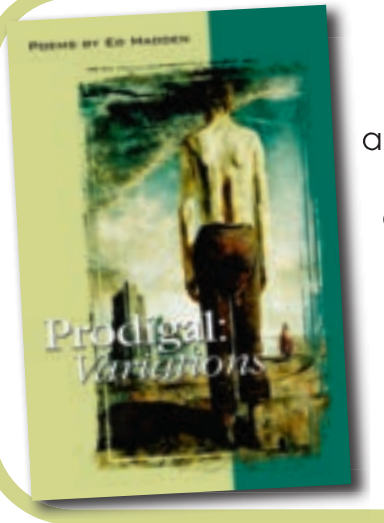
Blyth's newest paintings are characterized by wiry lines and smudges with small bursts of color. Spong's influence is clearly in evidence. And if you look closely, you can see tiny lines subtly etched into the canvas. Blyth didn't use any tool you can buy in an art supply store to make them; she used her fingernails. "For about a week, my fingernails were a wreck, but it felt so good to scratch directly on the canvas," she says. There's also a distinctive color palette forming in the series, with orange as its anchor. "It's deliberate now. Most every painting starts with an orange ground. It's usually going to peek out from somewhere....

"The pieces with lines and shadows are a little different. They are the step in between the three-dimensional assemblages and the newer abstract work. The lines are inspired by the objects, the rusted wire I found. They still have a presence in the work. They are still being treated as objects on a field or in a space, requiring or demanding shadows or being drawn in a way that shows their character. They are really almost still-lifes, yet the lines are more fluid than an actual object. The wires and lines have morphed into these scribbles and calligraphic marks in the new work."

In the not-too-distant future, Blyth has a desire to take on welding but will need a larger space and equipment. She's been a little quiet about her plans because, about six years ago, she lost part of the index finger on her left hand using a table saw to cut wood for painting. "My family gets really nervous when I start to talk about power tools!" she says. "I know my limitations. I probably will need someone with me. And I need to be patient."

Blyth's paintings and assemblages can be found at her studio in The Arcade and at Camellia Gallery in Hilton Head Island. Looking ahead, she would like to expand her representation to Greenville and Charlotte. Meantime, you can get more information about Blyth's work from her website at www.eileenblyth.com. For now, she is very happy working on this new "Not What I Meant" body of work.

"This is all so new," she says. "This is where I am going to be for a while. I am definitely in a good place."



"Heartbreaking, honest, and above all, human, Ed Madden's poems move beyond parable and biography, beyond father and son. These poems are for anyone who has ever been haunted by what should have been but found solace in the hope of what could be."

Natalie Brown // Keeping the Circus Going

By Cynthia Boiter

Keep the circus going inside you, keep it going, don't take anything too seriously, it'll all work out in the end. ***// David Niven***

Photo by Forrest Clonts

Many years ago, and certainly before Columbia performing artist Natalie Brown was born, there was a game show which ran on the CBS network from 1950 until 1967 called What's My Line? The point of the program was for four regularly appearing celebrity panelists to try to guess the occupation of a contestant by asking him or her questions which could only be answered with yes or no. The catch was that, more often than not, the contestant either enjoyed an unusual profession, or she or he looked nothing like what one would expect a person in said occupation to look.

If Natalie Brown had been a contestant on What's My Line, she would have broken the bank.

To see Brown in her street clothes, with typical low-key make up and jewelry, one would never expect that the brown haired and mild mannered young woman could take to the stage like a peacock gone a 'courting – hips swaying, abdomen thrusting, spine all akimbo. But once having witnessed the sequined spectacle of a beaded and bedazzled, feather-encrusted Brown, it's easy to admit that the lady was born to dance – belly dance, that is.

The child of a career military father, Brown bounced about different locations during her childhood, eventually settling in Irmo for her last two years of school at Irmo High. A bit a of self-proclaimed "odd duck," she gleefully left the midlands behind after graduation for a full ride to New Orleans' Tulane University and a year studying abroad in London. It was in the pep band at Tulane that Brown, a flutist, met her future love, photographer and French horn player, Toby Morriss. "We hit it off almost immediately," she says, and the two eventually moved in together.

Brown, who was freelancing as a writer for the New Orleans alternative newspaper, The Gambit Weekly, had thrown her back out at the age of 22 during her last year of college, and continued to suffer with back pain two years later. "I still had pain and felt stiff," she says, "and I was looking for something to do to rehabilitate my back and put my body back together." When word came her way about a belly dance class, she thought why not? "I was hooked from the very beginning," she admits.

"I progressed quickly and almost immediately fixed my posture," she says. What's more, the artistically-minded young woman soon realized that belly dancing held the answer to more than just one question in her life. "I had been struggling after college trying to figure out how to make a living, and when I slipped into that belly dance class it was like a big a giant universal puzzle piece just fell into place. I knew I wanted to do this for a long, long time."

After six months, the student had worked up to taking classes three times per week and was performing in a student belly dance company in New Orleans. But within another half year, tragedy struck the city in the form of Hurricane Katrina and Brown was forced to evacuate New Orleans with Morriss. They came to Columbia in August 2005 and started over in a home to which Brown had never planned to return.

In late 2005, events turned in her favor when she ventured out one evening to attend a drum circle conducted by an eastern fusion band called Turku. "I dressed in all my tribal gear and went out to dance," she remembers. "I danced with a lot of girls who wanted to learn tribal dance, so right then, I decided to be a teacher and start my own belly dance company. Besides, I needed to dance to work through my grief over Katrina."

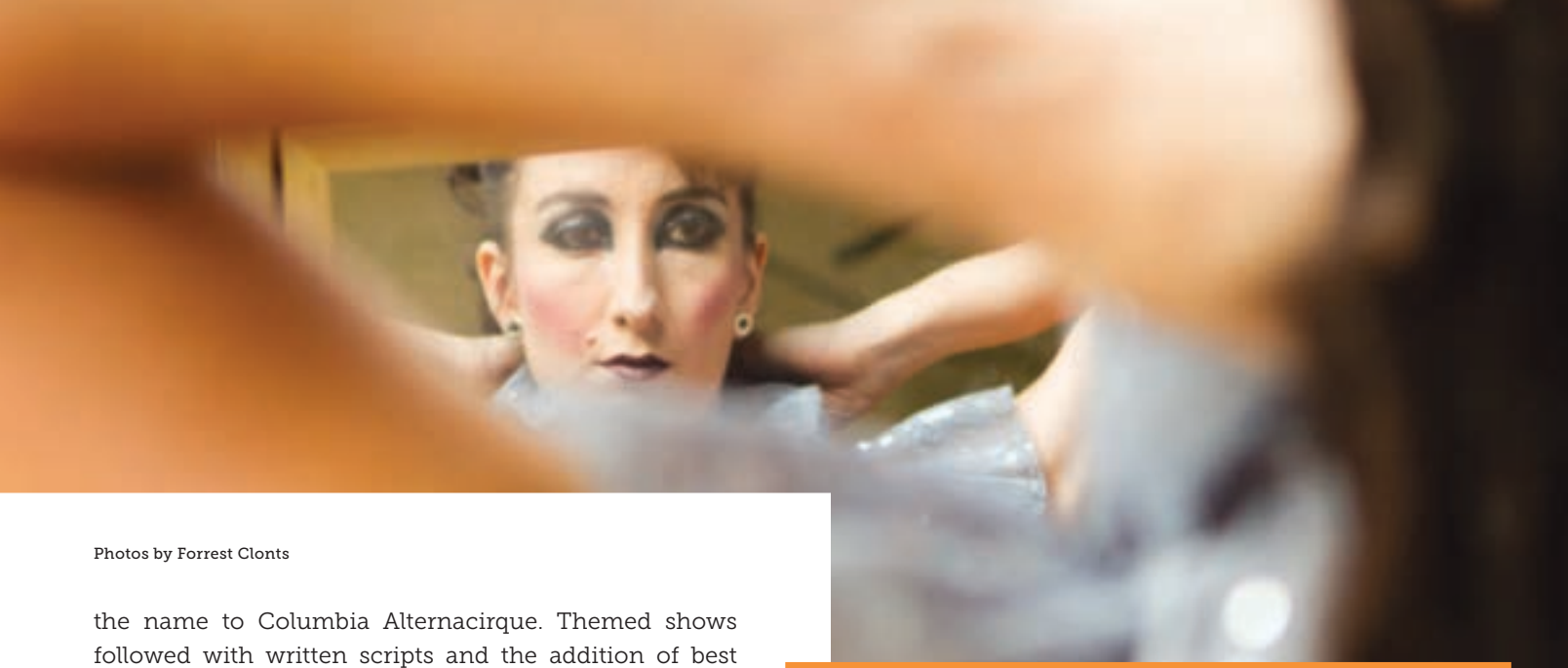
Brown explains that belly dance, as an art form, varies depending upon whether the style one dances is tribal, her specialty, or cabaret, a more middle eastern style originating in northern Africa but somewhat watered down, if not corrupted, by Hollywood. "Cabaret belly dancing is what you're more likely to see somewhere like Zorba's," Brown says. "It is very feminine and the dancers wear long hair and heavily sequined costumes. The music is orchestral and the style is very flirty and welcoming. It's usually performed as a solo. The technique is the same as tribal belly dancing, but the stylization is very different."

While belly dancing as folk art has been practiced for thousands of years, originating on the Arabian peninsula as a dance of women for other women often to assist in childbirth, America's take on belly dancing began with the 1883 Chicago World's Fair. It was in the exhibit, A Street in Cairo, where world's fair talent director Sol Bloom first appropriated belly dancing as a vehicle for his newly found talent Ashea Wabe, also known as Fatima or Little Egypt, shocking contemporary Victorian society with her scanty costuming and undulations.

American Tribal Style Belly Dance, on the other hand, is a much more recent art form, created on the west coast in the mid-twentieth century by Jamila Salimpour, who fused her early work with Ringling Brothers Circus with other forms of folkloric dance. The grand dame of belly dance in the U.S., Salimpour was the first person to codify the American belly dance technique. Her daughter, Suhaila Salimpour, who took up the torch from her mother in the 1980s, has been a major influence on Brown as an instructor and mentor. "She is a very strict teacher," Brown says, her brown eyes displaying a sense of both reverence and fear.

"Tribal dance tends to be done in a group," Brown continues to explain. "It requires a strong, empowered posture with earthy movements and strong elbows. In the last twenty years, tribal dancers have started mixing in hip hop, pop and lock, and even some burlesque to create more of a tribal fusion which is, in many ways, divorced from the Middle Eastern roots."

It is this type of fusion or mixing of art forms that Brown has cultivated in her teaching and the design of her dance troupe which, in April 2006, began practicing under the name Delirium Tribal. By September 2007, after a series of collaborations with the fire performance art of Steve Oswanski, Brown added additional performers to the troupe, creating a variety show format, and changed



Photos by Forrest Clonts

the name to Columbia Alternacirque. Themed shows followed with written scripts and the addition of best friend and local poet Kendal Turner, who now serves as ringmaster and circus narrator, with regularly scheduled performances staged predominantly at the Art Bar on Park Street in Columbia's Vista.

"I'm always learning," Brown admits. "I've learned to rely on the advice of smart people," crediting local arts leaders like Katie Fox and Lauren Michalski with providing support and counsel as she has navigated the waters of developing an operational budget, securing insurance for her performances, and bringing the troupe up to the standards of a professional operation. An April 2011 performance at the River Walk Amphitheater in West Columbia "finally turned a profit," she says with relief.

With a smaller company now, Brown continues to teach in the studios of the Columbia Music Festival Association, which is also where the troupe rehearses. "We would not exist without CMFA – they've been phenomenal to us," Brown confesses. After splitting in 2006 with Morriss, who was later tragically killed by a hit-and-run driver in 2010, Brown now lives with her mother In Irmo, teaches an introduction to Belly Dance class for the P. E. department at USC and, in her words, "obsesses" about her dance troupe which she casually refers to as "the circus."

It was Brown's obsessive diligence which led her, late in 2011, to successfully complete a Kickstarter fundraising campaign that will allow the circus to purchase equipment and set supplies, as well as fuel and insurance for future fire performances. And in January 2012, the always planning artist is hosting a multi-day festival in Columbia featuring dance and circus performances, as well as guest artists who specialize in a variety of circus sideshow and Vaudeville acts like hammering railroad spikes up the nose, wearing mousetraps on the tongue, and walking on glass. "I get to show my beloved Columbia all my insecure friends," she says, without a hint of irony. To see Brown on the street or having coffee at a local café, modestly dressed in fashionable clothes and thoroughly unassuming, one would never guess that she keeps the company of fire eaters and other self-proclaimed freaks, or that she wiles away her hours deep into the night meticulously hot gluing beads and bangles on costumes she'll soon wear on stage to shimmy and shake. But to hear her talk about it – about the circus and the performers and all the plans she has for them, there's no doubt that the circus will keep going inside of Natalie Brown. And it will all work out in the end.

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Journy Wilkes-Davis // Telling Stories through Dance

By Bonnie Boiter-Jolley

Twenty-three year-old Journy Wilkes-Davis comes from a tight knit, supportive family of seven. The Columbia City Ballet dancer says that though his parents have always been "extremely supportive" of his dance career, they are also his biggest critics – something he is grateful for. It is no surprise that this combination of support and criticism have led Wilkes-Davis to constantly pursue the perfection of his craft. He credits his family with helping him to "see the bright side," and to guide him through his most difficult decisions.

The eldest of five children, Texas born Wilkes-Davis leads a parade of performers, comprised of siblings Saif, Ransom, Vision, and Nations. Like their older brother, the four are each artistically gifted, specifically in dance, and have all been homeschooled by the equally talented matriarch, Milla Wilkes-Davis, a piano teacher and ballet costumer. When asked about his schooling, the dancer says he is pleased with his parents' choice. Though he knows the goal was initially to protect him from the negativity of bullying and social cliques, he recognizes that the flexibility of homeschooling made scheduling training and rehearsals far more manageable as he became more serious about ballet.

Wilkes-Davis credits his father, Scott Davis's, military career with affording his family the opportunity to experience a variety of cultures and lifestyles throughout his childhood, something the young man now says was hard, but "rewarding." Wilkes-Davis lists Ochsenfurt, a small town in Germany where his family lived for close to seven years, as his favorite place to have lived. Coincidentally, Ochsenfurt is also where Wilkes-Davis first became acquainted with dance as his sister, Saif, began training at a local studio. Not until the young teen participated in the ballet, *The Nutcracker*, in Savannah at the age of 14 was his interest in the art form truly piqued. Dancing the title role opposite his sister as Clara, Wilkes-Davis observed and learned from the veteran dancers he saw in rehearsals. Inspired by the heights to which former American Ballet Theater and Columbia City Ballet dancer, Dagoberto Nieves, was able to soar in his role as the Sugar Plum Cavalier, Wilkes-Davis was determined to study ballet himself. Wilkes-Davis soon fell in love with the movement and set his sights on a career in a dance. Wilkes-Davis continues to look to more experienced dancers for inspiration and growth, specifically gravitating towards those who are "continuously dedicated to improving their craft."

Though road blocks have been sparse in his professional pursuits, the young artist has encountered speed bumps along the way. "I've had the challenge of not knowing when it's time to move on," he says. Wilkes-Davis refers to an experience just out of high school with a company trying, and failing, to "get off the ground." That particular experience ultimately led him to realize he wanted, and needed, more training in classical ballet. Wilkes-Davis alludes to experiences with other companies when the positive aspects ran their course and the work place became toxic. "The hardest part for me was accepting that I couldn't make everyone happy and, ultimately, what was best for me was what mattered."

" I see now that every type of dance is ***telling a story."***

Photos by Jonathan Sharpe
Above: Wilkes-Davis warms up before rehearsal for *The Nutcracker*

Now in his fourth year in South Carolina and his second season with the Columbia City Ballet, Wilkes-Davis's list of goals continues to grow. "I still have a lot to work on as a male dancer," he modestly says, listing technique, flexibility, jumps and turns as his primary concerns. Wilkes-Davis cites the stage acting required of all professional dancers as a "constant struggle." The delicate balance between reacting naturally on stage and telling a story to an audience on a grand scale is difficult to master. He admits that his personal philosophy on training has been influenced by his experiences teaching ballet. Rather than sitting back and waiting for a teacher to offer correction, the athlete now challenges himself to find new ways to work on his own craft. "I wasted too much time expecting teachers to help me when I should have been helping myself," he recalls.

Recently engaged to fellow CCB dancer, Anna Porter, Wilkes-Davis says he hopes to always be involved with dance in some way, "Whether I'm teaching, choreographing, or even directing, I love dance too much to completely stop after I'm done performing." Though the young artist admits that when he first started dancing he dreamt of joining a big company like the American Ballet Theater in New York City, he now believes "you can find fulfillment in whatever place you work."

Wilkes-Davis's appreciation of dance continues to evolve with age. "The older I get the more I find something to appreciate in every type of dance," he muses. "I see now that every type of dance is telling a story." Journy Wilkes-Davis hopes his story involves dancing happily for a long, long time. "I want to be a dancer that can transport the audience to a place where they can forget about their worries and problems for a while, and just enjoy the beauty of dance."

Music and Intellectual Pinball // Magnetic Flowers

By Kyle Petersen

Photo by Thomas Hammond

The unwieldy title of Magnetic Flowers' second album, *What We Talk About When We Talk About What We Talk About*, really tells quite a bit about the band. As a reference to a collection of Raymond Carver short stories it indicates the band's literary awareness. Its sheer length hints at the verbal dexterity that overflows in many of their songs; and, perhaps most importantly, it hits on one of the central threads of their music – a self-aware grappling with how we communicate with one another, particularly in a modern world with a seemingly ceaseless flow of information.

Of course, the music itself provides a similar sense of stimulation – the five main members pepper these songs with multiple melodies and rhythms that restlessly evolve and change over the course of their songs. Co-front men Jared Pyritz and Patrick Funk tend to handle the more traditional duties on guitar and lead vocals, but the supporting cast of bassist Albert Knuckley, keyboardist/multi-instrumentalist Adam Cullum, and drummer Evan Simmons is anything but traditional. Both Knuckley and Cullum contribute startlingly original vocal harmonies and occasional lead vocals, as well as endless progressions of countermelodies that give the songs an extraordinary layered and orchestral quality, while Simmons' versatile drum work gives an adventurous and cinematic edge to the tunes. The end result is a hydra-headed indie rock/folk/orchestral pop powerhouse – not something to be taken lightly.

Meeting the group in person has a similar effect. The five men are all unusually articulate, easily excited, and acutely reflective about their own work, and their personalities bump off each other in the same symbiotic matter as their music does. Cullum is definitely the oddball and mad wizard of the group – he's the one who "will throw really crazy parts in" and has a creative need to just "get stuff out," while Knuckley is the most self-effacing and

Simmons is the most incisive and intellectual (although that last charge is a difficult one to claim in this band). Still, attention is inevitably drawn to the two co-founders: Pyritz and Funk. The two co-front the band and inevitably end up being the spokespeople for the group. Pyritz, the one with the rapid-fire lyrics and barely-contained vocal energy – is also the fastest talker of the group, although his wordiness on stage is tempered by a humility and sincere lack of pretense. Funk, the taller, bearded counterpart to Pyritz, seems the most reflective, although his engagement and the manner in which he plays off of Pyritz's digressions indicates a clear meeting of the musical minds.

The two men also, as it turns out, largely willed the band into existence. "We started it sort of out of desperation – we talked about being in a band forever," Funk admits. Both had played music in high school in Lugoff, SC, but had never aspired to a particularly professional level of musicianship. Pyritz thinks that they "both needed some sort of creative output" and, he says with some timidity, "we figured, we can kind of do this."

The explanation for the kind of music they started making was born out of similar terms of necessity. "Jared and I aren't great musicians – I mean, we're okay, we can get by, but we [obviously] surrounded ourselves with really great musicians so that we can [be a real band] – when we first started, what we could do was write words," Funk says. Both had majored in English literature at USC and were already lyrically-focused music fans anyway, so they wrote words, and lots of them. In the process, they found out that what came about was a subtle balancing act between catharsis and making a statement. "A lot of times the goal is to finish something and take it out of you," Pyritz says, while other times they write "songs that [they] think might help people out a little bit," according to Funk.

The result, almost immediately, was a highly literate, word-heavy style of song-craft in the line of acts like The Decemberists, Okkervil River, and Sufjan Stevens. Still, the nascent outfit was still missing a lot of pieces to the puzzle – those "really great musicians." After throwing up some songs on MySpace and booking their first show, and after briefly considering playing with a drum machine, the two quickly began to seek out band members to play with live and to record their first batch of songs. Keyboardist Adam Cullum, who they asked to play on a single track, offered to hang around and play bass with them. "Adam was our bass player for a few years after that," Pyritz recalls. And although he didn't contribute much to the songwriting and arranging on the Flowers' first record, Past and Futures (Early), he would become a pivotal figure in the future of the band. An experienced multi-instrumentalist and veteran of numerous other indie rock bands and solo projects, Cullum brought his restless, hyper-kinetic style and outrageous energy to the group, something which contributed mightily to the arranging of the next record. Also key was the addition of Albert Knuckley, which not only freed Cullum from bass duties, but also added some heavyweight chops to the position and a player whom the others call the "MVP" of the band for his willingness to tackle hard harmony parts and facilitate a song's most difficult moments. When Simmons joined the line-up, the Flowers finally were as powerful a musical force as they were a literate one.

First, though, they set about making their debut recording. "There was a huge learning curve on [the first record];" Pyritz says somewhat apologetically, "A lot of it was just learning how to record for the first time." The band tracked and mixed five songs over two days, and then added two of their best home recordings to the collection. The resulting album establishes much of the template for what the band was to become and features some of their best tunes, from the cinematic "Mark Pyritz Goes to Mexico," and poignant indie-folk of "Flowers in the Kitchen," to the self-aware "Widescreen Vision," and climactic, horn-fueled closer "At Last."

And while the group is still undeniably proud of that first effort, things really began heating up with 2009's What We Talk About. With a full-length under their belts and a blossoming musical synergy among the members, the songs became increasingly layered and complex. The band credits these increasingly intricate arrangements with their oftentimes difficult democratic songwriting process. "The five of us probably push each other more than we should," Simmons admits. Pyritz adds, "There's never been a songwriting [or arranging] decision in this band where it's like, 'it is this way and can be no other way.' There are times when that seems to be the case, but it never really is." Simmons glibly agrees. "'This is how it has to sound' is code for, we are done with practice, we've run out of beer and we have to go home now." The group often starts songs as a collaboration between 2 people that gradually adds in the other players. "It's easier to get people to get on board with an idea two people came up with," Simmons says.

The results of such collaborations are, quite frankly, stunning. From the percussive convulsions of the opening "Mouths Run Dry," it is clear this is a much different band. After a lone strike of the gong, multiple voices fervently howl a re-worded version of "I'll Fly Away" over a percussive, Tom Waits-style rumble. The song barrels down its minute and a half running time to a remarkable bridge in which the vocal parts split apart into the traditional words of the gospel tune, right before

the final clap of the drums that leads into the propulsive piano line of the second song, "Southern Baptist Gothic."

From there, the closest things to a Magnetic Flowers signature sound takes hold – hyperactive keyboard parts, bold bass lines and powerful splashes of acoustic and electric guitars burst through, all held down by unusually imaginative drumming. Still, there are just as many change-ups, from the jittery "Talk Talk Talk Talk," to the stately "Northern Lights," and the closing ballad "Reprise." The first of these tunes also showcases one of the band's most clever lyrics in its riffing on T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" that turns a caustic sneer towards hipster-cocktail party conversations that culminates in the chanting of the album's t tle. The reason for this song's central role in the album seems to be its evocation of the central problem surrounding all the songs they write.

"This culture is so noisy, with too much information, too much stimulus, and just too much everything," guitarist/singer Patrick Funk explains. "And I think what [we] are trying to investigate is what it means to come up as a human being with that kind of stimulus all the time." The song's casual references to Charles Bukowski poems and Tom Waits records as examples of placeholder subjects for chatty conversations devoid of meaning seems to be aimed squarely at this sort of inability to communicate that some of their other songs, such as "What She Said (to the Writer at the Party)" and "Mouths Run Dry," seem to hint at more elliptically.

Elsewhere, though, the band seems to have prescriptions for these concerns. On what is easily their most straightforward and, arguably, best song, "Northern Lights," all pretense is laid bare as Funk unveils a path forward in this too-busy world:

You should put more money aside
And go visit them friends
Before all contact ends
And they're trapped in the photos you hide

Get a passport and get a plane
Go watch northern lights
Under fluorescent skies
Before daughters tie you to school plays

The song is built on a lush string section, two stately guitar chords, and Cullum's accordion part, giving it an austere sense of reassurance that is missing elsewhere

Photo by Thomas Hammond

– except in the closing reprise. Also a ballad, this time with Pyritz singing, the song deliberately slows down the tempo as the narration of the album finally seems to find a moment of space and reflection – with the constant refrain of "hallelujah" accentuating this feeling. The song swells towards a moment of crisis, where the narrator recalls a dream of his sister as a young girl going down, sinking on a boat with him but, at the crucial moment of crisis, the music does not crash into cacophony, but rather falls out underneath of that beautiful four-part harmony chorus of "Hallelujah," right before Cullum echoes his idiosyncratic rendition of "I'll Fly Away" again (hence the title of "Reprise"). It's a beautiful, conciliatory ending to an album that seeks to bridge the intellectual and the emotional as a means for communication once again – which, come to think of it, seems to be what all music aspires to do.

Of course, the band's story doesn't end with this record – they promise a new EP out sometime in 2012, and they continue to write and record. For a band like this, songs are never finished and questions are never truly answered – that's why their work exists in the first place.

William Washington AKA WillPower Photo Courtesy Preach Jacobs

South Carolina Hip-Hop on the National Stage

By Preach Jacobs

The producer known as WillPower has only been in town for a couple of hours, but it's already apparent that it's going to be a long night. William Washington (also known as WillPower or Supahot Beats) has been working feverishly for this day: A hometown showcase of his most frequent collaborator, singer Nikkiya (full name Nikkiya Brooks), at the New Brookland Tavern. The show is of the upmost importance to Washington, who hopes to demonstrate how far they both have come.

"It's important for this show to be successful, because this city is responsible for our existence," he says emphatically. "We really want to show our people at home the progress that we're making and that we're making things happen." The "things" to which Washington is referring are the numerous placements his musical backdrops, and Brooks' voice, have made in the past year. Working with Yelawolf – the newly signed rap phenom on Eminem's Shady Records – Washington produced the bulk of a major label debut, Radioactive, that sold over 41,000 units in its first week, landing it at number 27 on the Billboard 200 charts. The two also appeared on a variety of other artists' releases, ranging from Tech N9ne to Wiz Khalifa. They also found time to complete the Brooks-written Speakher, a blazing mixtape which frequently features MC Lyte and Yelawolf as well.

Both Washington and Brooks are quick to point out that this success didn't happen overnight.

In person Nikkiya Brooks is a stunning and alluring woman, appearing as major label-ready as an artist can get. Whatever the hell the "it" factor is, she has it and then some. However, the story she tells conveys a very different experience.

The two collaborators moved to Atlanta in 2006 "to get their feet wet," according to Brooks. Washington was pitching an hour-long television show to local stations that would focus on local, independent music of all genres and which Brooks was to host. The show ran for just six weeks on UPN before both sponsors and investors walked away.

Left without job prospects, the artists ended up "both sleeping on a concrete floor in a loft office in downtown Atlanta," Brooks confesses. "We were there from October 2006 until March 2007."

The living situation was obviously not ideal. "In the mornings we had to be out of the offices before anyone renting another office in the building showed up," Brooks recalls. "The friend's office we were staying in didn't want us to be seen brushing our teeth or showering, so if we didn't do it before that morning, we were out of luck."

Instead of seeing this rough period in her life as negative, Brooks hopes the story can provide hope for other artists. "I just really want people to hear our story and get inspired, because it inspires me," she says. When asked what gave her faith to stick with Washington and her creative dreams during this period, Brooks explains it simply: "It's in his name. Will-power. I saw the God in him. I didn't trust him per se, I trusted the God I saw in him."

Over that time the duo developed a life-bond more like siblings than co-workers, although they eventually parted ways, with Brooks coming back to Columbia to go back to school (earning a BA in Political Science and eventually a Masters in Community Counseling) and Washington taking a break from music production to focus on video directing and editing.

So why the sudden, startlingly successful return to music? Washington straightforwardly replies with a single word: "Yela."

The story of Yelawolf and Washington begins with a chance encounter: "The first time I met Yelawolf was in New Jersey at Sugar Hill records. I was in the lobby and saw this white dude in there by himself. He asked me what I do; I told him, 'I make beats.' I asked him what he does, and he said, 'I rap.' Then he asked 'wanna make a record?'" Washington recollects with a slight grin.

Yelawolf (nee Michael Wayne Atha), an Alabama native in a genre of music that tends to thrive only in the big cities, instantly clicked with the Columbia-based beatsmith. When asked about Alabama and South Carolina's similarities in being overlooked as a hip-hop center, forcing artists into the big cities, the similarities didn't escape him.

"You gotta leave small towns in order to be heard, but the small town can never leave you. The object to it all is to be honest. This is where I'm from. This is who I am. My story is my own," Yelawolf responds via e-mail.

The two artists' collaboration became far more than just another project – their chance meeting ultimately led to the modern-day independent classic Trunk Music (eventually Trunk Music 0-60, the mixtape which would bring the rapper to the attention of Eminem.)

In addition, Washington's production on songs like "Pop the Trunk" became an instant banger, with everyone from The Roots to Travis Barker doing live renditions of the song. It was this song in particular that Eminem first heard.

Going from being an indie artist to the roster of a label run by one of the most famous artists in the world, Yela now sees both sides of the music business fence.

"I have a platform to now do music on an international level. I get to work with my inspirations and to utilize the prestige of the name Shady and Interscope to get shit done," Yelawolf says happily, while still wary of the less savory parts of the corporate machine. He knows that "labels don't think about what matters personally to the artist. The problem is, what matters personally to me makes the music what it is....I like it my way or not at all." Yelawolf not only got Washington back into the music game, he was also "the glue that brought [Washington and Brooks] back together," Washington says. The rapper requested Washington ask Nikkiya to sing a chorus on one of the songs they were working on and, since then, "it's been no problems ever since."

The night of the New Brookland Tavern showcase, both Washington and Brooks stop by local radio station Hot 103.9 to promote the show. Sitting in the cramped radio studio as disc jockey H-Dub talks to them about their latest projects, the two seem poised for the future. If there was any stress apparent prior to the interview, it fades away in their sense of accomplishment once on the air. Getting national acclaim is good, but hometown love is always great, too.

The station plays several tracks off the Yelawolf album, including the Washington-produced "Throw It Up" that features Gangsta Boo and Eminem. Shortly after, Brooks hears her single "Cheater" blasting through the speakers of the studio. Not much is said during the songs, but the look on her face is ecstatic.

Washington with Eminem Photo Courtesy Preach Jacobs

I TOLD HIM, I MAKE

BEATS

HE SAID, I

RAP

HE ASKED, WANNA MAKE A

RECORD?

Back at the New Brookland Tavern, the club is packed with local legends, music know-it-alls and, most importantly, family and friends of Will and Nikkiya. On the bill are Symphony Crack Orchestra and Rittz (a part of Yelawolf's Slumerican imprint), who play well-received sets before Nikkiya hits the stage.

Transforming from the jeans and coat she had on earlier to a magazine cover-ready star in all-black boots and stockings, Nikkiya has the crowd under control. She performs songs from Speakher (which has been downloaded over 40,000 times) as the audience sings along with her, as if the tunes were in heavy rotation at the local station.

The success of Washington and Brook's hometown makes it easy to conclude that Columbia has nothing to prove to the national music market. The duo serves as more-than-able music ambassadors for a town that may not fit the hyper-urban paradigm of the hip-hop/rap genre, but produces remarkable talent nonetheless. With acts like WillPower and Nikkiya, South Carolina's scene is nothing but healthy – seems like everybody else just needs to catch up. Don't worry, they'll get there.

NiA // Columbia's Nomadic Theatre Troupe

By August Krickel

Performance venues and physical space are big issues for theatres in Columbia. "Theatre" usually implies, first, the building itself, whether historic facilities like Town Theatre and USC's Longstreet Theatre and Drayton Hall, or recent constructions like the current spaces used by Workshop, Trustus, and Chapin Community Theatres. Not so much for The NiA Company, happily independent and "truly nomadic," as creative director Darion McCloud describes the acting troupe. This year marks the 15th season for Columbia's original, multi-ethnic acting company, which grew out of Trustus Theatre's African American Acting Workshop in 1998. "Basically, we all wanted to keep it going," McCloud recalls. That workshop had arisen to meet a need for black actors in local shows, as well as to provide training for aspiring performers who wanted to get involved in community theatre. McCloud notes that whether you are black, white or purple, an actor just wants to do good work. Even in the 21st century, actors of color have the challenge of finding good roles, especially in "serious" shows, i.e., non-musicals. "It's OK for us to be entertaining, i.e., singing and dancing, but it's not OK to be provocative." NiA was therefore formed to offer an alternative, and to present theater with a purpose. "NiA" is in fact Swahili for "purpose," and McCloud smiles as he recalls a number of possible names that were suggested ("Sienna, Black with a Q, i.e. 'Blaq,' etc. ")

But don't think this is simply a group of African-American actors. McCloud is proud that NiA includes both white and black performers, as well as Asian-Americans and Hispanics. He points to 2009's production of Neil LaBute's Fat Pig as a good example of a work by a name-brand author where race was irrelevant, and never mentioned at all in a script focusing on relationships among four big-city yuppies, which could be any ethnicity. NiA also does children's shows, where actors may play a dog, a cat, or a hen, making the color of the actor's skin a non-issue. Their first production was an original work for children called Fractured Fairy Tale, performed at the Richland County Public Library where McCloud worked as a storyteller. The revised show is now produced as Whatchamacallit, and Kwanzaa candles are the center of its story. "We want to be accessible to all types of people, both adults and kids," McCloud says. That's why tickets are generally no more than $10 to a NiA show. "We don't want to make any economic hurdles for audiences. If you can afford to see a movie, then you can see a live show."

NiA has performed just about everywhere: in the vacant Fox movie theatre, at USC's Lab Theatre, in the Tapp's Arts Center, at the former Gotham Bagel, in the parking lot of EdVenture, and back where they began, at Trustus. "Trustus had always been an informal partner," McCloud remembers. "But it's like you grow up in your parents' house, you come of age, and you want to move out." NiA's next collaboration with Trustus will be the upcoming production of August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*, set to premiere on February 10th.

Their goal is refreshingly simple yet amazingly ambitious: "to try to make the world a better place, using theater as a tool." They think of art as service, and recently combined the two in an inter-generational project centered on local African-American history. Residents of the Marion Street high-rise senior facility partnered with high school seniors to tell stories from the past of the Mann-Simons Cottage. NiA has continued its relationship with the retirees, welcoming them to rehearsals for subsequent shows; McCloud sees NiA becoming "a cultural portal for the seniors to connect with the rest of the Columbia arts scene."

"I believe in the transformative side of art," McCloud says with conviction. "I've devoted my adult life to sharing that power with anyone I can touch." An important part of the group's mission is to teach, both by casting less experienced actors alongside veteran performers, and also by exposing young audiences to the power of imagination. "We're not a company with bricks and mortar," McCloud notes. Performances for schools and youth groups often feature what he calls a "Backyard Series of kids' shows,

" I believe in the ***transformative side of art."***

where everything, every prop, every costume has to be something that a kid can go back and replicate at home." Towels become capes, baseball hats become crowns, and children see adults depicting scenes from their imaginations believably on stage. One cast member of a show called *Who's in My House* was quite proud and pleasantly surprised when, walking home one day, he literally saw neighborhood children re-enacting the play in their front yard. Another non-traditional event NiA produced was a guided/thematic tour of the recent "An Artist's Eye" exhibition at the Columbia Museum of Art, where actors performed monologues relating to specific pieces in the collection, breaking CMA attendance records for that kind of gallery tour. "We tell stories others may not want to, or in ways that others won't tell them."

NiA stands at the cusp of a new era of productivity, with the addition of Heather McCue as company manager, and McCloud's recent departure from the art museum staff to focus full-time on creative projects as storyteller, actor/director, and teaching artist and art instructor. He sees this as a chance for NiA to move to its next step, to become more formalized with its schedule, more ambitious, and more creative. In addition to the upcoming Gem of the Ocean, NiA will be part of the annual "What's Love" Valentine's Day event at 701 Whaley in February; they will continue their high-visibility shows

Darion McCloud engaging his audience (above) and directing his cast (below).
Photos Courtesy Darion McCloud

in actual theatre spaces and auditoriums, as well as non-traditional performances where fortune leads them, plus any number of children's productions at libraries, museums, and schools.

A Columbia native and graduate of C.A. Johnson and USC, McCloud will also be a presenter at the TEDx conference in January, where local leaders will be exposed to collaborative and synergistic networking and workshops focused on innovation in technology, entertainment, and design. He's comfortable in the role of gypsy artist, both in his own career and with NiA. He refers to his "NiA peeps," the changing roster of actors and other theatre techs who are like a family. Some affiliate for a show or two, while others settle in for the long haul. "If you're down with NiA, NiA's down with you."

DAY JOBS

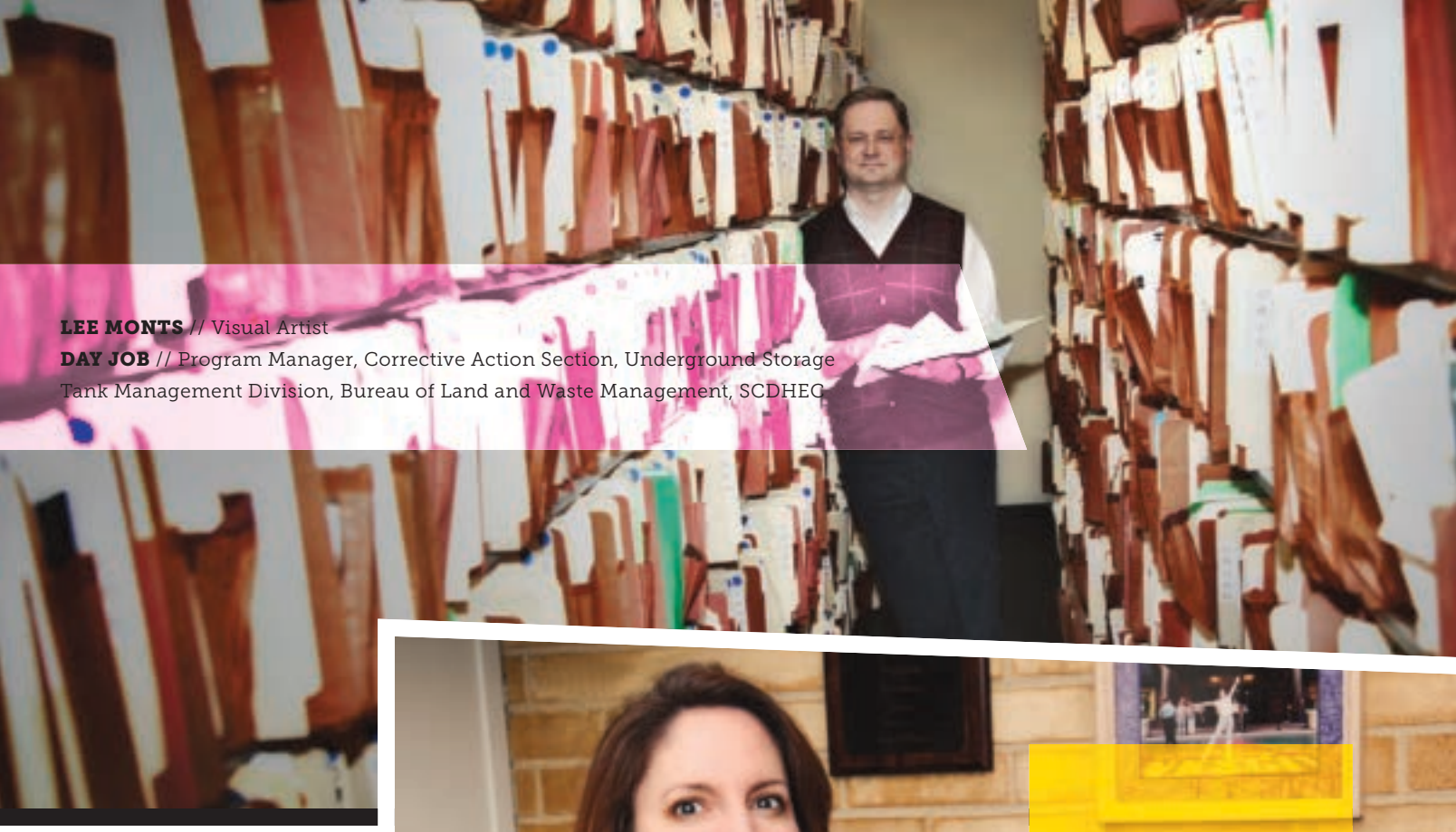
If Berlioz or Nijinsky were alive today and living in Columbia, South Carolina, would either of these artistic geniuses be able to buy their bread and beer based on the sale or performance of their art alone? Wishful thinking, but sadly – probably not. Like most painters and poets, musicians, sculptors, dancers, actors, and other individuals who make art their lives, a modern-day Michelangelo would likely have to wash dishes to buy his marble; Oscar Wilde might sell shoes during the day then write plays about his customers come dark.

Day jobs. It's rare to find the artist who doesn't have one.

The reality is that most South Carolina artists make multiple contributions to their communities in addition to their arts. They work, vote, pay taxes, raise families, and grumble about the government like the rest of us mere mortals.

In this regular feature, Day Jobs, Jasper Magazine – The Word on Columbia Arts salutes our local artists and the myriad ways they work to sustain our community at the same time that they create our culture.

CHAD HENDERSON // Actor + Director
DAY JOB // Marketing Director, PR Director, and Production Manager at Trustus Theatre.



LEE MONTS // Visual Artist
DAY JOB // Program Manager, Corrective Action Section, Underground Storage Tank Management Division, Bureau of Land and Waste Management, SCDHEC

HERE'S TO ALL 24 HOURS IN AN ARTIST'S DAY

LAUREL POSEY // Actor
DAY JOB // Assistant Arts Coordinator for the SC Arts Commission

Ron Rash // The Great Joy of Reading Southern Writing

By Cynthia Boiter

Author Ron Rash Photo by Mark Haskett

Ron Rash speaks the way he writes, with a voice that is rich with history, low and close to the earth, reflecting the humble wisdom that comes from learning from the past and listening to the lessons of nature and the stories of one's ancestors. A father, teacher, husband, poet, Rash is, above all, a gifted wordsmith who wraps his words around his readers with tender precision.

Born in Chester, South Carolina, Rash's people, as Southerners say, are from the North Carolina mountains, and much of his childhood was spent visiting relatives who lived in the shadows of the Appalachians. The author of a baker's dozen of books – four novels, with one forthcoming in April, four short story collections, and five books of poetry, (see Fred Dings' review of Rash's newest collection, *Waking*, on page 57) – Rash hasn't always written, though he seems to do so with such ease. "I didn't write as a child," he says, "though I loved to read and I loved nature. I was very comfortable out in the woods. I loved to daydream. Really, I was pretty introverted."

Rash didn't begin writing until he was an English major at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina. "It wasn't something I really enjoyed," the 2011 inductee into the Fellowship of Southern Writers says. "But when I started working on my master's degree at Clemson, I got into the work of Walker Percy, and that really influenced me. I found myself reading and writing all the time." Percy, who died in 1990, was a physician-novelist and non-fiction writer; the author of *The Moviegoer*, *The Last Gentleman*, *Love in the Ruins*, and others, Percy was one of the founders in 1987 of the Fellowship of Southern Writers, and known for his existentialist literary struggles, as well as for coming late, though very successfully, to writing himself.

It was the reading of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* that "made me want to be a writer," Rash says. Early in the novel, an unscrupulous pawnbroker is killed by a poor ex-student who plans to use the pawnbroker's money to do good deeds. "It was almost like this book entered me," Rash reveals. "I've read and re-read it several times – I still almost revere Dostoyevsky as a writer."

An early and multiple winner of the South Carolina Fiction Project, previously sponsored by The State newspaper and then by the Charleston Post and Courier, Rash began his writing career as a poet and short story writer. His first publications were *The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth and Other Stories from Cliffside, North Carolina*, a book of short stories published in 1994, and *Eureka Mill*, a book of poetry published in 1998. In 1994, Rash won a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in poetry, and in 1996, the Sherwood Anderson Prize for emerging fiction writers. "A short story is much closer to a poem than a novel,"

Rash says, explaining that he much prefers short story writing and poetry to writing novels. "It is just so much more concise."

In 2000, he published a trio of poetry and prose books, *Among the Believers*, *Raising the Dead and Casualties*, before finally, in 2002, publishing his first novel, *One Foot in Eden*, winner of Forward Magazine's Gold Award for the Best Literary Fiction, the Novello Literary Award, and the Appalachian Book of the Year, all for 2002.

But Rash, who is now the Parris Distinguished Professor of Appalachian Cultural Studies at Western Carolina University didn't plan to write the novel.

"I was in my early forties and I was writing what I thought would be a short story, but it just wouldn't end. And I got this sinking feeling," he laughs, explaining how the novel just grew before him almost of its own accord. "With a novel, you have to have a mill-like diligence to get it done. It is much more exhausting. And it takes me about three years to put a novel together."

Rash followed *One Foot in Eden*, a murder mystery heavily shrouded in place and culture, with the novels *Saints at the River* in 2004, *The World Made Straight* in 2006, and *Serena* in 2008.

Set in 1929 in the virginal mountains of North Carolina, *Serena* is the gripping story of a newly married couple who commit themselves to building a fortune in the timber industry. The book won a multitude of awards and accolades including the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance Book of the Year Award and being named Publishers Weekly Best Book of 2008, as well as one of The New York Times' Ten Favorite Books, the Washington Post's World's Best Fiction, number seven in Amazon's Top 100 Best Books of 2008, and it was a finalist for the Pen/Faulkner Award in 2009. Of particular note is how the novel successfully portrays an ambitious and greedy entrepreneur who just happens to be a woman – rather than falling into the all too often tripped trap of portraying a ne'er do well who never does well precisely because she is a woman.

Rash is proud of his work on *Serena* though he admits the writing of it was an exhausting endeavor. "I feel like Serena is my best book, and the best I'll ever write," he says. "But *Serena* probably took more out of me than any other book. I had days and weeks when it was just flowing. But it wore me out."

Rash's third novel, *The World Made Straight*, published two years prior to *Serena*, won the Sir Walter Raleigh Fiction Award in 2006, as well as the Atlantic Monthly's 2006 Summer Reading pick, and the 2007 American Library Association Alex Award, and addressed similar themes of environment, history and family – all within the context of a classic Southern connection to the earth and nature.

Also exploring issues of frailty as exhibited by relationships, the environment, and ultimately, life itself, 2004's *Saints at the River* was chosen as the 2012 selection for the One Book, One Columbia campaign – a community reading program in which the entire city of Columbia and its surroundings are encouraged to read and discuss the same book over the designated period of January 17 through the end of February, 2012. *Saints at the River* is set in South Carolina with a significant portion of the action taking place in Columbia, and the two main characters being Columbia residents. The novel begins with the death of a 12-year-old girl who drowns in the fictional Tamassee River in upstate South Carolina and whose body becomes trapped below the river. The conflict of the story centers around the best way of removing her body, and locals, environmentalists, and a land owner with an eye toward development all disagree.

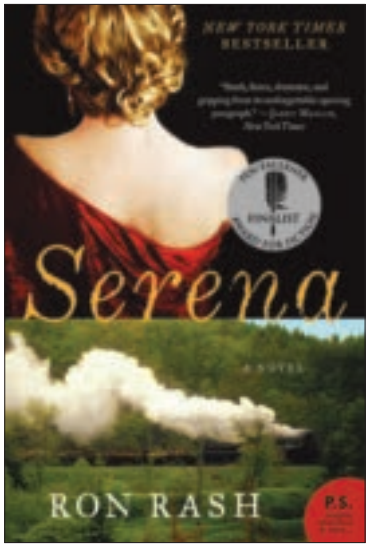
"I wanted to write a novel about environmental issues that didn't come off as propaganda," Rash says. "A lot of time environmentalists make the mistake of not seeing the other point of view. I hope Saints at the River will allow people to say that it is a fair book. Progress is not a black or white situation and the problem in this story isn't either. There are no bad guys, and sympathies shift throughout the book."

The connection to the environment that Rash tends to feature in all of his novels comes naturally. "I spent so much of my childhood and adolescence on my grandmother's farm near Boone, North Carolina, and I loved hunting and fishing but also being nomadic – just wandering through the woods," he says. "There was no TV, no car or truck. I was there helping her on the farm – milking cows and such. She would fix me a good breakfast in the morning – and I would be gone for eight or nine hours, just wandering or fishing. We had relatives all around that area, and occasionally I'd see an aunt or uncle. ... But, looking back on it now, it was all sort of amazing and wonderful. I got to hear that mountain dialect, and that's what I hear in my head now when I write."

Family, too, both dysfunctional and not, almost always plays a role in Rash's stories, and *Saints at the River* is no exception. "It's universal," he says. "There's always tension between love and loyalties and conflict." One example, he notes, is the relationship between the protagonist of the novel, photographer Maggie Glenn, and her father, a prototypical Southern man. Rash describes Maggie as "a little self-righteous" but recognizes the difficulties she has communicating with her father and the role that heritage plays in that relationship. "There's that Scots-Irish mentality cropping up in Maggie's inability to communicate with her father," he says. "It is very hard to get that generation of men to express their feelings."

Not a fan of generalizations, Rash says he hopes his writing helps to "explode some of the stereotypes" that plague Southern literature. That said, most of the writers who have inspired Rash are Southern. Despite the stereotypes that arose from the film treatment of *Deliverance*, for example, he still lists South Carolina's James Dickey high on his list of personally influential writers. "He taught me a lot," Rash says of Dickey. "He showed me the possibility of writing about the South and also being universal." Rash also highly regards the work of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor and can see their influence in his own work. "Reading Flannery and Faulkner has always been important to me because they showed the rural Southern world that I'm interested in," he says.

No stranger to honors and awards – *Saints at the River* was given the Weatherford Award for Best Novel of 2004, and was named Fiction Book of the Year by the Southern Critics Book Circle as well as the Southeastern Booksellers Association – Rash wears a kind of uncomfortable humility when asked about all the accolades he has accrued in a still relatively young writing career. "I'm probably most proud of the Frank O'Connor Award," he admits, which he received



in 2010 for his collection, *Burning Bright*, also published in 2010. The Frank O'Connor Short Story Award is the largest short story prize in the world.

Despite his fairly universal success in all three genres of short and longer fiction as well as poetry, Rash appears to be most comfortable with short fiction which, he admits, also employs some degree of poetry. Commenting on his new novel, *The Cove*, due for released in April 2012, Rash lets out a long breath and admits that he doesn't think he'll ever write another novel again. "The last one, I believe, is good," he says, "but there was little joy in the writing."

Luckily, there is great joy in the reading of Rash's works, whether short fiction, novels, or poetry. And happily, Columbia-area book lovers will be able to make that great joy their own by joining one another in 2012's One Book, One Columbia program as we read Ron Rash's *Saints at the River*. For more on One Book, One Columbia, go to page 62 to read Columbia City Councilwoman Belinda Gergel's guest editorial on the reading program, launching on January 17, 2012.

Review: *Waking*, by Ron Rash

Hub City Press, 2011.

By Fred Dings

Hub City Press reaches far beyond the usual aspirations and quality of small, regional presses with the publication of Ron Rash's most recent book, *Waking*.

This is poetry of the highest caliber, of national importance, lean and muscular, authentic to the region it features, and deeply moving. Some years ago in another review, this reviewer called Ron Rash the Robert Frost of the southeastern Appalachians, and these poems further confirm that assessment. Whether personal remembrances or the interior monologues of local inhabitants, these poems find beauty in the midst of hardship and loss, a hard-bitten beauty that somehow rescues the present and past through its recognition.

In one poem, we encounter the childhood memory of sitting inside a junk car covered in snow, looking at the world through cracked glass, huddled inside "an Appalachian igloo." In another, we encounter a man who stands across from a church listening to the hymns being sung, but who has refused to ever again enter the building after losing his wife and child. In yet another poem, we overhear the thoughts of a tired and older veterinarian who is used to taking late night calls to rescue calves having difficulty being born, many not surviving. This night, one does, and he takes his time afterward to "linger awhile / in the barn mouth watching stars / awake in their wide pasture."

In poem after poem, we encounter the difficult reality and find inside it something of redemptive beauty, a tight-lipped, hard-won beauty.

Fred Dings is the author of two books of poetry, Eulogy for a Private Man and After the Solstice. An associate professor of English, he teaches in the MFA program at the University of South Carolina.

Junk Car in Snow

By Ron Rash from *Waking*

No shade tree surgery could
revive its engine, so rolled
into the pasture, left stalled
among cattle, soon rust-scabs
breaking out on blue paint, tires
sagging like leaky balloons,
yet when snow came, magical,
an Appalachian igloo
I huddled inside, cracked glass
my window as I watched snow
smooth pasture as though a quilt
for winter to rest upon,
and how quiet it was – the creek
muffled by ice, gray squirrels
curled in leaf beds, the crows mute
among stark lifts of branches,
only the sound of my own
white breath dimming the window.

My Last Day at Holy Cross

By Celeste Doaks

Outside the school they argued as the sun danced
on black asphalt. Momma's nostrils flared as she spoke
to the nun in short staccato phrases. But she's not stupid.
Sometimes she gets flustered. At age six, flustered didn't compute
but I knew my troubled tongue was the problem. When reading
those Nan and Ted sentences stuck in my mouth like grains of salt,
clogged in a shaker that fell out in clumps, or sometimes not at all.
But this stutterer listened close until Miss Mary Mack,
complete with her white collar, said things I didn't understand. She's holding
back the rest of the class. Perhaps she should stay behind. Her voice chilled
with ice cubes while momma stayed hot as a furnace. And mostly,
I stood—my mouth buttoned shut—the same way I learned ballet.
My brown feet posed in some strange configuration, arms open,
slightly bent at the elbows as if asking for a hug. This is how I learned
every stance; how I learned my positions.
celeste doaks

Celeste Doaks received her MFA this year from North Carolina State University.
A poet and a journalist, she received the 2009 Academy of American Poets graduate prize.

Reprinted from Home Is Where: An Anthology of African American Poetry from the Carolinas, edited by Kwame Dawes. See review, page 8.

Call of Duty

By Howard L. Craft

My wife's womb is a world
My son lives inside
At night I sing him his ABC's
I want him to talk early
I place head phones on my
Wife's belly and play 90's hip hop
I think about holding him and rocking
Him to sleep with Wu Tang instrumentals
I think of the things I need to teach him
The man lessons, the Blackman survival
In America lessons
I hope he will listen better than I did
I wish my father were here to help me
I said ten fingers and ten toes
Healthy baby, when people asked me
Did I want a boy or a girl?
But I prayed for a son
Now I pray to get the father hood thing right
I pray and I pray that I won't fuck it up.

Howard L. Craft is a poet, playwright, and arts educator from Durham, NC.
He is the author of several plays and a book of poetry, Across the Blue Chasm.

Reprinted from Home Is Where: An Anthology of African American Poetry from the Carolinas, edited by Kwame Dawes. See review, page 8.

Concerto no. 7: *Condoleezza {working out} At the Watergate*

from *Head Off & Split* by Nikky Finney

Condoleezza rises at four,
stepping on the treadmill.

Her long fingers brace the two slim handles
of accommodating steel.

She steadies her sleepy legs for the long day ahead.
She doesn't get very far.

Her knees buckle wanting back
Last night's dream.

[dream #9]

She is fifteen and leaning forward from the bench,
playing Mozart's piano concerto in D minor, alone,
before the gawking, disbelieving, applauding crowd.

Not [dream #2]

She is nine, and not in the church that explodes into dust,
the heart pine floor giving way beneath her friend Denise,
rocketing her up into the air like a jack-in-the-box
of a Black girl, wrapped in a Dixie cross.

She ups the speed on the treadmill, remembering,
she has to be three times as good.

Don't mix up your dreams Condi.

She runs faster, back to the right, finally hitting her stride.
Mozarts returns to her side.

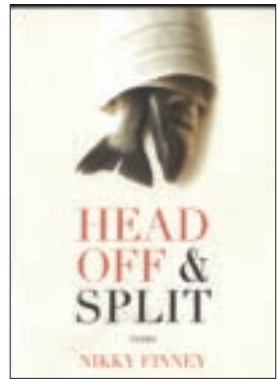
She is fifteen again, all smiles, and relocated
to the peaks of the Rocky Mountains,

where she the Steinway
are the only Black people in the room.

TriQuarterly Books, 2011

Review: *Head Off & Split*

by Ray McManus



Nikki Finney's latest book of poetry, *Head Off & Split*, is the winner of the 2011 National Book Award. To anyone who is familiar with Finney's work, this should not come as a surprise. In addition to *Head Off & Split* (of which I'll talk about later), Finney's books of poetry include *The World is Round* (2003), *Heartwood* (1997), *Rice* (1995), and *On Wings Made of Gauze* (1985) – all strong collections, with an undeniable voice of clarity, and matter of fact poignancy. In other words, it was only a matter of time. What does come as a surprise, however, is the fact that for the second year in a row, a native of South Carolina has won the National Book Award for Poetry (Terrance Hayes won in 2010). For fellow natives, this only confirms what so many of us have believed – that South Carolina is a landscape rich with poets whose voices belong in the larger conversation, that poets from the South have something to enhance and complicate the canon of modern and contemporary poetry.

It's no wonder that poets from South Carolina exist. For all its beauty and determination, it is truly heartbreaking to live here, and can offer less to leave here. It's our history – divided, politically charged, white-washed, in constant turmoil with itself and with the present. *Head off & Split* inhabits both politics and history. As Finney stated in an interview with Cat Richardson, she is "incredibly drawn to history; personal history, American history, Southern history, family history, the history of a community, the history of secrets, the history that has gone missing, the history that has been told by the lion hunter but not the lion, the history of pencils, of loss, of tenderness." And then there is the present. In an interview, Kwame Dawes stated that he writes poetry to make sense out of the madness of the present, to civilize the uncivilized. Poets looking toward the madness of the present find a reflection of the cruelty of the past. To wrestle with that, the poet has to be very careful not to make sense of one and run the risk of making an excuse of the other. So many aren't careful or take the easy route and point to the obvious, and their work falls flat, takes no risk, reveals no insight. *Head Off & Split* does anything but fall flat. It's daring. It's wild. And it doesn't hold back what the poet wants to say. From the scope of the collection to the individual poems, Finney pushes fearlessly with

urgency. She is not pushing us away; rather, she pulls us in to show us, to help us understand, to remind us as in the poem "Heirloom" that "there is practice for everything in life. This is how you throw something perfectly good away."

We begin the book with "Resurrection of the Errand Girl: An Introduction," a prose piece that is one part prose poem, and one part ars poetica. It opens the book as a "whole fish" that is "wrapped in yesterday's news" and we are meant to see it kept whole, guts and all. So when the first section titled "The Hard · Headed" opens with "Red Velvet," a poem dedicated to Rosa Parks, we can quickly see that Finney wants us to understand the totality of keeping it whole despite what people say, despite what history says or how it says it. There is a quiet revolution that exists in one's determination. We see this again in "My Time Up with You," where Mayree Monroe stands defiant against "young Tom Brokaw" and hurricane Rita. The last lines hold steady: "I will be here 'til the end." Rosa and Mayree are real and one in the same, but more importantly they remind most of us what we are not – strong. Take for instance "Plunder," a brilliant collection of intertwined sonnets that on one hand exposes the ignorance and lack of compassion by previous leadership, and on the other calls out those who applauded. Then there is the "The Condoleeza Suite," a series of poems that exposes the icon of what people consider to be powerful, talented, and beautiful (the concert pianist and former Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice) as someone who may have gotten somewhere, but at what price:

She is fifteen again, all smiles, and relocated to the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, where she and the Steinway are the only Black people in the room.

Pit these two poems that close out the first section against the poems of the second section --"The Head · over · Heals," where a girl welcomes the lightning strike to "lose her obeying-girl tongue" as in "Thunderbolt of Jove," or the "grown woman in grease-pocket overalls inside her own sexy transmission despite the crowding of hurled red hots" as in "The Aureole," or the voice in probably one of the best love poems I have read in a long time in "Orangerie," and the unflinching command of "The Clitoris"-- and it becomes evident that what most consider strong is a lie. Strength doesn't come from history; it doesn't come from politics. It comes from within. It sounds cliché, but how often is that forgotten. When we begin the final section, "The Head · Waters," we are greeted with the poem "Dancing with Strom," a poem whose subject matter is familiar to any South Carolinian. The poem begins with a quote from Strom's racist past. Throughout the poem, Strom is dancing with the women at the wedding. But it's the speaker who refuses to dance with him by not falling victim to language and by seizing the power of the symbol that represents strength, in this case the porch:

History does not keep books on the handiwork of slaves. But the enslaved who built this Big House, long before I arrived for this big wedding, knew the power of a porch.

But language is a symbol, one that can easily be untrue, or worse misused by people who have no idea what they are saying. In same interview with Richardson, Finney stated: "I am hoping that the reader realizes we are standing at an incredible moment in time. A moment when so much of what we do and don't do matters. I believe more and more our beautiful language is being hi-jacked by those who care nothing about language ...language has been stolen and stomped on and sold into sound bites..." And when we get to the last poem, "Instruction, Final: To Brown Poets from Black Girl with Silver Leica," where the poet points out that it is the diamondback terrapin that "can outrun a hurricane," that "two-fisted is not the same as two-faced," and to be "careful to the very end what you deny, dismiss, &cut away," we remember that she is talking to us.

*An assistant professor at USC Sumter, Ray McManus is the author of two books of poetry, **Driving through the country before you are born**, which won the 2006 SC Poetry Book Prize, and **Red Dirt Jesus**, selected by Alicia Ostriker as winner of the Marick Poetry Prize.*

COMING OF AGE ON STAGE & PAGE

Jasper loves artistic collaboration and cross-pollination, artists working across genres and media to provoke, inspire, collaborate, and create. Last fall, Trustus Theatre hosted a poetry contest with Jasper and in conjunction with the Trustus production of the hit musical *Spring Awakening*. Because the play focuses on sexual awakening and coming of age, we invited writers to submit poems about the coming of age experience.

The winners were Randy Spencer and Kristin Freestate, both of Columbia. Both received tickets to the play, and the winning poems were published in the play program and (now) in *Jasper*. Spencer's winning poem, "The Gift," is an adolescent fantasy, the last lines charged with his naïve desire and our own adult cynicism about that desire. Like T. S. Eliot's mermaids, we know she isn't singing to him. Freestate's poem, "Move-In Day," is a poignant portrayal of age, a speaker so very aware of the energy and the beauty of the young.

Move-In Day

By Kristin Freestate

I flicker, room to room,
light each candle, burn each bulb,
fill them all with light, noise.
I trim myself with tissue paper, Lucy Luminaria,
cut patterns over lamps
and let the light shine through,
casting shadows of myself across these walls.

Today I helped the students moving in
and watched the girls, all tan with glossy hair.
They counted inventories, chattering
of bunks and beanbag chairs. I wondered—
was I ever so guileless?
So lovely?

Kristin Freestate is a poet and business manager who lives in Columbia. Her work has appeared in The Petigru Review and The James Dickey Newsletter.

The Gift

By Randy Spencer

The summer issue of Holiday hides
underneath my pillow.
An olive-skinned woman
stretched prone on a pedestal
is spread across two pages,
framed by the Aegean's two blues.
Her undressed body arches upward,
lifted on slender, gold-braceletted arms,
her head high,
ripples as strong as a riptide
running along the curve of her spine.
She is something amphibious,
a glistening treasure, a gift
brought up from the sea,
her eyes reflecting the water
out of which she rose.
She says to me: this day
I am expecting a lover.

A physician and writer, Randy Spencer received his MFA in poetry from USC in 2002. He is the author of two chapbooks, The Failure of Magic and, most recently, What the Body Knows, which was selected as a winner in the 2009 SC Poetry Initiative chapbook contest.

Let's Read and Talk!

By Belinda Gergel, City Council District 3

As *Jasper* readers well know, Columbia residents love to read! Indeed, this past year we joined cities like Seattle, Cambridge, Portland, and Berkeley on Amazon's "20 Most Well Read Cities in America" coming in at #16 on the list!

In an effort to capitalize on all that this love of reading might hold for our community, Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin and City Council, Richland County Council, Richland County Public Library, and the Columbia Council of Neighborhoods have launched One Book, One Columbia. Patterned after programs in communities across the country, One Book is a community-wide reading initiative that invites all area residents to read the same book at the same time.

The goal of the One Book program is simple – we want to provide opportunities for our residents throughout the community to join together in discussion around the themes of a great, compelling book. The 2011 inaugural program attracted several thousand readers from all walks of life who read the selection and discussed it in venues ranging from book club living rooms to business break-rooms, from the Rosewood Deli to college classrooms, and from Starbucks to prison community rooms.

We think the One Book program is exactly the kind of program that smart and savvy *Jasper* readers will embrace! You understand the role of reading in informing and transforming the human experience. Moreover you appreciate the close link between a flourishing arts and literary infrastructure and a creative, vibrant community. Celebrating the power of books to bring our diverse community together to dialogue about ideas speaks volumes about what we value as a city and region.

The 2012 One Book, One Columbia program will officially kick off on January 17 and run through the month of February. At this time we will invite all area residents to join us in reading New York Times best-selling author Ron Rash's *Saints At the River*, a page turner set in South Carolina. It is an edgy work of fiction that addresses how one community responds to a tragedy when there appears to be no good options for action. Awarded the Southeastern Bookseller's Association's "Best Book of the Year," it explores themes that will resonate with Columbia book lovers – themes of family and place, the protection of scenic rivers and the natural environment, and the role of the media in shaping and covering news issues. We ask that *Jasper* readers join us in One Book and promote the reading experience with your circles of friends and associates. If you are a member of an organized book club, please consider having your book club read *Saints At The River* as its February book selection? Consider yourself a leader in this initiative and help spread the word!

Of course talking with fellow Columbia residents about their take on *Saints at the River* truly is the highlight of the One Book program. Author Ron Rash will join us on February 1st at the Richland County Public Library on Assembly Street at 6:30 PM for a special lecture and book signing, and Mayor Steve Benjamin will host a panel discussion on February 16 at 6:00 PM at the library. The RCPL will sponsor several exciting programs for One Book readers, and I urge you to check out its One Book page at www.MyRCPL.org/onebook. The One Book, One Columbia Facebook page provides information about events and a place to share insights on the read. Please visit and "like" the page for routine updates. Participating in these programs and events and using social media encourages the kind of dialogue that enhances this special reading experience.

I look forward to joining you in the read and hearing about your thoughts and observations about *Saints At the River* and the One Book experience. Until then, shoot me a message at bfgergel@columbiasc.net. Let's read – and talk!

As Curtis Mayfield Would Say, *Keep on Pushin'*

By Michael Miller

Photo by Mark Green

It's still 2011 as I write this, but I can't help feeling that things will be better in the New Year. After all, my palm readings, astrological omens, and surf reports say things are looking up. I certainly hope so. It's been quite a struggle these past few years, especially for artists who are always working to earn a living while pursuing their craft.

Despite tough economic times, however, there's been a rather remarkable occurrence here in the Capital City over the past year. The Columbia art scene has enjoyed a period of robust expansion. From Vista Lights to First Thursdays on Main, from the Tapp's Building to 701 Whaley to the Arcade Building, artists and their art are attracting more attention and becoming more a part of everyday conversation.

This isn't to say Columbia's art scene was dormant before this current surge of interest. Columbia has fostered many fine artists and art events over the years, but there's no denying the excitement and participation that's going on right now. It sort of reminds me of the Columbia music scene during the mid-1990s when clubs and bands were flourishing, and people who didn't know Hootie from In/Humanity were nevertheless getting involved.

Most of Columbia's recent artistic growth is the result of grass-roots efforts by artists, gallery and business owners. Some of the credit, however, can also go to support from city government. City officials are realizing that a vibrant art scene not only enhances quality of life, but also provides economic stimulus. The City should be commended for its proactive attitude towards the arts, evidenced by hospitality tax grants and the controversial-but-statement-making $200,000 Community Development loan for the Tapp's Art Center. But now's not the time to rest on our laurels. There's much that can be done, initiatives that can be enacted, and programs that can launched.

It doesn't take a lot of research to see how other cities have made the arts a major part of their economic and social revitalization. Places such as Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Seattle have formed public/private partnerships to energize blighted communities, reduce commercial vacancies, and help nonprofits acquire property.

In Miami, empty warehouses were renovated as art galleries, and zoning restrictions eased to allow artists to work and live in the same space. Low rents were offered to artists and galleries in these areas. When the artists started moving in, business and development followed.

Columbus, Ohio, did something similar by taking a mile-long, rundown business corridor and turning it into an art gallery/market district complete with new streetlights, sidewalks, and trees, thus revitalizing a neglected part of town.

In some cities, developers have been encouraged to allow artists to paint murals on old buildings. Public spaces have been offered to sculptors to display their work. These types of programs have resulted in walking tours, which in turn brought energy and stabilization to those parts of town.

The stories go on and on, and while some of you might say Columbia is doing these things (just look at the Vista and Main Street), I'll say, true. But let's continue the momentum. There are numerous areas and corridors that deserve attention: North Main, Huger Street, Rosewood Drive, and dare I mention the old Capital City Ballpark stretch of Assembly Street?

So let's keep pushing forward. Ignore the nattering nabobs of negativity. Go to a museum. Go to a gallery opening. Buy a piece of original art! We can make this a better year and, who knows? Maybe someday we'll be known for our arts scene as much as for our railroad tracks and college football team.

NEWBERRY Opera House

Jan. 13-14 Newberry Ballet Guild
1/18 Travis Tritt – JUST ADDED!
1/19 Travis Tritt
1/21 Doc Watson and David Holt
1/22 Glenn Miller Orchestra
1/28 Rigoletto, Verdi's Classic Opera
1/29 Jake Shimabukuro – Ukulele Virtuoso

Feb. 2 Ain't Misbehavin', The Musical
2/3 Hotel California "A Salute to the Eagles"
2/4 Miss Newberry College Pageant
2/8 The Temptations
2/11 Abbey Simon, Pianist
2/12 Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder
2/14 Brigadoon, The Musical
2/17 Ray Price
2/18 The Four Freshmen
2/19 Arlo Guthrie, "Boys Night Out"
2/25 James Gregory "The Funniest Man in America"
2/29 Burlesque to Broadway

Mar. 2 An Acoustic Evening with The Buckinghams
3/3 Cowboy Movies withThe Saddle Pals
3/4 Lee Greenwood & Louise Mandrell
3/15 Vienna Boys Choir
3/16 Martha Reeves and the Vandellas
3/22 Steep Canyon Rangers
3/28 The Highwaymen Musical Tribute, Waylon-Willie-Johnny

Apr. 12 Starship with Mickey Thomas
4/13 An Evening with Nanci Griffith
4/15 The Oak Ridge Boys
4/18 Stand by Your Man - The Tammy Wynette Story
4/19 Canadian Brass
4/20 Roberta Flack – JUST ADDED!
4/22 Jim Brickman, "An Evening of Romance"
4/27 Loretta Lynn

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