

# WASPIER



# STORYTELLING

## IT'S A MATTER OF THE HEART

Long ago, humans gathered around the glow of a fire and told stories. They passed tales down from generation to generation, etched them on cave walls, and painted them in temples in an effort to better understand the human experience.

Ever since the Greeks gathered on hillsides to watch performances, the theatre has always been a place where humans convene to share stories. In a time where entertainment is readily available through our phones, computers, televisions, subscription services – why do we continue to put on clothes and go to the theatre when we can Netflix-and-chill in pajamas at home?

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The research found that when an atmosphere makes people synchronize their bodies with each other, it can cause them to bond and in turn like each other more. This suggests that going to the theatre can connect us on a deeper level, enhancing our social bonds more powerfully than we previously realized. In times when we may feel more divided than ever, the age-old remedy of theatre is still there to bring us together as we laugh, cry, hurt, and love as one human family.

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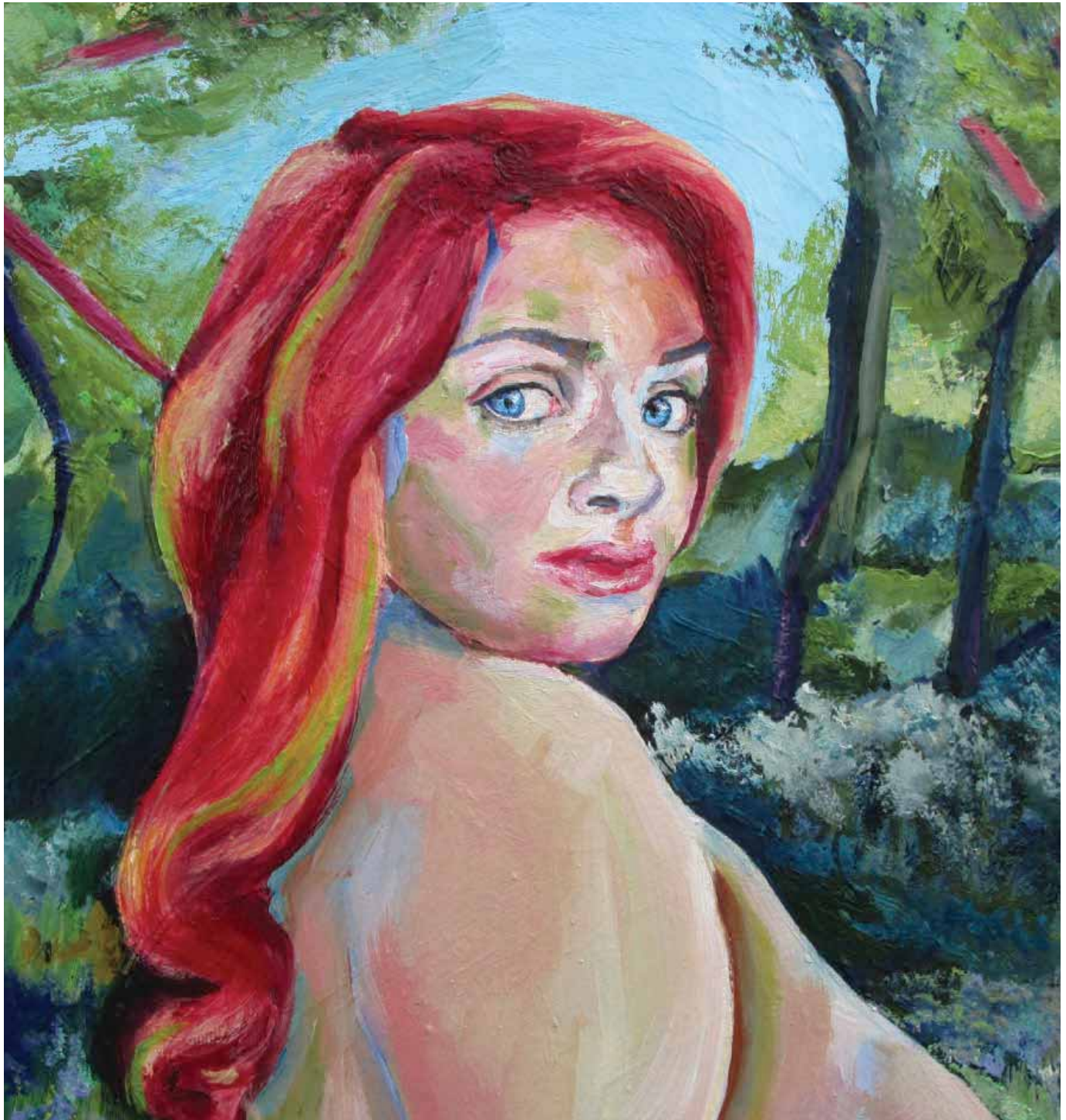
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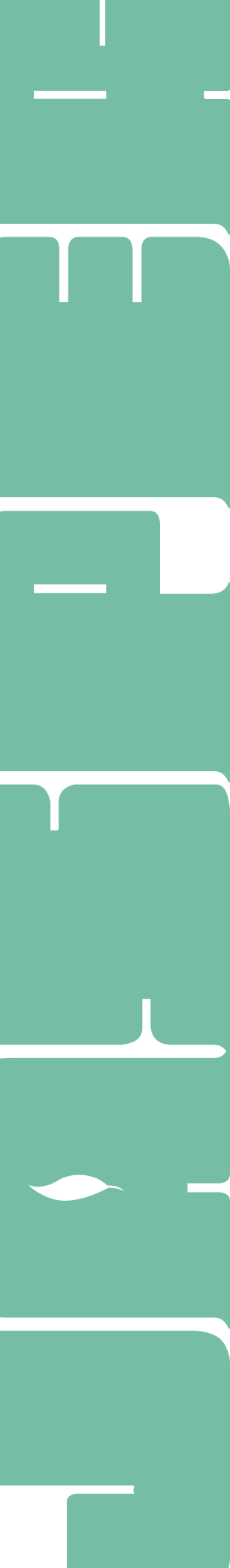
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## Dear Friends,

**W**elcome to another issue of Jasper, coming at you just as festival fatigue is taking hold and the pollen is starting to clear.

In this issue we're delighted to feature two outstanding visual artists from the area whose work is starting to take off throughout the country. Ansley Adams, our cover artist, paints lush portraits of stunningly Rubenesque women content both on their own and in the company of other women. Her work makes a fabulous statement about beauty and the eye of the beholder. Christopher Lane is our centerfold artist. Chris offers a similarly lush aesthetic that evokes memories of Chagall and Rousseau and asks the viewer to take liberties with reality and enter his world of fantasy and particularity.

We're happy that Kristine Hartvigsen is writing for us again, this time exploring the new digs at the Columbia Art Center and the dedicated work of Brenda Oliver. In a second story, Kristine gets at the heart of The Watering Hole, an organization of poets and writers of color whose work has inspired our community as they have taken up residence as Jasper's neighbors at Tapp's Arts Center. Be on the lookout for opportunities to see and hear this full-body spoken word experience. It will change you.

In our music coverage, Kyle Petersen talks to MIDIMarc, aka Marcum Core, about his pervasive work on Columbia's hip-hop scene, and I spend some time with Daniel Machado of the Restoration and Chad Henderson of Trustus Theatre. In this crossover of music and theatre – the kind of amalgamation Jasper loves – these gentlemen have birthed a brand new musical theatre experience that will likely take flight beyond the Columbia

stage. Read my piece on these boys to learn about the process of going from a few connected songs to a concept album to a full-length musical production.

And as always, we bring you words. Beautifully crafted poetry and astute observations of profound and important collections of prose.

Thank you for sticking with Jasper, picking up a magazine, and supporting us in this continued labor of love. Here is my gentle reminder that everyone who works for Jasper does so as a gift to this community of arts and artists that sustains us. Please consider joining with our devoted supporters listed on page 6 by becoming a member of the Jasper Guild. We've made it easy to do so by visiting [JasperProject.org](http://JasperProject.org) and clicking "support." We will love you forever.

In closing, here's to Columbia, clear sinuses, and a restful summer filled with lazy days, new art, and new art inspiration.

Take care,



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

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# The Restoration's Concept Album *Constance* is Now *Constance – The Musical*

BY CINDI BOITER

# It's

**fascinating when you think about it.**

Every work of art, large or small, begins with one small seed. A kernel of truth—a tune or turn of phrase, a question or observation tended to creatively and intentionally until it settles in and finally begins to grow into something more than itself. A play of light into a painting. A series of movements into a ballet.

For musician and composer Daniel Machado, the concept album *Constance*, first recorded in 2010 with his band The Restoration, was born from a realization. “I was young and had been playing in rock bands,” the now 34 year old says, “and I was living with the mindset that I knew I was from the South but I didn’t think that much about it other than to be embarrassed by it socially and politically. But then I hit an age in which I began helping out with my grandparents and I began to realize how much *from here* I really am. It made me want to write about where I was from. It made me ask myself, ‘what is valuable here?’”

Spurred on by reading Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor, Machado says he realized that “the conflicted nature of loving and hating the place where you were brought into the world is fertile.” Already a devotee of ballads

or story songs, the USC studio art and graphic design major turned to his music. “I grew up in South Carolina loving the outdoors with a supportive, artistic family, but as a queer youth the area’s politics felt hostile. With The Restoration I wanted to reconcile those feelings. Today, especially under Trump, my feelings about the South apply everywhere. We all need to recognize how we oppress others and fix it at every level of society.”

Machado’s answer to his own call to write about where he was from, exposing and reconciling the failings of America in general and the South in particular presented itself in the form of the twelve original songs that make up the album *Constance*. “Writing about the things that trouble me most always leads to a lot of introspection, forcing me to confront my own ideas and preconceptions, see things from multiple perspectives, and talk to others about the hard stuff.”

Chad Henderson, 33, was the staff representative for Trustus Theatre the night before *Constance* premiered on the theatre’s stage and sat in the audience for the dress rehearsal for what he describes as a “private listening experience with a couple of friends.” Machado and Henderson had been friends since 2003, having met when their respective bands played some of the same clubs, including New Brookland Tavern in West Columbia. Henderson was in a ska band called Rudy, and Machado and his sister Sierra were in the Guitar Show.

“Granted, I had heard these tunes at previous concerts,” says Henderson, now the artistic director of Trustus, “but there was something new about the experience as I sat in an empty theatre. The space was quiet. It’s one of those rare moments I’ll remember forever. It was musically meditative.”

Set to what might be described as chamber pop or Southern orchestral folk music, *Constance* is the fictional story of the Vale family who lived in Lexington County from the late 1800s until near the end of the Great Depression. Machado’s post-Civil War protagonist, Constance Vale, marries a man of mixed race and grapples with the family’s estrangement from a prejudiced community and her son’s radical vengeance. Lyrically complex with addictive refrains, *Constance* became a fan favorite soon after release, garnering regional attention to Machado’s band, The Restoration.

“What I fell in love with that night was the music,” says Henderson. “I had somehow missed the entire memo that this album was a collection of story songs, and that a narrative lived within the tunes.”

A week or so following the release event, Henderson was driving home with the album playing loud in his car, and the final song played. “Suddenly my brain made the connections that Constance and Thomas were characters, and that this song, written in the omniscient third person, was telling me that a mob was descending on Constance’s house and something terrible was about to happen.”

“I got home and grabbed the “Constance Compendium” to see family trees, a timeline, a map, lyrics, and a short story,” he continues. I started the album again and read along, and by the end of it I was wide eyed and emotionally affected. My emotional reaction to it was where my deep connection began. Not too long after that, I asked Daniel if he’d be interested in considering a stage adaptation for the album and he said he was willing to play around with the idea. Here we are.”

Where we are is at the premiere of a full-length musical theatre production of the





story of Constance Vale on Friday night, May 4<sup>th</sup>, with an exclusive preview sponsored by The Jasper Project, publisher of Jasper Magazine, on Thursday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>. But the play did not develop directly from the album release eleven years ago. Even before the 2010 album release *Constance* had grown from four initial songs (*Constance*, *Little Round Shoes*, *Henry's Letter*, and *Drowning Mr. and Mrs. Palmer*) to 2007, with the formation of the band The Restoration and the addition of the character of Reverend Samuel Harper by bandmate Adam Corbett who, along with Machado, developed the titular accompanying lyrics ("*Praise the Union, Praise God...*")

In 2014 Machado and Henderson moved a step closer to completion of a full production by putting together a staged performance of the album with a cast of thirty including Restoration band members as well as Vicky Saye Henderson, G. Scott Wild, the late Bill Roberson, Caroline Widener, and more, with new ensemble arrangements by Andy Bell. According to Henderson, "I felt we had learned that putting the character behind the music actually worked, which was encouraging. We also learned that there was a lot of interest from audiences at the 2014 concert who wanted to see the project further developed. We had started something – planted a seed we could nurture. I'm thankful we're finally able to put more work into it."

Machado agrees. "While concept albums sometimes lend themselves to musical theatre I write them from the perspective of a songwriter informed by other concept albums and the tradition of story ballads, not so much musicals," Machado says. "I wanted any move to bring *Constance* to the stage to be driven by someone fluent in the theatre world. When Chad said he was ready in 2017 I jumped on board."

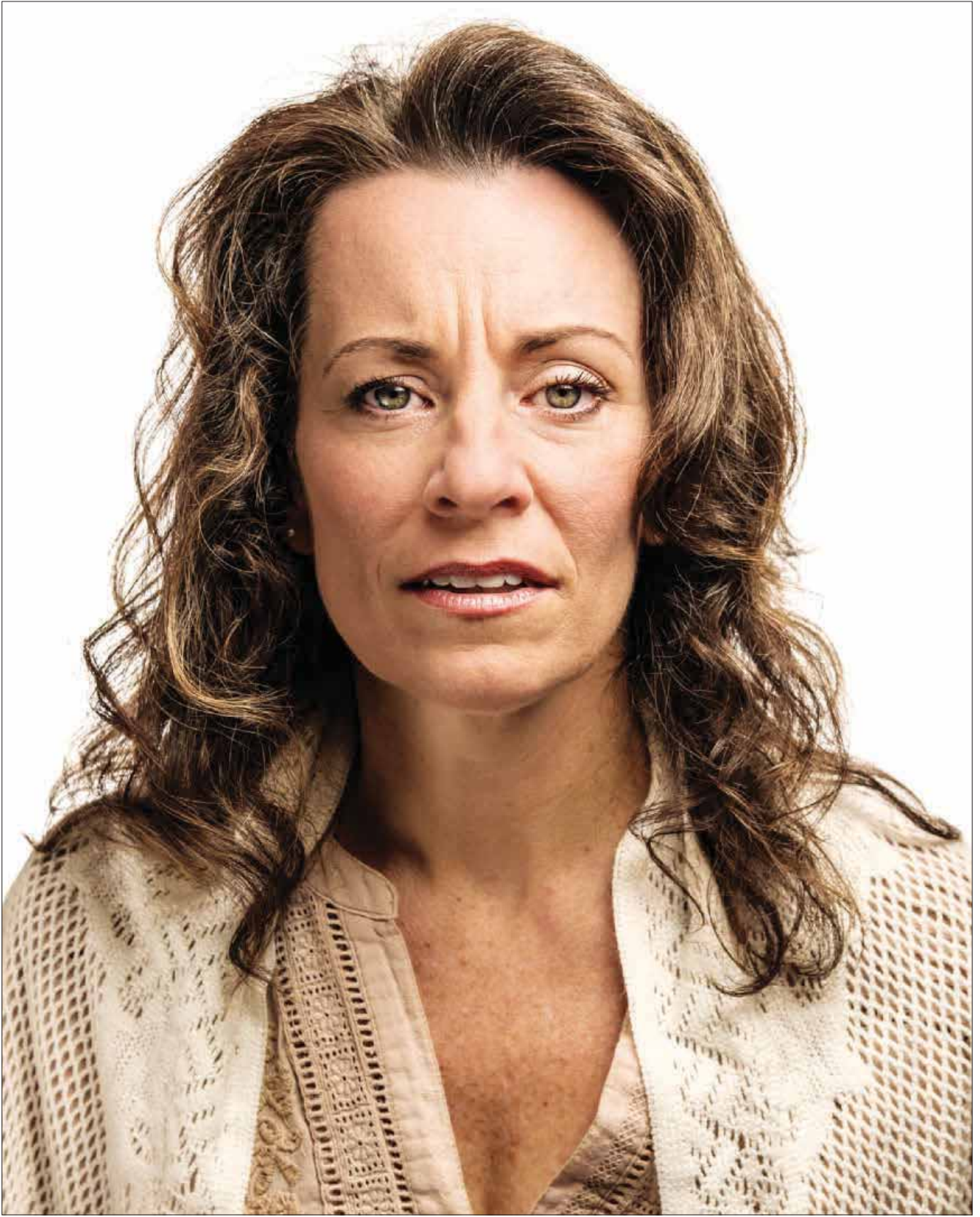
Machado is careful to credit The Restoration bandmates with the parts they played in developing *Constance*, including creating their own arrangements and adding their own distinctive flavors to the score. Bass

player, vocalist, and author of the beloved Reverend Harper character, Adam Corbett is an example. "Adam is an excellent arranger, often re-arranging his own songs radically sometimes over a period of a decade or more, using them in various projects of various genres...He's also a great abstract thinker. These skills have always made him a go-to collaborator for experimenting with the feel of a song before committing to an approach. He's also been a great sounding board for ideas and direction."

Violinist Lauren Garner and keyboardist Sharon Gnanashekar receive similar praise from Machado. "Having Lauren, who is classically trained, on violin during a song's rehearsal phase is very important for keeping us in an orchestral mindset, both dynamically and with arrangement. This has been true from our early *Constance* rehearsals through last year's rehearsals for our new album." And Machado credits Gnanashekar's key work "for the full sound of the band. Like Lauren on violin, not only does his playing fundamentally guide our arrangement mindset during rehearsals, it also helps determine which embellishments from other players are highlighted in a song, as he chooses to double certain parts, while also arranging his own."

While Eddie Lord was the original *Constance* drummer, having joined the band in 2008, Steve Sancho serves in the current post. "Steve's musical memory is incredible, as is his range of rhythmic possibilities," says Machado. "Not only does Steve host band practices, he creates an experimental atmosphere that has allowed our band to try many less structured approaches during his tenure in the band. Steve's ability to play in the pocket while simultaneously deconstructing his parts and phasing in and out of abstraction has allowed us to play with several new genres." Having joined the band in 2013 along with Sancho, Sean Thompson plays both slide and electric guitar. "As a lover of delta blues guitar I always considered him my





## West, The Restoration's New Album Speaks to a Personal Past & Present

favorite picker in town," Machado says. "It's not just about chops, it's about having the right vibe, being technical without sounding too technical." Machado also credit producer Stephen Russ with invaluable creative production abilities.

The role of collaboration in mounting an original piece of musical theatre is not lost on Henderson either. "Theatre is an incredibly collaborative art form. This piece, more than some, truly calls on the collaborative nature of the artists involved to make it work," he says. "Whatever people see on stage at Trustus this spring is not only the product of many people's work in our community over the past few months, but also over the past four years. This play reveals the darkest parts of an historical community, but the process of producing this play with this group of musicians and theatre artists has revealed something else about the values of our own creative community: dedication, collaboration, creative problem solving, fellowship, and bravery."

With its compelling music and dramatic story-telling, *Constance* pings the nerve center of not only Southerners but anyone who is sensitive to the skeletons in the South's past and present, including race, religion, gender politics, socioeconomics, and oppressed creativity. There is much more to be taken from a viewing of *Constance: The Musical* than the complex but catchy tunes you won't soon get out of your head.

**As the arrival** of a full-fledged theatrical production of their debut LP *Constance* approaches, The Restoration are in many ways coming back full circle.

The group formed ostensibly around that debut back in 2009 to make that record, replete with 19th century garb, folk instrumentation, and a Faulkneresque multi-generational tale of race, class, gender, and music that spun out a fully-realized band vision.

That was the plan, anyway.

"*Constance* was supposed to ... just use the textures of the region without going too far to do anything specific, which of course we did," Machado recalls now. "But the [original] idea was, what if a band took this cultural starting place and made rock songs with that stuff?"

And in way, that original idea is the impetus for the aesthetic direction of the new album, their first true full-length since their debut. Machado cites both his earlier, grungy-pop influences in *Guitar Show* as well as the complex musical structures of progressive metal as coloring the arrangements, but ultimately seeks that original formula for the forthcoming LP, which is entitled *West*.

Fittingly, there's a familiar thematic and narrative depth to the new effort that is found on both *Constance* and 2012's *Honor the Father*. Each of those character-driven song cycles grappled with questions of family, place, and culture in provocative ways, something of a trademark for the band. And while *West* is a bit of a twist in that it delves into rich biographical material for the first time

as Machado dramatizes the story of his father's wayfaring childhood, but like those earlier albums, these songs feature different character's viewpoints, linear narrative storytelling, and they shift spatial and temporal settings over the course of the collection.

"It's based on the stories I heard growing up from my dad, from when he was a kid," Machado explains. "He was sort of 'passed around' among unconventional parents." The narrative charts his father's experience at military school as well as at various relative's homes over the years, including one epic road trip out west with his father that typified the uncertain future of his life.

While Machado will be the lead singer for the material, he is enlisting The Mobro's Kelly Morris and cult folk singer Tim Eriksen (as well as a third unsigned role) to serve as backing characters voices to provide narrative texture to the different character songs.

There's a distinct balance of excitement and apprehension in Machado's voice as he talks about the biographical--and verging on autobiographical--nature of these tunes, but the reality of a new Restoration story-song cycle has clearly captured him.

"I'm owning it. If I'm gonna air this dirty laundry, I have to talk about it [in public]," he says with a blend of sheepishness and confidence. "This is about old family junk, some of my earliest memories, and how it's impacted me as an individual."

- *Kyle Petersen*



WOMAN IN

# *Bloom*

ANSLEY ADAMS

BY KARA GUNTER

*“The more I have embraced the idea that women should reject normative beauty standards and adopt a positive perception of self, the more I began to do the same.”*





**As I scrolled** through my Instagram feed, an image of a lusciously fat, nude Black woman stared back at me. She stopped my bored scrolling with a defiant, open gaze. She unapologetically challenged me to look at her body, while asking me to evaluate my own beauty standards. It was *intimate*. It was beautiful. I felt joy in the celebration of this human, womanly body displaying such an overt comfort and confidence in herself. If only I was this self-assured in my own skin! This woman, in a backdrop of a verdant, botanical wonderland, appeared as goddess, ready to lead a sisterhood of women out of the depths of shame and into the joy of self-acceptance.

This arresting image was one of Ansley Adams' paintings from her latest body of work featuring fat-positive images of the female body. Following, is an interview with Adams in which she fills us in on her inspiration and her aesthetic:

**Jasper: To the viewer, your newest work feels as though it originates from the heart. What does this work mean to you?**

**AA:** I remember first becoming conscious of being "fat" when I was 12. I wasn't actually outside of the realm of what was typical for a young girl going through puberty, but all of my clothes were suddenly way too small. I started feeling the need to diet, and I started believing that my muffin top was something I should be embarrassed about. This was what society told me, I learned this from teen magazines and on TV, and from reactions my friends or even family members had about my weight gain. Years of dangerous dieting ensued, including bouts of starving myself or binging and purging through exercise, and I began to hide my body in baggy clothes and dark colors. From ages 12-18, I attributed every failure in my life (loss of friends or the inability to find a boyfriend) to my

weight. Right before college, I dangerously lost around 80lbs in a matter of months, and I entered college the thinnest I had been in years. I also began college with devastatingly low self-esteem, and with anxieties that I was still not thin enough. However despite this, I started to make friends, and for the first time in my life, I started dating, I fell in love, and I began to stop seeing my weight as a measurement of my self-worth. During the four years of college, I regained the 80lbs and some extra to boot, and being fat just became something I accepted about myself, like the color of my eyes. I saw it as something of which I would never be free, something that would continuously weigh me down and remind me that no matter how happy I am or how much success I have, this aspect of my identity will still be holding me back, holding me down.

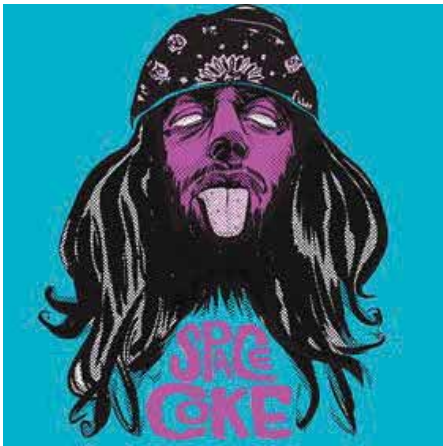
During graduate school, I began to make artwork that was personal and expressive. I delved into feelings of loneliness and depression in my life; however even though I was vulnerable and honest with what I was feeling, I knew I was avoiding the subject of my weight. In fact, all through graduate school, and for several years after, I knew, in the back of my mind, that making work about my issues with body image would be the most honest work I could make. Even though I knew this, I just kept denying it; I didn't want to make work about my weight. Because, truthfully, I was still embarrassed by my body. I didn't want to draw attention to my size, or my private shame at not being able to lose the weight or keep it off.

Finally, in 2016, I was frustrated. I felt uninspired, and I had no desire to keep making what I was making at that point. I expressed this desperation to my husband, who gave me the best advice I have ever received. He asked: "What is the one thing you *don't* want to make art about?" I didn't even have to think about it. When I answered that it was my weight, he said: "Then that's what you have to do." I knew he was right, but I still didn't want to

**STORY CONTINUED ON PAGE 24**

# LOCAL

# RECORD REVIEWS



## SPACE COKE

*South Cackapulco Gold*

"They're pulling us up," says the square-jawed scientist as the aliens beam him and his love interest onto their spaceship. With this first sample, from the sci-fi B-movie *This Island Earth*, Space Coke begins lifting you off the ground. The first track off of *South Cackapulco Gold*, their wonderfully named January release, begins with a sledgehammer of acid rock, complete with badass guitar riff. And just when you think you know where this album is going, track 2 is an A\$AP Rocky cover, with Ahomari on vocals.

I'm sure Space Coke is tired of hearing their sound associated with the term "classic rock," but it's impossible to listen to a track like "Life Explained" and not imagine them as an opening act for Blue Cheer. Psychedelic is more fitting, without evoking the spectre of yacht rock. As for getting high, it's not so much a motif as it is the backbone of the whole recording. Track 5's title is simply

"Drugs," a more punk version of Queens of the Stone Age's "Feel Good Hit of the Summer".

To be fair, it's hard to deny that Space Coke has made a great addition to anyone's smoke playlist. The last track "Yesca" (Mexican slang for marijuana) spins out into the ether with guitars, drums, and of course, an organ. Shades of Iron Butterfly? Perhaps. But between them and Space Coke, only one is listening to New York hip-hop. -*Matthew O'Leary*



## DEBBIE & THE SKANKS

*Souvenir*

It's tempting to mourn Debbie & the Skanks as a shooting star that burned through Columbia's musical orbit, only to fade away before achieving peak fahrenheit. There's a romance to that narrative, but it doesn't do the band or its fans any favors. The reality is that there was a time not that long ago when Debbie & the Skanks were one of the hottest party bands in town but, as Prince so wisely reasoned many years ago, parties weren't meant to last. And I don't mean "party band"

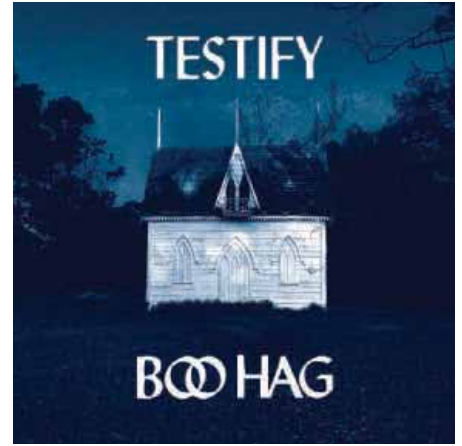
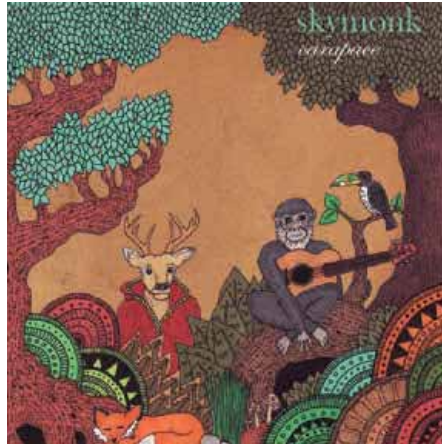
as a pejorative, even though so many others seem to. Debbie & the Skanks were a rock and roll band that built its brand and reputation around high levels of intoxication on the part of its members (real or perceived), the requisite unpredictability that attends such a reputation, and a predilection for treating each performance as an event unto itself - a party that would end at ?. And like all good parties, we got to go home with a souvenir. In this case, that would be *Souvenir*, the first, last, and likely only proper record the Skanks will ever make.

Fans of the band, which were many, are unlikely to be disappointed by *Souvenir*. Debbie & the Skanks staked their claim as a live entity of brute force, so it shouldn't shock anyone that for all of its merits as a document of such a band's brief run, the energy level doesn't match that of its prowess onstage. If you went to enough shows, you'll recognize most of the songs on the record; and this was recorded by a band that knew this would be its only record, so it wouldn't necessarily behoove them to take big artistic risks on *Souvenir*. It is exactly what it promised it would be and in that regard it's a total success. -*MS*

## JACKSON SPELLS

*Baba Yaga*

While *Baba Yaga* hasn't convinced me that Jackson Spells were correct in their decision to carry on as a bass guitar-less two-piece, it's hard to deny that their most recent EP demonstrates the band's improvement at patching up some of the potholes such a self-inflicted handicap creates. Vocalist/pianist John Watkins and drummer Rob



Cherry debuted as duo on Jackson Spells' 2016 release *2.5*, and the lack of a low end often distracted from what were otherwise solid, well-crafted indie-pop tunes; Watkins seems to have gotten wise to this problem on *Baba Yaga*, writing piano lines that do more to fill in the bottom end. It's not a cure-all, but it does allow the individual tracks to stand sturdier on their own terms.

As on *2.5* and the band's 2015 self-titled debut as a trio (with James Wallace on bass), John Watkins' songwriting, while occasionally repetitive, displays a writer with a strong grasp of the memorable pop melody and the left-field intelligence to deliver it in ways unconventional enough to avoid panicking a listener who may not be totally at ease with his own appreciation of the memorable pop melody. But the writing and execution on *Baba Yaga* neither improves upon that of *2.5*, nor marks a step backward. I fear that the band may have plateaued, going as far as it can without making a dynamic shift in instrumentation. Of course, Jackson Spells has made surprising turns before, and I would love to be proven wrong. - *MS*

## SKYMONK

### *Carapace*

Skymonk won't be confined to genre on *Carapace*, a five song EP that can only be tied to what we know as rock music.

"All My Shame" sets out like it's going to be Southern rock number with a well worn progression of crunching guitar chords. Guiding the intro are Kelly Nash's vocals. The fellow can fly and shows off a bit of his twang. But before it dive's too far in Skynyr'd's

"Simple Man" territory, it breaks off into a Led Zeppelin blues riff that carries the song through to the end.

The following track, "1984," mines Southern America as well with more of Mississippi's greatest export guiding Skymonk's sound, given a more esoteric nature that shows through in an R&B way during the chorus before breaking back into riffage.

While their guitar tone lends itself to blues rock and they excel in this area, Skymonk does not confine themselves. "Stitches" is an aughts rock radio anthem in the vein of Audioslave and other FM favorites of the era. However, the biggest influence on *Carapace* is Kings of Leon. Their sound is all over the record.

Speaking of Audioslave, part of what binds Skymonk to those years is Nash's intonation of that decade's vocal sounds, a tone embodied in someone like Chris Cornell. Nash reflects a lot of Cornell's style, with perhaps a bit more twang. In "Old Dog", his voice absolutely soars over the driving guitars and rhythm section, the ghost of Soundgarden clearly chasing.

At times Skymonk risks sounding generic and lacking definition. Still the five songs of *Carapace* don't leave you bored, but rather hoping for more. - *David Travis Bland*

## BOO HAG

### *Testify*

Boo Hag has always been a tough band to pin down. The immediately point of reference would be The Cramps if you took out the voyeuristic perversion and replaced it with Southern paganism. The Columbia band is a mix of Bo Diddley and Black Sabbath at almost all times. The cat guts and pine sap mystical energy stays with them too. That's why the change to dark side of Christianity in South that the band expresses in their newest release *Testify* is a natural turn. If anything, Boo Hag has turned from singing about the kind of black magic that would scare backwood Southerners to what they preach in tar paper churches with little in the way of distinction.

"If I hear that trumpet sound. When they lay him in the ground. Once his soul forever down. It's a heavy crown," Saul Seibert sings in "Crown" with the Sabbath tactic of following the melody, but huffed full of swamp gas in the blues hammering and the drums tempoed to the speed of digging a grave.

There's a prophetic and apocalyptic vibe throughout *Testify* with its echoing riffs and earthly drums. The lyrics are chants at times. Church pew hums or ceremonial shouts in the woods seem to spot every song. Boo Hag also made an intentional effort to place in each number background noise familiar to the South — the hum of cicadas, thunderstorms, and the like. *Testify* seems to do just that for a band hell bent on putting all old and rotting but never dead Southern spirituality into their music.

While having a distinct angle to their band,

*Testify* falls short of being the complete picture that Boo Hag painted in their previous album. This newest release compiles songs like a scattering of scenes from a Southern Gothic novel instead of the novel itself.

Maybe the best way to describe Boo Hag is through comparison to other art. With *Testify*, you get the unearth remains of a score to scenes that could be straight out of a Tennessee Williams play or Flannery O'Connor short story. -David Travis Bland



## THE HAVES

*Requiem*

All over the place. It's a clichéd phrase, but no words are more apt to The Haves latest record *Requiem*. The album isn't a scattershot of misguided takes or unfocused structures or ideas. It's simply that The Haves embrace chaos in music.

Hard rock Zappa? Maybe that's what you'd call it. Since The Haves seem to write upside down songs, let's start at the end of the record. In "Moon Made of Iron," the A-tonal runs of Zappa scratch up and down the song. But the overdrive of Rage Against the Machine and an anti-capitalist message still pervade. Guitars are loud and drums pound with double bass, all of it with unwavering fidelity.

Rage and Zappa are just reference points here, but not necessarily influences. But it would be hard to discount that Les Claypool and Primus had an effect on bassist Luke Matthews. He slaps and pops with a spidery dexterity on the fretboard in nearly every song. Sometimes this chaos gives *Requiem* the insanity of a record by The Locust. But The Haves are focus on sending a message here too.

The penultimate track "Bottom's Up" puts that message to the forefront with it's caustic bite to consumerism and capitalism's bonds. The song begins with a reciting of Merle Travis' ode to the chains of debt "Sixteen Tons" before The Haves break in to a mid-tempo groove that's the Chili Peppers and Rage Against the Machine together but with a storm of guitar and whirlwind of bass notes.

The congas in "Charlie Chaplin was an Anarchist" do little to settle the confusion.

"Shatterhouse" puts the record into perspective. They hit a pop-punk breakdown in the intro, finding a steady rhythm with stream of conscious spoken words. Then the chorus does a couple go around of heavy funk-rock before they fall into chromatic bursts in the bridge, jumping into a melodic chord progression with galactic guitar shredding. The song grows more and more unhinge but never falls apart. It's all over the place. That unsettled spot is where The Haves and *Requiem* thrive. -David Travis Bland



## DANGER BOY

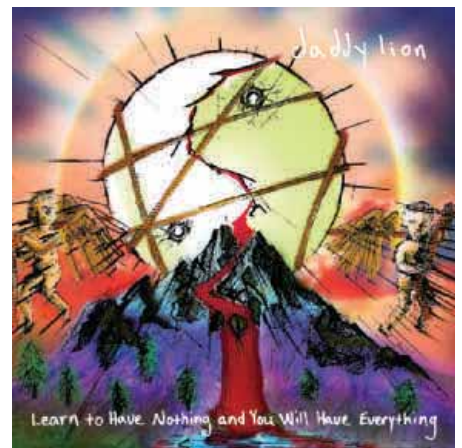
*Lavender Realm*

There's a brooding mysteriousness that's at the core of Danger Boy, the Tyler Washington-fronted rock outfit which sends members of Alarm Drum and MyBrother MySister into a whirlwind of ferocious, shoegaze-tinged post-punk and emo-laden urgency with all the full righteousness of youth.

And really, it would be enough to just cathartically revel in the desolate warmth of Washington's mumbling, then crooning, then shouting delivery, a trick that the band uses to provide a real narrative structure to the tunes even if you can't make out the

lyrics, but that would ignore how well the group works through different paces on this short EP. The true opener "Killer in a Maze" showcases a bright, shiny new wave guitar riff paired with emo-goth angst in the vocals and some churning no-wave guitar passages, while "Unwell Reverie" and "Slow Bleed" suggest what it would be like if the Smiths abandoned their commercial pop ambitions and embraced their shoegaze-punk spirit. The closing number "Purple Heart" reverts to an almost grunge archetype, even with the various characteristic threads of the band (propulsive riffs, dreamy pop distortion and emotional release) all still abundantly evident.

Throughout, too, the DIY recording aesthetic that makes the group sound like they are playing down the hall from you works in their favor, with the muddy, mysterious quality bending well to the emotional urgency of the material. For all of its purported imperfections, there's an undeniable charisma to this young outfit, poised on the edge of cool and earnest, anthemic and insular. -KP



## DADDY LION

*Learn to Have Nothing and You Will Have Everything*

At this point, Daddy Lion should be a known entity in the Columbia music scene, but somehow *Learn to Have Nothing* still feels a bit revelatory, if only because of how polished the band's various strengths are.

While past efforts often felt rushed and harried by comparison, there's a full-bodied feel to the sound, arrangements, and performance on this record that establishes it as a clear high-water mark. The layered noise

effects set against the chugging riff of the opening “Mother Sun” is evidence enough of that, and lead singer Jeremy Joseph presents a boisterous, cocksure vocal persona that recalls some of the glammier moments of Joseph Arthur’s eclectic recording output.

Still, Daddy Lion excels as an almost quintessential post-punk/college rock revivalist group, which means most of these songs end up a bit more guttural or dreamier than such straight-ahead rock moments, but even those are quite good. Take “Storm,” with its effervescent dream-pop riff and buoyant vocal, that still stays firmly planted in the aesthetic world of the band. There are slight breaks, moments when frontman Jeremy Joseph seems like he could push his voice to stadium rock heights, but there’s always a nervy, wiry current that make Daddy Lion seem like a band comfortable in its own skin, regardless of whatever outward trends or aesthetic shifts might be occupying other contemporary rock outfits. -KP



## GEORGE FETNER & THE STRAYS

G.F.A.T.S.

It’s been a minute since we’ve seen singer/songwriter, guitarist, and composer George Fetner rock out—he’s been busy composing avant-garde neoclassical pieces and crafting spare, plaintive acoustic albums. But when he exclaims “I was born on a spaceship called rock ‘n’ roll” over top a rumbling Southern boogie riff, you kinda have to believe him.

This isn’t quite the jam band-oriented frolick that Fetner championed in his old band Pinna, but elements of it remain, particularly when fleet-fingered solos from the frontman or second guitarist Anthony Charles. At its

core, though, this EP is a remarkably tight and well-executed triumph of euphoric classic rock sensibilities, with subtle horn flourishes and joyful backing vocals sprinkled over tunes that trade on Allman Brothers and Tom Petty templates but aren’t afraid to balance meat-and-potatoes licks with the virtuoso flexibility that Fetner and his ace backers can provide. And whether it’s the reverb-laden breakdown on “Parachutes,” the ingenious hand-clap intro and calypso riffing of “I Should Have Warned You,” or the wistful narrative of “Tornadoes,” Fetner and company are clearly keen to make rock ‘n’ roll that can surprise as much as it invigorates. -KP



## ALARM DRUM

*Culture Crush*

At some point we’ll have to stop being impressed by the youthful shoegaze band Alarm Drum, but that’s a difficult task when faced with the surefooted sound and adventurous arrangements these indie rock savants routinely churn out. Their patented blend of more pretty-than-noise blend of synths and distorted guitar melodies are one of the more dependably great musical quantities in town, and the fact that they never really let a song rest solely on those laurels allows them to continually grow and evolve rather than succumbing to merely faithfully reviving the sound and spirit of bands older than they are.

One *Culture Crush*, that often means playing with the synth sounds and rhythms of these tunes to the point where they almost depart from the established Alarm Drum template, trying on the nostalgic haze of chillwave or the sleek future-as-past R&B of Blood Orange. The group also continues to

excel at using the studio as instrument, manipulating vocals and trying on layers of percussion that give this batch of compositions an urgent, and necessary, contemporary feel even as they continue to earn their slew of underground reference points. It’s past time to drop the age qualifier from descriptions of Alarm Drum and simply admit that they are one of the best bands in South Carolina, period. -KP



## KING VULTURE

*King Vulture*

King Vulture, a project born out of the songs of Kate Pyritz and given life by a host of familiar indie rock characters from the local scene, including her husband Jared, is a glorious, thoughtful mess, in the best way possible. Layers of guitars, keyboards and saxophone parts fade in and out of the mix, arrangements make use of herky-jerk rhythms and competing parts and the songs themselves sometimes dispel with traditional structures all together.

It’s a testament to just how committed the band members play together that the result is almost universally an art-rock triumph rather than tedious exercise is pseudo-math rock complexity. On the anthemic full-song opener, “Right,” a wordless chorus with an interlocking waterfall of percussion supports backup singers that carry just a whiff of unhinged joy while the verses follow nervy guitar lines and spills of saxophone and other assorted interjections seems to stay firmly off-balanced. That’s a feeling that occurs frequently on the rockers here, even on the most straight-forward numbers like “Satellite” and “MAB,” all of which benefit from

Kate Pyritz's ability to deliver a life-affirming chorus with her deep, soaring delivery.

Elsewhere, though, the band allows itself to stretch out even more experimentally, with tunes like "Reprieve from the Waiting" and "Hymn" hanging out in the air with, despite the number of instruments and tools the group has at its disposal, a kind of skeletal support system. It all comes to a head on the epic "Henry," which can often feel like a band trying to see how much paint they can get to stick on the wall. Splayed guitar lines, ferocious drums, rollicking bass lines and unsettled horns and strings just get carried onward and upward as the band builds to a kind of frightening excess of noise and cacophony. It would be annoying if it wasn't so much fun.

-KP



## THE CHRISTINE BUILDING

*The Christine Building*

Named after an iconic apartment building off Millwood Avenue that has housed many of Columbia's artists and bohemians over the years, The Christine Building is fittingly

a project of two long-time scene members, Stan Gardner and Tim Bedford. The duo mostly leans into their 80s underground influences, which at various points can mean punk, post-punk, goth, or jangly college rock, depending on the song. The lyrics, as enigmatic as they are, seem to vaguely hint at the sense of loss surrounding the now-vacant (possibly condemned?) building.

Highlights include the propulsive opener "Below the Surface," which threatens to slide into no-wave Sonic Youth territory, "Let's Blow this Place to Smithereens," a cheeky, yet mournful, rock tune that features nice slow-fast transitions and a bit of elegiac violin, and "Dénouement," the exhaling instrumental ballad that leads you out in relative silence. In between are songs that can lag a bit, even at faster tempos, but generally prove to be fun guitar workout exercises in the specific kind of six string sprawl that emerged in the fractious conceptions of post-punk in the '80s.

-KP

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do it. When I started my first body-positive painting, *New Beginnings*, I was still ashamed and embarrassed by my body. I was terrified to expose this thing about myself to the world, but as I worked on this painting, and as I painted these two beautiful, curvy women, I began to appreciate my own curves. And as I have continued to work on this project, it has changed the way I think about myself and my body. The more I have embraced the idea that women should reject normative beauty standards and adopt a positive perception of self, the more I began to do the same. For the first time, my work is not just telling a story about myself. Instead, it is helping to write my story.

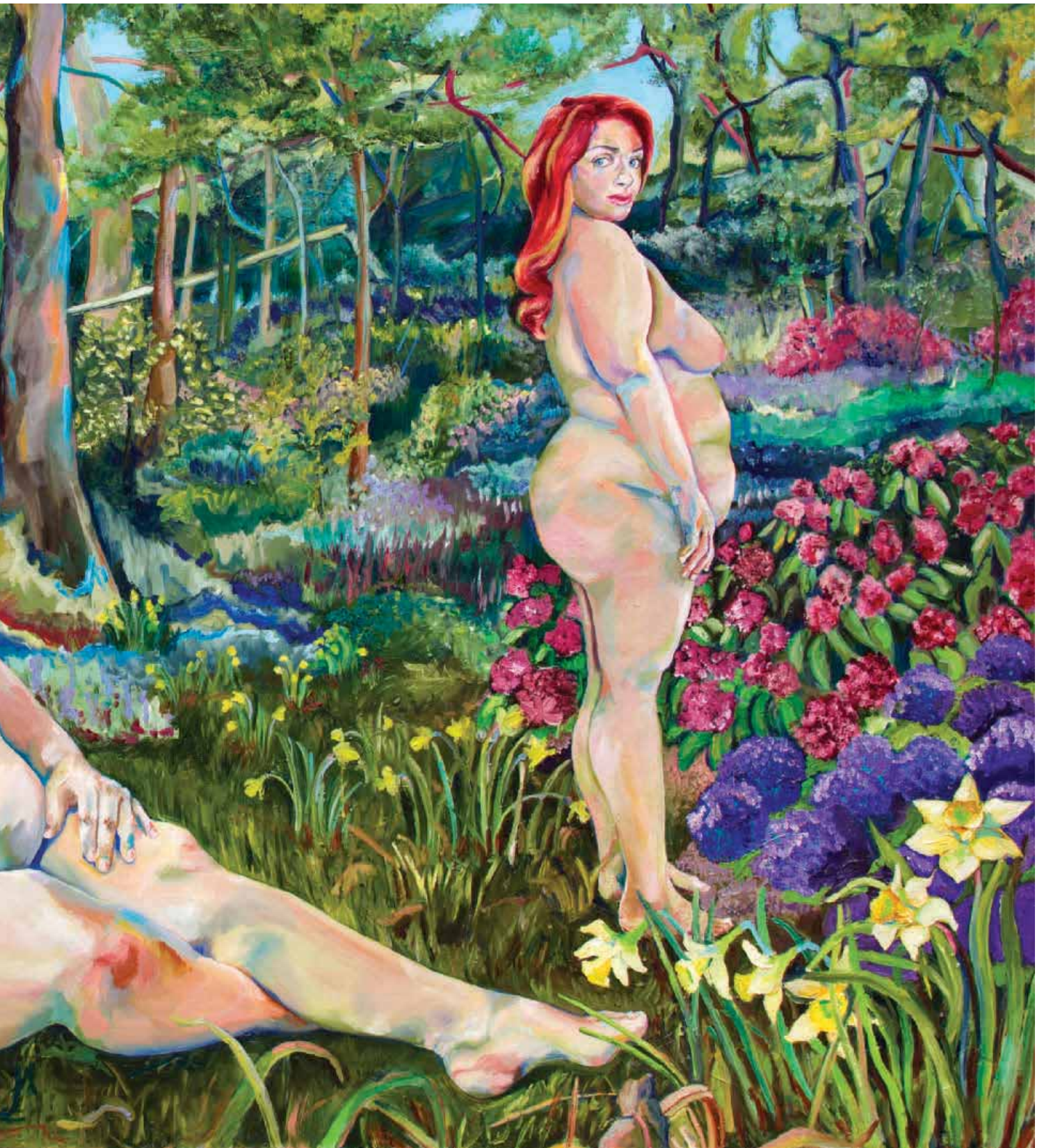
**Jasper:** Your models are not demure, shrinking violets. They are frank, and self-assured, and at home in their bodies and these lush, Garden of Eden-like surroundings. Can you talk about this?

**AA:** My figures are not apologetic or embarrassed; they are bold and defiant, this is very important to me. For me, my insecurities always manifested in trying to hide my body. In breaking free of this myself, I want the women who see my paintings to feel empowered to love and celebrate their bodies.

During college, I fell in love with the Pre-Raphaelites. Millais' *Ophelia*, Rossetti's *Lady Lilith*, and Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shallot*; these were my first loves. I was enamored with the depiction of beautiful women, in front of the backdrop of a turbulent and twisting nature scene or luscious florals. They say you never forget your first love, and I think that is absolutely true. Even as I moved on from the Pre-Raphaelites, their influence continued to ebb into every figurative work I did. I was constantly painting women with huge epic jungles or plants around the figure, especially during the first couple years of graduate school. However, I lacked a key component: (as cliché as it sounds) I wasn't painting from the heart. I knew I liked the aesthetic, but the figures were just characters to me, I was telling narratives that were not my own. I finally found a connection with myself only by removing the figure altogether.









When I returned to figurative work in 2016, with a personal motivation in tow, I came right back to my nature and botanical ideas. In doing some research, I found several symbolic connections between my work and the idea of the forest; for example, in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Bruno Bettelheim writes about the forest in fairy tales. He says the forest is a metaphor for being lost, and that typically it is only when the hero learns something or overcomes a challenge that he or she can find their way out. This idea is so pivotal to my concept, my figures were lost, but like me, they have overcome; they have found their way into the light and have reclaimed their power. At the same time, I was reading a book called *The Language of Flowers* by Vanessa Diffenbaugh. In it, Diffenbaugh writes about a girl who has learned to communicate with others through the meanings of flowers. This story inspired me to explore Victorian floral symbolism further and incorporate it into my work. Beyond flowers being symbols of resilience, rebirth, and feminine beau-

ty, they each have specific meanings. For example, the daffodil is a symbol of spring and new beginnings. I felt this was a perfect title for my first painting in this series, which represents a rebirth in both my artistic direction and my perception of self.

**Jasper: How do you see this body of work continuing to develop or evolve?**

**AA:** Right now, I am focused on weight issues, on celebrating curves, fat rolls, and stretch marks. This is my focus because these are things that I relate to, and therefore it is my current motivation. However, I can see myself expanding this body-positive message to be more inclusive and begin to talk about things like age, gender, and sexual issues associated with body image. As I mentioned early, this is the first time I feel like my artwork is actually helping to write my story. I am so passionate about this work, and I am growing through it as an artist and as a person. I am curious and excited to see where it takes me.

Ansley Adams can also be found at [www.ansleyadams.com](http://www.ansleyadams.com), and on Instagram and Twitter @ansleyadamsart.





*The Lush and Kind Art of*

CHRISTOPHER  
LANE

BY CINDI BOITER

*As an artist and human being, I strive to accept others.*

T

here is an ethereal quality to Christopher Lane's art that takes the viewer to another place and time. The way he plays with his color palette and dimensionality, the way his paint intentionally eats up every inch of the canvas, leaving nothing left untouched, nothing un-anointed, Lane is the kind of painter who bleeds himself into his work. And he's gaining national attention for it, although there is already evidence that the Columbia-based surrealist has much more to offer than what we have yet seen. And what we've seen is splendid indeed.

Lane did not grow up in South Carolina and landed here only after meandering, both as a child and an adult, from place to place, leading ultimately to a stint on a submarine in the Navy serving as a corpsman medic. His childhood started in Minnesota and took him as far away as Cairo, Egypt, where his father was serving in the armed forces.

"I have had the privilege to live in many places, each telling its own story with a unique style, history, architecture, and light," the artist says, "from the hieroglyphics and pyramids of Cairo to the tombs and monuments of Luxor, the Louvre in Paris, the Sistine Chapel in Rome, billboards and graffiti in New York, Kansas City and New Mexico with their vast landscapes and color filled skies, the mountains of Colorado, and the winter light of Minnesota with its deep blues, greys and silver sunsets. The place that I've chosen to call home [is] South Carolina, with its abundant wildlife, lush forests, unique architecture, both mountains and sea. **Everywhere in South Carolina is a masterpiece.**"















After struggling as a child with undiagnosed dyslexia, Lane was sent to the Gow School in South Wales, New York, where a passion for drawing that had begun in the fourth grade was reignited. “The Gow School not only diagnosed and treated my dyslexia but also convinced me to paint big and through that I gained my self-esteem,” Lane says. “They also got me out of my educational coma as I was given the appropriate techniques to learn.”

After leaving the Gow School, Lane moved to Paris where he was tapped to do runway modeling but spent less time painting. The time abroad influenced the artist though, and he continued to be moved by the work of Bosch and Dali and the surrealists. Back in the states, some time spent studying art at Eastern New Mexico University, a marriage that didn’t work out, and the end of a stint in the Navy found him in the Folly Beach area of Charleston, where he began work in the food service industry and took up the paint brush again.

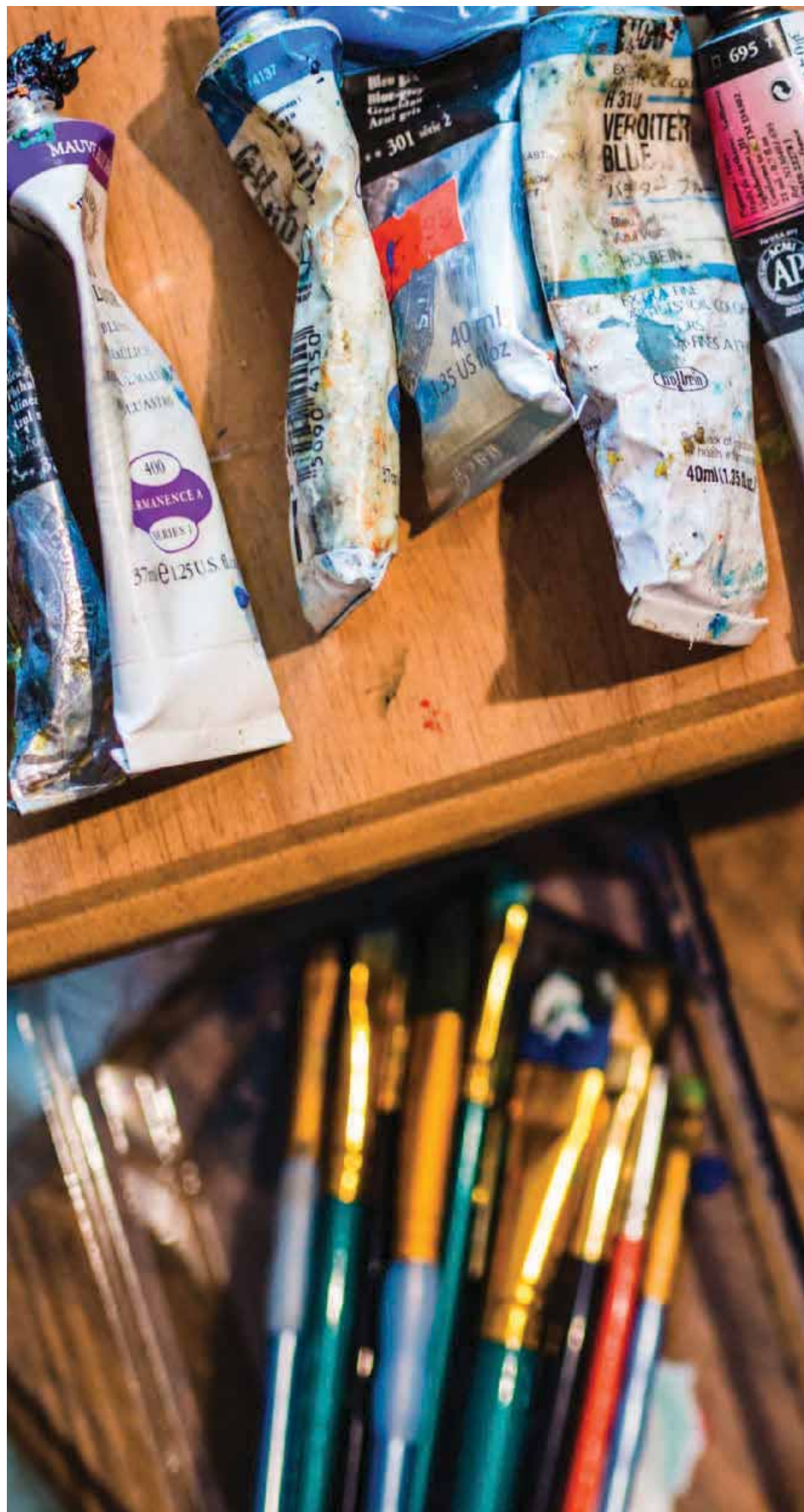
After spending most of his twenties in the lowcountry, Lane moved to Columbia when he was thirty and, again, supplemented his art with working in food service. He credits the kindness of a number of people who facilitated his growth as an artist through their support, including Mary Ann Havens and Gurney Adams, his landlord in Olympia, who was generous with rent deadlines and the volume at which Lane played his music throughout the night while painting. “If I’m anything, it’s because of my friends,” Lane says.

The artist also credits the love of his life, paralegal Lisa McVety, with the taming of much of the chaos that can accompany any artist’s life. “She influences my art in the absolute best way. She handles the business side which frees me up to be creative. She’s my best friend, my Gala. She’s my greatest muse,” he beams. McVety returns his affection and admiration. “Sharing my life with this man is one my greatest joys,” she says. “His heart, his very love for people and nature is reflected in his art. He is open and vulnerable on the canvas and shares his emotions with each stroke of the brush in a way that invites you to be just as courageous.”

The now 50-year-old says he creates “large art making large statements,” though he learned his attention to detail while serving in the Navy. “Perhaps this is why I am drawn to a large canvas,” he says. Lane is also drawn to painting “groups of people, separated by geography, yet sharing the same basic human needs and desires. This alone is the biggest influence in the composition of my paintings. My greatest hope is that my paintings reflect the one truth, we are all the same. We are all one.”

As is often the case with fine artists, Lane has begun to reap the rewards of his life-long work over the past few years, adding the likes of a small group show at the Waterfront Gallery during Spoleto Festival, a similarly small show at Fusion Art in Palm Springs (where he won Best in Show), and an exhibit in New South Wales, Australia to his resume. His pieces *Circle of Life* and *Seabrook Sunset* can currently be seen in G25N’s “Inspired by Nature” online virtual gallery space.

Given Lane’s talent, work ethic, and priorities—“Integrity is everything,” he says—there is no discounting his merit for success nor his mission for his art. “As an artist and human being, I strive to accept others. Growing up in the ‘70s and ‘80s with dyslexia was difficult. Until my diagnosis I was deemed to be ignorant or mentally challenged and it was incredibly painful,” he says. “I never want anyone to feel that pain. My work is inclusive. It is for everyone and hopefully inspires others to also be open to many different possibilities never explored. I want to be a sparkly grain of sand in an ocean of talent. I want to be that little tiny glint.”



*See more of Christopher Lane's work at [www.lanartworks.com](http://www.lanartworks.com).*

An artistic workspace featuring several paint tubes, some with labels like 'AP' and '0.4 oz (12ml)', and a magnifying glass with a blue handle. The scene is set on a wooden surface. The text is overlaid in a large, bold, white font with a black outline, except for the word 'GLINT' which is in blue.

I WANT TO BE  
A SPARKLY  
GRAIN OF SAND IN  
AN OCEAN OF TALENT.  
I WANT TO BE THAT  
LITTLE TINY **GLINT**.



# *The Watering Hole Finds a Home, Works to Narrow Divides in Race and Genre*

BY KRISTINE HARTVIGSEN



# W

**hen Monifa Lemons** announced she was moving to South Carolina to focus on The Watering Hole nonprofit poets' collective, her ailing mother asked why she couldn't do that in Maryland, her longtime home. "I said it wasn't needed there, as opposed to being needed in the South," Lemons says. "Poets in the South are not given the respect and honor and opportunity historically that poets in the North get."

Along with her friend and colleague, Clemson University professor Candace Wiley, Lemons is co-founder and director of The Watering Hole, a creative community supporting poets of color in the South. The two met for the first time around 2009 when both were attending a Cave Canem South workshop made possible by funding secured by Dr. Kwame Dawes, a prolific author, then Distinguished Poet-in-Residence at the University of South Carolina, and executive director of the South Carolina Poetry Initiative.

"Monifa was the person in the room who, when everyone stood up to say why there were there, 25 or so people said 'I am here because Monifa told me to come.' She makes everyone who talks to her feel like they are her best friend," Wiley recalls. "Afterward, she invited me and others over to her house to: spit poems, eat food, and build community. It was amazing!"

Lemons was born in New York City. “My mom always made sure that we had art in our lives,” she says. “One day she took me to the Black Spectrum Theatre Company in Queens. I fell in love with the theater in a way I can’t describe.”

She left New York at age 19 and ended up in Columbia. A fierce spoken word artist, Lemons hungered for local venues to grow her craft. She didn’t find the ideal she was looking for so, in 1998, she began hosting her own open mic, “The Flow,” at venues including Conundrum Music Hall.

“As an open mic host and poet, I wanted to learn more,” Lemons says. She had plenty of experience but lacked a structured, academic background. When she met Wiley, it clicked in a yin-and-yang sort of way.

“I was the person who, if you asked me as an undergrad what real poetry was, I would have said spoken word. I wasn’t a spoken word poet, but I really respected it,” Wiley explains. When she went to grad school, she soon realized that teachers in the education mainstream are programmed to teach the old, classic, mostly white poets. “I didn’t hear anything I could relate to. The course work didn’t reflect my experience. I can quote people, like Emily Dickenson — whom I do not love — because someone pounded it into me.”

The Watering Hole began simply, as a Facebook forum. Cognizant of the enormous creative void left by Dawes’ departure and the end of funding for Cave Canem South, the two women took it upon themselves to organize and host their own three-day Watering Hole retreat in the spirit of Cave Canem at Santee State Park in 2013. It has since become an annual event, and The Watering Hole now is a nonprofit with a website and online fundraising. The retreats have been poignant and memorable to many participants.

“To be in a room with people who knew and respected the authors who inspired me,

to not need to explain the idiosyncrasies of my work, to have guides who would point the way to my next reading/listening list, to not be questioned, resented, or undermined for writing race, and to have poignant critique of my work,” Wiley told the online publication *Legendary Women* in 2015, “was priceless.”

Author Len Lawson, who teaches English at the University of South Carolina Sumter, attended the retreat and described it this way in his blog: “Before the retreat, my goal was to identify challenges I’d been having in my own writing to excel to the next level of my work. The results of the retreat were spiritual —if not supernatural —in transforming my view on poetry, the poetry community at large, and myself. ... This was one of the top ten moments of my existence, and its full impact on my life is yet to be determined. This movement among poets of color is set to change the world one line at a time, especially in the face of threats against our humanity.”

“It didn’t matter what letters you had after your name,” Lemons says. “Everyone was learning, and nobody cared where you came from.”

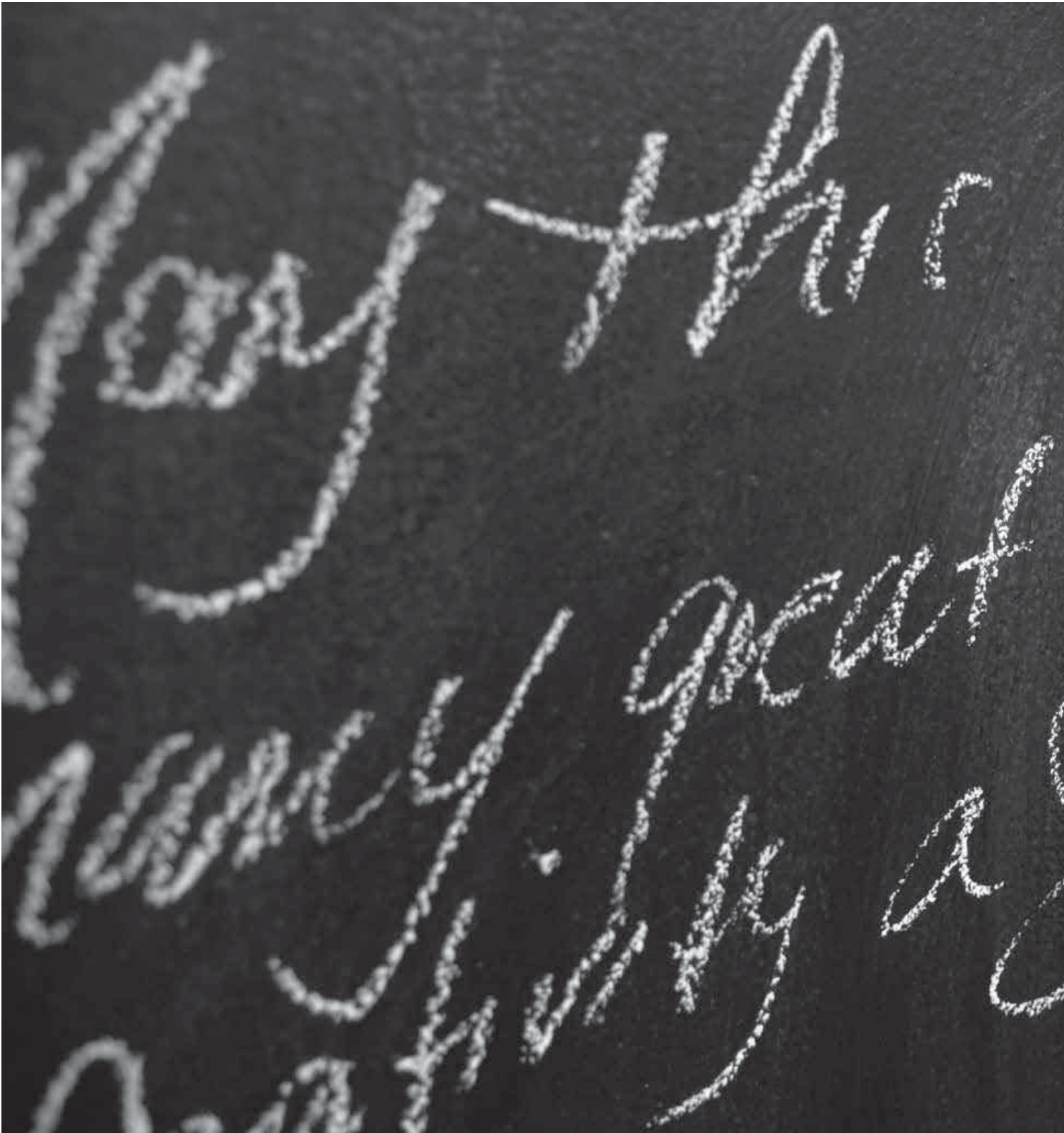
The following year, Lemons and Wiley were invited to present at the prestigious Furious Flower conference at James Madison University in Virginia. “That conference happens only every 10 years. They are very, very selective in who they pick to their presenting panels,” Lemon says. “And we got picked! That panel changed my life.” The two were uplifted in the realization that the literary world took them seriously. “I remember our talking after and saying, ‘We have 10 years to take over the world! Where will we be in 2024?’”

The Watering Hole officially celebrated the opening of its “bricks and mortar” headquarters at a March 1 grand opening event in their downstairs studio at Tapp’s Arts Center. And “The Flow” open mic, hosted by Lemons as “SelahthePoet,” is back now every











third Tuesday in the Fountain Room adjacent to the group's new studio. So what does it all mean?

"This means that we are home in an official capacity, and we can work with people who want to write—from the beginning writer to the person who wants us to read their manuscript. That means EVERYTHING," Lemons says. "It means that we get to build poets from the ground up. That is all we are here for. It's a home for spoken word artists to learn the written word and for written word artists to learn spoken word."

On reflection, Lemons says, "Leaving my mom was the hardest thing I have ever done." Relationships between mothers and daughters can be complicated. Her mother used to ask her when she would "get a real job," lamenting that her daughter, a single mother, was nearly killing herself for poetry, spending money on poetry without any coming in. "Me and my mom have had an understanding since the moment I told her I am a poet. ... But I know she was conflicted."

Last Thanksgiving, the two came together, and Lemons was relieved to see that her mother had made peace with everything. "I heard my mom say, 'Well done. I know you will be fine. I see what you do now. I get it.' ... That is everything to me. I think she saw herself in me."

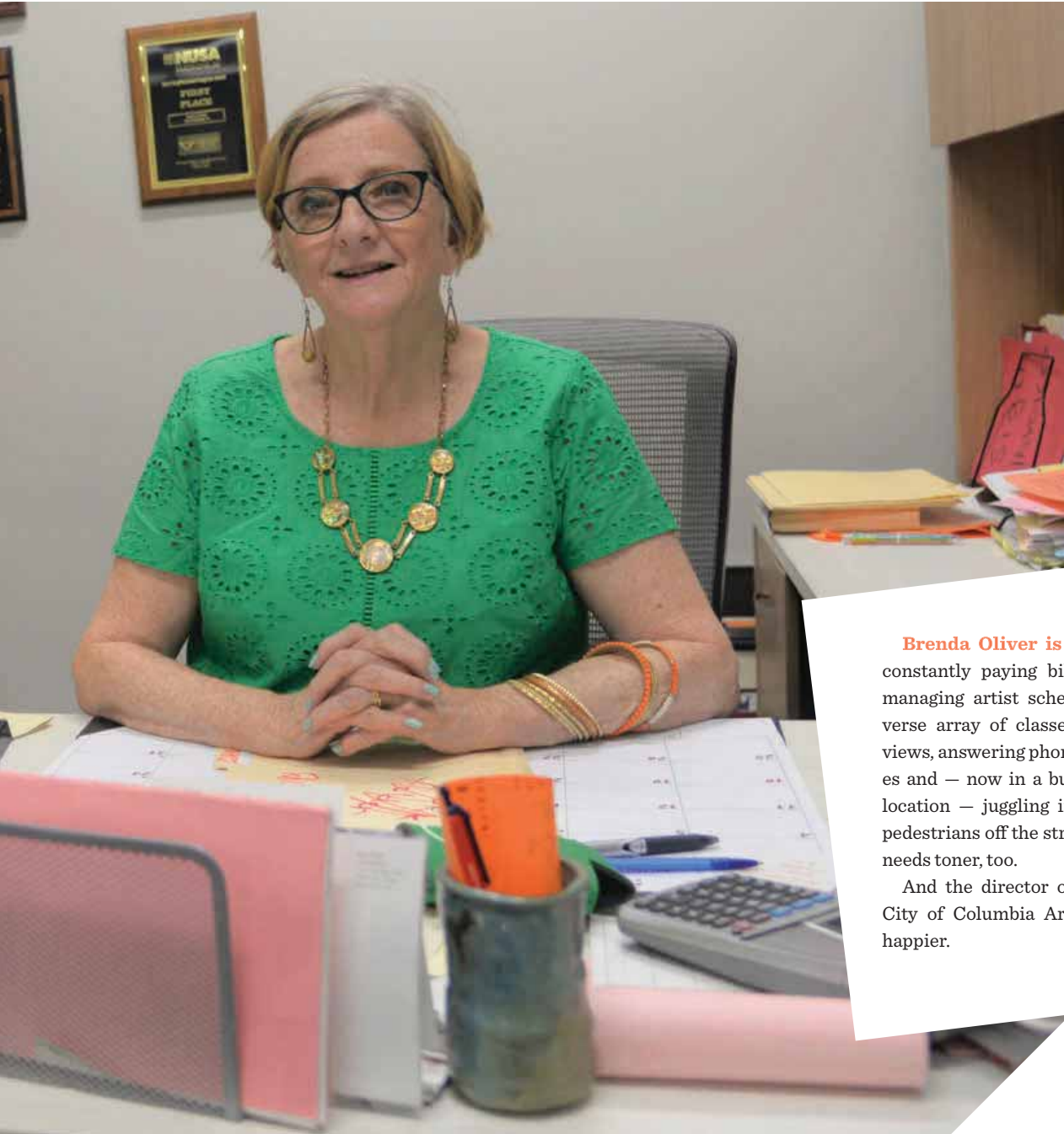
Lemons lost her mother in February. The pain was still palpable at the Watering Hole grand opening. She composed herself, and her close supporters pulled her into their loving embrace.

"The Watering Hole to me sits on the fence between written and spoken word artists, between page and stage. That is what we do," she says. "Unapologetically, I am about this work."

# Columbia Arts Center— Bringing Art to the People



BY KRISTINE HARTVIGSEN



**Brenda Oliver is overwhelmed.** She's constantly paying bills, ordering supplies, managing artist schedules to deliver a diverse array of classes, doing media interviews, answering phone calls, teaching classes and — now in a bustling new downtown location — juggling inquiries from curious pedestrians off the street. Oh, and the copier needs toner, too.

And the director of the newly relocated City of Columbia Arts Center couldn't be happier.

“The best thing about our new location is visibility. Before, no one knew we existed, and we had no space to work in. I have almost doubled my capacity here,” Oliver explains. “I now have the capacity for 100 studio members, and we have a waiting list of about 20 people waiting for slots. When I started (in the Center’s older Calhoun Street location), we had only 35 studio members.”

Last fall, the Center moved into its new 5,000-square-foot space at 1227 Taylor Street beneath the Cannon parking garage. The City’s investment in the space is estimated at \$850,000. Modern concrete floors, contemporary office space, classrooms, and gallery space visible via generous windows to the street attract the interest of passers-by and create an ambiance conducive to creativity of all kinds.

“The response has been extremely positive. People often just drop in during the day. One of the more interesting comments came from a fellow from Morocco who was touring the Southeast,” Oliver says. “He was elated to find this facility. He had been to many major cities everywhere across the Southeast and had not found another facility like this. He was really impressed that a municipality was doing this, that the city thought enough of the arts to provide this facility.”

The Center is a must-see during the city’s downtown arts crawl the First Thursday of every month. Dubbed “Worlds of Creativity,” the Center’s First Thursday focus was on African-American culture in February and Irish culture in March. “Every month, we will be promoting a different culture,” Oliver says. Educational presentations occur simultaneously with a number of live art creation demonstrations.

Evening classes in everything from ceramics and clay art, drawing, sewing and quilt-making to sculpture, jewelry-making, and basketry are offered Monday through Thursday. The Center also offers spring and summer art camps for children.

“We are able to offer these things to the community at large for a reasonable price,” Oliver adds. “It’s affordable to most.” It appears to be something citizens want. Classes fill up quickly. A drawing class and a pine needle basketry class taught by local artisans Lucas Sams and Clay Burnett, respectively, both recently sold out.

Oliver is pleased to note the Center’s involvement in several successful community outreach projects. Originally begun six years ago with referrals from the Fort Jackson Wounded Warrior Transition Unit (deactivated in 2014), Creative Journey continues to provide free art resources to military veterans healing from PTSD. And for a couple of years now, the Center has been partnering with Sonoco, United Way of the Midlands, Sustainable Midlands, EdVenture Children’s Museum, and others to support Operation Bedroll. Volunteers collect plastic shopping bags, craft it into a type of yarn they call “plarn,” and crochet from it lightweight, waterproof bedrolls for homeless citizens. The mats provide dry insulation for those who must sleep on the ground. An additional benefit is they keep thousands of plastic bags out of area landfills. The Center serves as a drop-off point for the bags and supplies volunteers interested in crocheting the bedrolls.

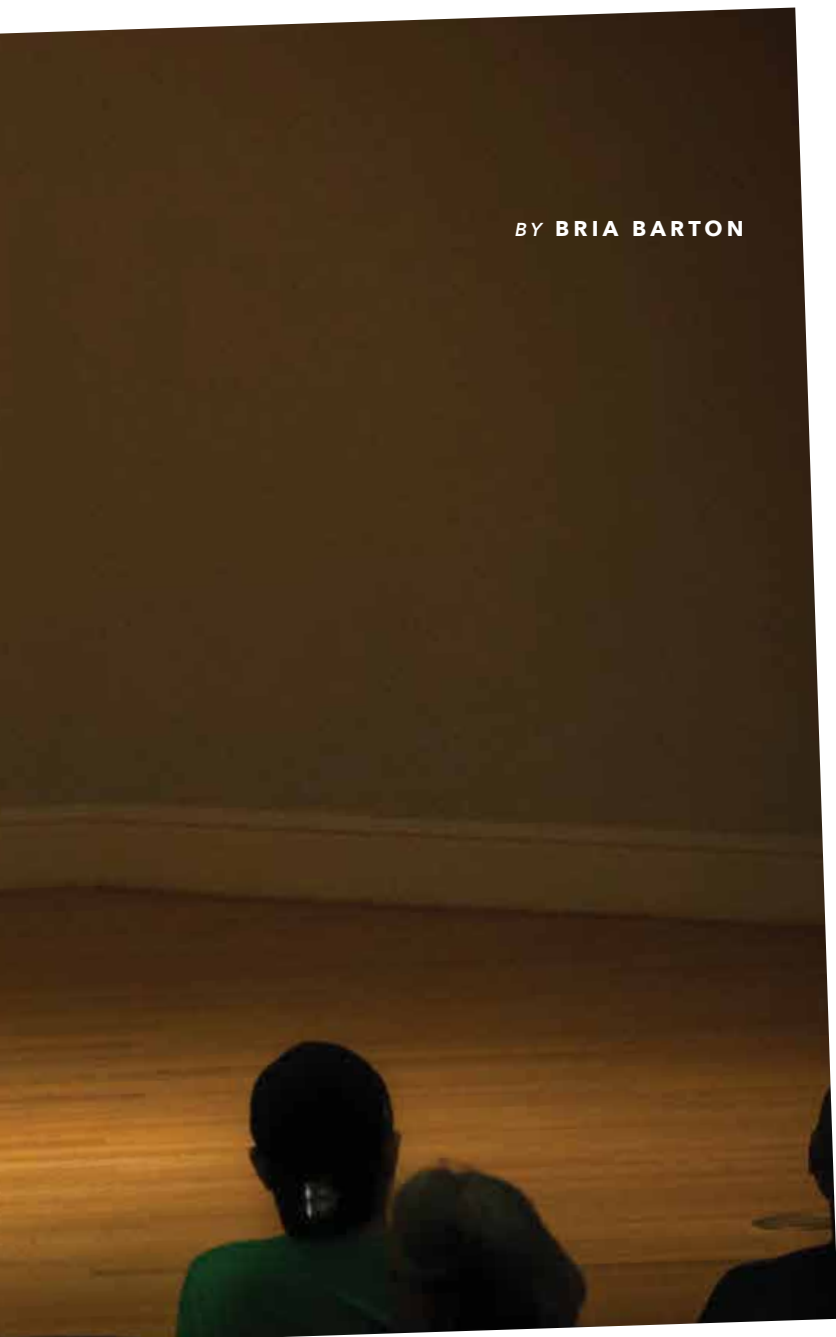
“I am big on partnerships,” Oliver says. “You can’t do it without partnerships. We are forming a wide spectrum of partnerships.”



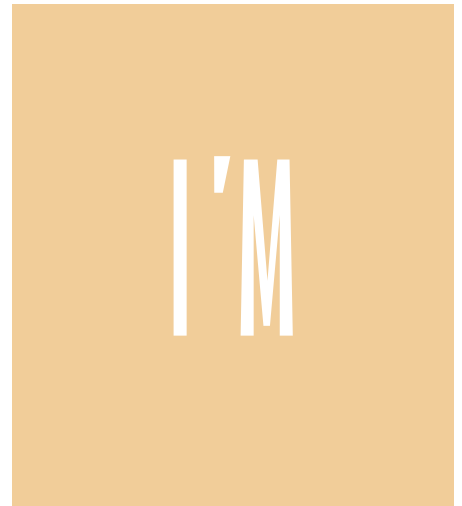
# SHANNON IVEY







BY BRIA BARTON



**going to concretize...,” Shannon Ivey says with a giggle.** “I laugh about that word, but that’s what I’m going to do. Concretize.”

To concretize is to shape an idea or concept into reality. Make it concrete. And that verb is the essence of Ivey and her endeavors, both on and off the stage.

Although she holds the titles of actress, director, activist, educator, and Tedx Presenter, Ivey doesn’t categorize herself or her work.

“At a meeting, someone once said to me, ‘Who are you with? And I said, ‘I am with *myself*.’”

Having grown up entranced by theater, Ivey recognized, as an undergrad acting student, that she was only directed by men. Inspired to incorporate the female perspective into the theater scene, Ivey was bitten by the directing bug.

She developed the What She Said Project, an undertaking that grew out of the Soda City Story Slam, after realizing the need for women to have their own “brave space.”

She was motivated by an “amplification” technique used by women in the Obama administration to ensure their voices were heard and acknowledged in a male-dominated environment: When one woman made a statement, the others repeated it, and gave the original speaker due credit.

“Whenever I would put out a call for story slam participants, I would get 80 percent men and 20 percent women, and the women would over-prepare, stress themselves out, and scare themselves,” Ivey says. “There’s actually a lot of research that shows if you add one man into a learning environment women take steps back, so I decided to see if I could be the one to hold space for *just* women.”

*“I think people  
are hungry for  
vulnerability.  
Once you’re  
touched by the magic,  
you get what it is  
and you’re  
grateful for  
their bravery.”*

The What She Said Project carried an underlying theme of *What she didn't say*, and Ivey says her interest in narrative medicine created a space where women could collect and express their feminine struggles, many of which were physical and stigmatized.

"I think people are hungry for vulnerability. Once you're touched by the magic, you get what it is and you're grateful for their bravery," Ivey says. "In that brave space, we all have to be willing to hear and tell some tough things, but everyone is willing to stop, so there is a very consent-based storytelling culture that I'm trying to build."

Ivey's most recent project involvement, Amplify—A Cultural Plan for the Columbia Area, is a community-driven initiative launched by One Columbia meant to "broaden public participation in arts and cultural activities." The project is split into a multi-part series, one of them being Ivey's interpretation of the 36 Questions that lead to love.

The questions, which have been scientifically-proven to incite love between strangers, are intended to be both social experiment and speed dating—but as a community. Ivey hopes to learn why people of all backgrounds make Columbia their home, but she expects the answer to be a common one: People are here because of people.

"There's a quote that says you can't hate someone if you know their story," Ivey says. "The event is open to anybody, and it has nothing to do with networking. It has to do with making a new relationship."

While a professor at South Carolina State University, Ivey says she allowed herself to acknowledge her whiteness and deconstruct the privilege of traditional theater. She discovered Theatre of the Oppressed, a form of theatrical expression that highlights the social issues faced by oppressed groups in society.

Her work, like the What She Said Project and 36 Questions, is a combination of activism and art intended to draw attention to the topics society typically shies away from and generate community togetherness. Ivey says humans have the natural instinct to step back from the uncomfortable, which is where the problem lies. When an issue is avoided, the oppressed become more oppressed.

"Women oppress their issues because failure isn't an option. We internalize shame," Ivey says. "In our mind, if we fail, we will fail our children, we will fail our partner, we will be a failed woman—somehow, because the bar seems so high."

Ivey says that storytelling is the key to social justice because she's seen it change minds. Nobody owes anyone a story, she says, but when they are willing to share "their special story" and be vulnerable, people notice and "everything shifts" and it "inspires somebody else."

"I'm not super religious, but it has a testimonial feel, so it's a little like story-church. A lot of people don't have that sort of home anymore because we've started to move away from that as a society, so it gives that intimacy and hope," Ivey says. "The strength gained from standing in your truth and standing in your story, there's no price for that."

The next step in her work, Ivey says, is making more people understand each other. She hopes to refine the importance of people of all circumstances coming together, looking nothing like one another, and sitting and listening to each other's stories, in silence.

"I think it's very powerful to be able to move between the genres," Ivey says. "People are like, 'she's not a theater person, she's a storyteller.' Of course, I'm a theater person. But I'm also moving where there is a gap that is needed. It is between the professionals. It is between art and activism. It is between the community and the stage."



Behind  
the

# BEAT

MIDIMarc is Quietly the Sound Behind  
a Lot of Columbia's Hip-Hop

BY KYLE PETERSEN

In person, Marcum Core, aka the beatmaker and producer MIDIMarc, is an unassuming dude. He has a gentle, if assiduous, presence, the kind of guy more comfortable pouring over the liner notes of an obscure record he pulled out of a bin at Papa Jazz than rocking the mic at New Brookland Tavern.

Which, when you think about it, makes sense for a hip-hop producer whose musical world is largely confined to the studio, with the exception of a stray old-school DJ here or beatmaker-cum-hypeman there. And that, indeed, is where Marc is in his element.

“I’ve just always been a behind the scenes kind of person, I guess,” he shrugs, sitting comfortably on the couch in the mastering studio at the Boom Room, the hip-hop-oriented Studio B of Jam Room. “You know, beatmaking just fits [me]. I guess everybody has different parts of their personality or whatever, but the creative part of my personality just loves sound. It’s like, ‘okay, well, what can I do to make it sound the way I hear it in my head?’”

For Marc, making music feels like a natural extension of being a music fan. Explaining how he became one of the city’s go-to hip-hop producers starts almost from birth, with his parent’s record collection of Motown records and Aretha Franklin and through his early fascination with Michael Jackson and MC Hammer to the G-funk of Dr. Dre and adolescent worship of RZA and the Wu-Tang Clan.

That was, until one day fate intervened.

“I was pretty much just a fan. But the neighborhood that I lived in, my next door neighbor is a guy name Mookie, and he and some other guys in the neighborhood like they had started a rap group,” he recalls. “I just kind of went over there one day when I was probably being sent to check the mailbox or whatever and they had the turntable set up. They were rapping.

“That’s the day I met Fat Rat, and that’s the day I at least became super interested in you know, like, wanting to deejay.”





Fat Rat is Fat Rat da Czar, a fellow Hopkins-raised musician who now reigns as the city's unofficial godfather of the hip-hop scene thanks to his status as not only a long-running solo artist but also as engineer of the Boom Room and founder of the Love, Peace & Hip-Hop Festival. MIDIMarc, not coincidentally, is the producer behind many of his songs, including the G-funk-inspired and Ben G-featuring mixtape hit "Be Strong" and last year's hard-driving synth blast on the rapper's title track from his *RailRoad* album.

But it would take a while before Marc was producing beats with that kind of flare and polish--his earliest efforts, he says, came from simply looping his favorite part of a song from the radio using two cassette tapes, a throwback to the earliest forms of beat-making using two turntables to endlessly flip back to the percussion break in a song. From

there he would gradually accrue equipment, from drum machines, samplers and synthesizers to, later, laptops and software--that would allow him to make more complex and nuanced music.

"[Hip-hop] beats are pretty limitless, because hip-hop really prioritizes just manipulating sound and making sound itself your instrument," he says of his recording and songwriting process. "I could play some [riff], you know, on the synthesizer, or even just take one note, and chop that note into pieces and do whatever."

Whether sampling or creating his own melodies and rhythms, Marc compares the process to a James Brown jam session, where the band would play endlessly until they settled on a groove that worked for the frontman, who would make that groove the pocket to one of his songs.

The comparison feels apt, particularly given how many James Brown breaks ended up serving as the foundation of hip-hop beats, and it speaks to Marc's reverence for the past and open approach to music making. A prodigious music maker, he's produced quite a few solo beat projects, including an album-length tribute to the deceased Pimp C and some recent one-offs of Marvin Gaye remixes in addition to producing album tracks for Fat Rat, Cole Connor, and LaLisa in recent years.

How does a beat end up on a rap album, you might ask? Marc says the internet has overcrowded the marketplace with beatmakers, but that hustle and persistence are the main ingredients. He used to hand out tapes of beats at the record store or to people on the street to share his music, then spreading his music through whatever digital avenues were available. He also embraced the rise of

mixtape culture, intuiting that it would be another way to get spread his music.

As for a particular “style” in the traditional sense of West Coast G-funk (slow to mid-tempo grooves influenced by 1970s funk) or East Coast boom bap (hard bass and snare-centered beats), Marc doesn’t think of himself as having a signature sound or style. While he can pull and prod from various traditions, including more recent trends like Timbaland’s stuttering kick-drums or the cinematic spaciousness of trap music, he mostly stays loose and follows his own muse.

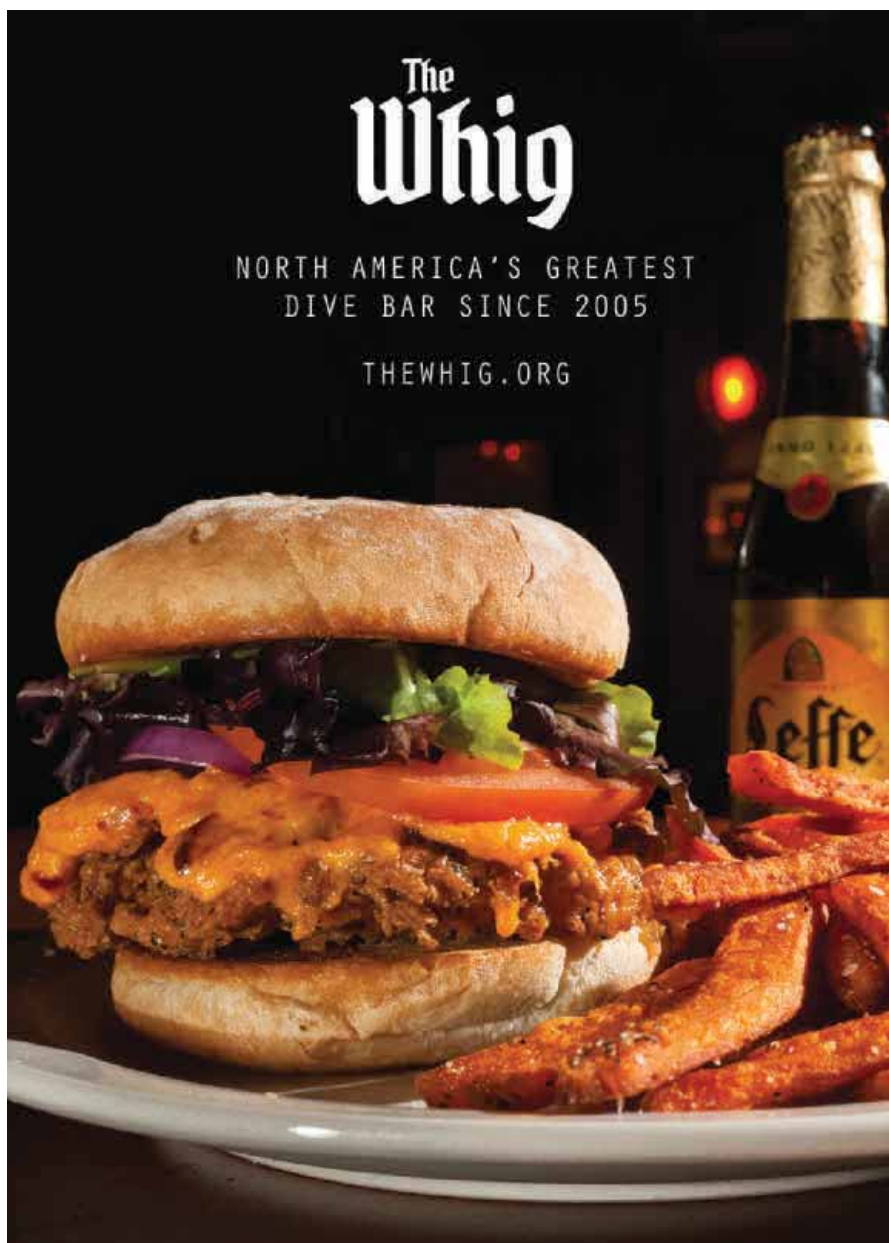
“I’m very much a Southern hip-hop producer, but more so by location than by culture, and not necessarily by sound,” he points out. “I’ve been influenced by so many different sounds and styles of hip-hop. But I’m definitely very proud to be from the South and I’m very proud of all of the producers that have come from Southern hip-hop culture.”

At this point, MidiMARC is a firmly established brand in terms of South Carolina hip-hop, even if he hasn’t gone on to the higher commercial echelons that fellow Columbia beatmaker Supah Mario has with his production credits with Young Thug and Drake. Marc has nothing but praise for his competitor, though, noting his amazing work ethic and hustle made his success well-deserved. Too, he thinks the city’s hip-hop scene is looking up, particularly with the staying power of Boom Room.

“That’s been huge for the scene from a creative standpoint, just having a sort of solid base for people to come together and work together, he says. “Having a dedicated engineer who consistently there and actually cares about your music.”

One thing he would like to continue to see more of going forward, though, is genuine community collaborations and spirit.

“I would like to see more collaborative songs and groups, you know? I would like to see more crews form, he notes. “I like to have a sense of family you know while they’re doing this thing. I like having people where they have your back and I have them, like the family unit or some tight family structure or a brotherhood while you’re going on this crazy journey. That’s important.”



# Catching Up With **David Axe**

*Freelance writer David Axe* has a lot of interesting credits to his name including military correspondent, prolific blogger, author, and graphic novelist. Last year he added filmmaker to his accomplishments—an endeavor he must have enjoyed because he’s at it again. Jasper caught up with Axe to learn more about his new project. Here’s the scoop.

**Jasper:** The Theta Girl came out in 2017, written by you and directed by Christopher Bickel – how did the film do and, in a tight little nutshell, what’s the most important thing you learned as a filmmaker as a result of the project?

**Axe:** THE THETA GIRL is playing at festivals and doing really well. We have a distribution offer so the movie should be available soon to the general public. THE THETA GIRL was a crash course in all aspects of indie filmmaking. But the main lesson was ... movie production is all about people. Take care of your people, and they’ll take care of your movie.

**Jasper:** Now, you are applying this knowledge to a new film, Azrael. Can you give us a sneak peek into what Azrael is about?

**Axe:** AZRAEL is set in the same universe as THE THETA GIRL. A weird, lonely crime-scene clean-up tech discovers the formula for a powerful psychedelic drug. A trio of

deadly women come looking for the formula. A violent chase ensues. AZRAEL is a volatile brew of sex, drugs and sacrilege ... plus a little art-theory.

**Jasper:** Who else is involved in this project?

**Axe:** AZRAEL was made in Columbia by a mostly local crew. Matthew Gault is producing. Our cast includes Caley Fleming, Catherine Hunsinger, and Aaron Blomberg. Music is by Preach Jacobs, Mario McClean, Gauge Santiago, and Matthew Akers.

**Jasper:** And what is the timeline for production?

**Axe:** As of early April we’re still in post-production. Our local premiere should be in May.

**Jasper:** Last question, what would make our area a more fertile ground for independent film?

**Axe:** There’s a ton of local filmmaking talent. People just need to get off their asses and make something. It’d be nice if we got some support from The Nickelodeon, Columbia’s arthouse theater. The Nick claims one of its missions is to support the local arts, but the current management refuses to show local productions, even for one-night premieres. It’s frustrating. Local filmmakers get much more help from Tapp’s Arts Center, and Tapp’s isn’t even a theater! -CB

*Follow Azrael at  
[www.facebook.com/azraelmovie](http://www.facebook.com/azraelmovie)*



# What I've Learned Writing About Dance

BY SUSAN LENZ

*“Every step was true to its intention, as much as if it was well written poetry.”*

**B**efore the dance season started last autumn, I was introduced as Jasper's new dance writer on the organization's blog. I accepted the position on a very particular condition, as an expert audience member. I totally admitted not knowing proper dance vocabulary or history, but I also shared my background and why I really am an “expert audience member.”

I promised to cover local dance events from that special point of view.

At the time, I planned to address theater etiquette, the difference between civic and professional companies, realistic expectations from productions, and behind-the-scenes information about a few dancers. I wanted to start conversations about live and canned music, costuming and set limitations, touring and special previews. My aim was to increase awareness of the many opportunities to witness dance in Columbia but also to provide insider information that would make our audiences better informed, eager for quality, and excited about upcoming shows. For the most part, I have done this and plan to continue through the spring.

What I didn't expect, however, was how this opportunity would enhance my

own enjoyment so much. Writing about dance for Jasper Project meant digging into background information for George Balanchine's *Walpurgisnacht Ballet*, one of several pieces needing research for my coverage of USC's Fall Concert. It meant watching *The Nutcracker* through the awe-filled eyes of Richland One's fifth graders as they experienced ballet with our civic company, Carolina Ballet. It provided an intimate setting to see Rick McCollough's new choreography for Columbia Classical Ballet before it went to the Koger Center. It included a lengthy interview with Columbia City Ballet's Colin Jacobs about his first principal role.

Best of all, *LifeChance 2018* introduced me to Manuel Vignouille and Rena Butler. They performed a most thought-provoking and beautifully executed piece called *Black and White*. Had I not been writing about dance, I would never have found YouTube videos and on-line interviews about this couple, the art residencies that provided time for the work's creation, the impact of the music, and the concepts expressing matters of race, gender, and stereotypes. I learned that the nudity (not shown on the Koger Center stage) was meant to express the dancer's vulnerability at the beginning of a relationship. The original costuming had the two pulling on pants as they reached out to connect. By the end, Rena wore a long white gown with an

open back, highlighting her black skin. Still bare-chested, Manuel wore a black suit, highlighting his white skin. From loneliness to a symbolic marriage, the choreography expressed their physicality, their humanity, and a connectivity that suggests a better world.

Even though I didn't get to see the original costuming, I was entranced by the performance here in Columbia. Every step was true to its intention, as much as if it was well written poetry. Every movement seamlessly suited the music. The audience responded to the drama, and I felt blessed to have witnessed it.

Yet, writing for Jasper gave me the opportunity to dig deeper into this work, to see the common artistic threads between visual artists like me and dancers like Vignouille and Butler. Like them, I care about taking risks, pushing emotional boundaries, bringing a spiritual meaning to my work, and being authentic. Most of Columbia's writers and actors and musicians feel the same way. This multidisciplinary approach to the arts is what makes *Jasper Magazine* so unique. My initial hopes for Columbia's audience have come full circle. I am better informed, eager for quality, and excited about the upcoming spring dance season.



# A Forest Almost

By Liz Countryman

REVIEW BY  
RAY MCMANUS

**L**iz Countryman's *A Forest Almost* (Subito Press, 2017) is a beautiful debut. It's a tight collection of twenty-five poems, drawn even tighter into three sections. However, it is within the space of the poem itself that Countryman is able to methodically poke through dusty layers of privacy and expectation with clarity and precision through her careful use of voice.

These poems are not packed, rather they are unfolded to fall where they lie. It's relieving to encounter. The genius here lies in Countryman's ability to invite us into the unfolding. Her voice is measured and quite deceptive in its simplicity. This leads to surprise revelations – from the profound to the profane but always with a calm, even approach. Sometimes, the reader has no idea what the next fold, the next line will reveal. Take for instance the poem "Old News" – one of my favorites. The speaker begins "We longed for that river, but older" and immediately the reader will get the impression that this poem will rest in its nostalgia, be predictable, but by the time the reader reaches the end, and the speaker announces –

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*We're as bent as we can be, waiting.  
I spit out my gum, you drool in my mouth,  
you tell me, "I'm rolling you over." I burn  
under you like a library. A place erases.*

---

– it becomes clear that we are reading poems from a skilled poet, one who is not afraid to use a simple simile and push it beyond our expectations.

Whereas Countryman's voice is steady and calm, it doesn't shrink. These poems can be fierce as in "Masculine Wind" (which I will admit, the first time I read it, I thought she was making a fart joke – she's not), or somewhat playful as in "The train moved me, clothes kept me seated" (Subway Ride, Spring 2002) or in a "A Farm Speaks":

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*I turn this way or that, depending.  
I am ten years older that I was ten years ago.  
Numbers are no joke to me.*

---

And we are seamlessly cast into the public and the private equally, never just, or all in, but always in a state of *almost*. The reader carries the poem outside of the book the rest of the way, but it's Countryman's voice that really carries the energy of this collection. Steadied and pointed, the reader just moves from one poem to the next with a speaker who is not afraid to ask just as much from herself as she does the reader, "Am I water

on a train on which damp people slump?" ("When I Err"), "Or does the window of me look in / jealously at my hearth?" ("Fireworks Phobia Formation"). It's a quiet vulnerability coupled with a tenacious eye and a witty penchant to bite without rage or delight. It must be some kind of Wisconsin matter-of-fact-yet-polite-bad-assery afoot. Whatever it is, however it works, it's beautiful.

Perhaps the most poignant moment of this collection comes towards the end of the last poem in the book, "Illumination After a Swim in Texas":

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*Then, it was degrees later.  
Crickets scraped; I held  
the end of a slack leash.  
This was when Dooley was still alive,  
before I first clicked save, Cars rush  
through greens, and the greens did  
something in the dark. But I never walked  
into them from the highway. I never  
met them the way I wanted.  
When I say I want you, this is what I mean.*

---

And it's at that moment we realize we moved from contemplation to a finality where everything is an almost, "a shaking barely felt" ("Another Neighborhood") that opens up everything. It was there all along in the quiet and stillness of Countryman's voice. We were never lost. Matter of fact or not, we do not know what lies ahead in this world. Could be another room, another city perhaps, or ourselves looking at each other, surrounded by a forest, almost.

# DéLana R. A. Dameron's *Weary Kingdom:* *Poems*

REVIEW BY  
MAYA MARSHALL

There comes a time when asking too much/of the same soil will destroy it, Dameron writes in her poem "Knowing the Limits of the Earth." Having been reared in South Carolina and yearning for her own history wrought of travel and establishing her own home, the young woman speaker sets out to grow herself on new land, up in Harlem. She teaches herself to move and build without failing to keep the lessons she's learned from her family (chosen and given) about cultivation, death, and defense.

*Weary Kingdom* (University of South Carolina Press, 2017) is DéLana R. A. Dameron's second full-length collection. It follows *How God Ends Us* (University of South Carolina Press, 2009). To be perfectly honest, I love the collection because it speaks to my own coming of age experience, south to north migration, and experience as a black daughter. The speaker tells us of her mother in "Dear—": She once claimed I won't know love. I told her/ love is learning acceptance: now I can sleep.... This woman's response to her mother's tells me the singular speaker in these pages is determined to define herself and to get free as she moves forward in the world carrying with her the magnolias and collards of the south. The poems are textured with anecdotes, lists, street sounds, tenderness and defiance. *Weary Kingdom's* speaker addresses former lovers, illuminates her Harlem apartment, and elevates quotidian portraits of scenes from the bus. The woman knows she is greater than her desire. She welcomes and governs her desire. She remains level-headed. Self-aware, determined, open, and she grows.

There are moments when I'm completely consumed by the propulsive images in this book and stanzas that leave me dumbfounded, particularly those that that begin "Communion":

*The night my mother tried to save me,  
she held my four-year-old legs down  
in the center of the room. I didn't want  
to do it. I didn't want to eat the flesh  
of a man I didn't know, ask Him  
into my heart's small cavity.*



Dameron's voice is self-assured, expert in city and country and the black American dialects innate in each. The poet takes her time, writes well-paced, decisive lines. There is light and love in each of these poems as well as a dexterity in forms from free verse to ode to palinode. It's adroitly woven. The writer has, since her first collection, matured her understanding of how the house of a book is built.

Even though the book is set in sections: *Mapmaker*, the *Migration*, *Pomegranate Sky*, it need not be read from front cover to back. I find myself happy to see any one of its epiphanies piecemeal. Reclusiveness is a result of obsession, of rumination, and so there are poems that seem to cover the same ground, but the repetition is ritualistic; it echoes the spiritual practice of sharing family stories with the next generation. So why not return to similar lessons in different poems, don't we do something similar at less holy altars?

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*Maya Marshall, a writer, editor, and poet holds fellowships from Cave Canem and Callaloo. Currently, she serves as a senior editor for PANK.*



## Tripping On

### Michael Dowdy's *Urbilly*

REVIEW BY  
LAUREN ROSE CLARK

Michael Dowdy's debut collection *Urbilly* (Main Street Rag, 2017 and winner of the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award) is a road trip. It is part map, part soundtrack, part storytelling, and part asking ourselves why we're taking this trip in the first place. With the *Urbilly* speaker as cartographer, Dowdy takes the reader through this space and selfhood between urban and rural, between what is cultivated and what is sacred, making sure we take all of the "wrong turns" and "detours" with him.

The speaker's reverence for place, the people that inhabit it, and for the things that might go unnoticed – "the keg, patron saint of bingers," or putting one's work down to watch a child draw – is perhaps the most prominent aspect of this collection – what makes it move with the music it creates at the level of the word and the line.

The speaker's music, however, does not go un-credited; the syntax of these poems is often made of language and sound from the speaker's sacred hip-hop icons and poetic influences, read in lines like "Disinter from the ditchwater a kneecap of hickory. / iPhone the remains of our ancestors."

These poems navigate the *Urbilly's* emotional and spiritual terrain, as well, including masculinity, faith, and what is inherited, especially the things he might not want to inherit. The speaker says, "Long ago I'd sold my twang for a song, / fleeing north from my father's family biz, / yanking the surplus notes like wisdom teeth, hoping my hick would molt, its flakes a blur / of Edison bulbs and other Brooklyn gems," but this collection is a song to both the natural and industrial, a song to the many places one might be grounded in however disparate they may be. While we might push against the roots we have, there is always something to pull us back. The *Urbilly* speaks to this irreverence in the insightful line, "What's necessary, they say, / isn't necessarily palatable," and so too are the places where we become – the places that stay with us, the places we, by some force, are made to write about.

Lauren Rose Clark holds an MA in Creative Writing from Auburn University and is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry at the University of South Carolina. She is a Poetry Editor for *Yemassee Journal*.

# THAT MIKE MIGHT APPROVE

—in memory of Michael Craig

POEM BY SUSAN CRAIG

My brother lived in a treehouse  
he built in three parts in his  
woodworking shop, with a Dutch  
roof and double-hung windows  
painted teal, a wide-open  
deck where he lounged, murmured  
Cohen at night, breathed weed  
to the river rush forty-seven  
feet below. In the picture  
from his October

junket to Yorkshire  
his smile tilts, he stands rumpled  
in front of a stacked-stone  
wall, sky Cornwall blue  
flocked in cumulus clouds, sheep  
in the field, cobbled gray that  
recedes out of view. That  
he turned the wrong

way three days later, precisely  
the moment the truck full of granite  
surged full-speed toward his car  
(the English would call it a *quarry*  
*lorry*)—that it wasn't  
a gentler Mini or Vauxhall nearly  
makes perfect sense.

That his treehouse came  
down as he'd said it eventually  
would—the triple-trunk oak sure  
to slump from eroding bluffs to  
the Saluda River. That it  
foundered instead in the October  
flood, same month as his  
death thirteen years  
earlier—this upheaval, this  
high-water crash that shattered  
glass and splintered wood, landed  
uphill on the bluff's soggy shoulders,  
lay scattered among bones  
of stranded fish, box-turtles hiding—I  
believe he'd approve. In the photo  
Mike's eyes are sage, soft with  
something like leaving.

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*Susan Craig is a native Columbian and longtime graphic designer whose work has appeared in Kakalak, Fall Lines, Mom Egg Review, Poetry on the Comet, The Collective I, and online journal Quorum.*

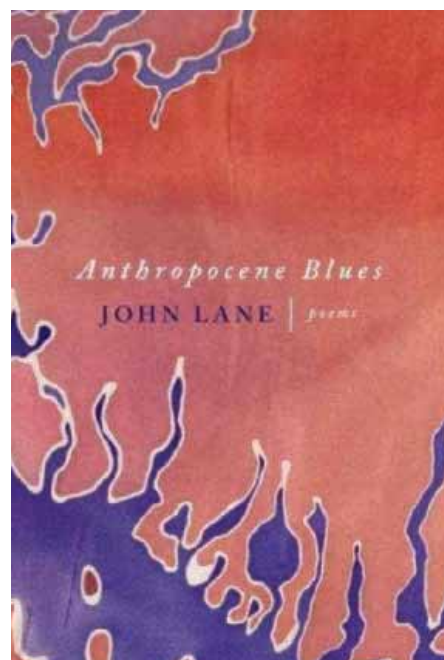
# John Lanes's *Anthropocene Blues*

REVIEW BY  
TARA POWELL

**John Lane** is among South Carolina's most versatile literary lights, with nearly 30 books to his credit to date. *Anthropocene Blues* (Mercer University Press, 2017) is his sixth full-length poetry collection, and in it Lane's muscular, prophetic voice sings with more urgency than ever. Layered by the dual influence of both current events and the best thoughts of nature writers from across the centuries, Lane's newest collection again digs deeply back and down even as it looks to the horizons for a new poetry to talk about human life as part and parcel of the life of the planet.

The book's title sets up the collection's central conceit of poet as both wandering bard and scientist—referring to a distinctively American musical art form in the same breath as it labels the book “Anthropocene,” a proposed name for what some scientists believe is a new geological age in which human beings are altering every facet of the planet on which they live. Once considered a whimsy of romantic poets, the notion that the human overlay on the natural world is in some sense real and nearly complete, is a more radical revision of how both scientists and modern poets may talk about the world than it may initially seem. A “seismic shift,” Lane writes in “The Geologist Considers the Post-Pastoral,” wherein, “We are now the voice, the digital gramophone...much more than the owl in the neighbor's/wood lot.”

Lane's book, voiced by a poet-geologist and interlaced by two distinct series of poems identified as “Field Notes” and “Erosions,” explores the implications of beginning to understand tension between human life and wilderness as false or at least collapsing. This is the book's blue note, a string plucked time and again across the times and spaces the poems seek to excavate. Lane is both interested by and suspicious of this tension, and the book in its search for new ways of seeing offers no easy answers. One of the book's standout poems features an encoun-



ter between the speaker and a barracuda he nicknames E.O. Wilson that leads him to a moment of “get[ting] real about the intellectual food chain.” The fish’s “fixed eyes pass over [him] like nothing,” but also push him to compare his visits to a particular reef over two decades as “hav[ing] built a new/colony of ideas and images, piling up within like an artificial//reef around a sunken steamer.”

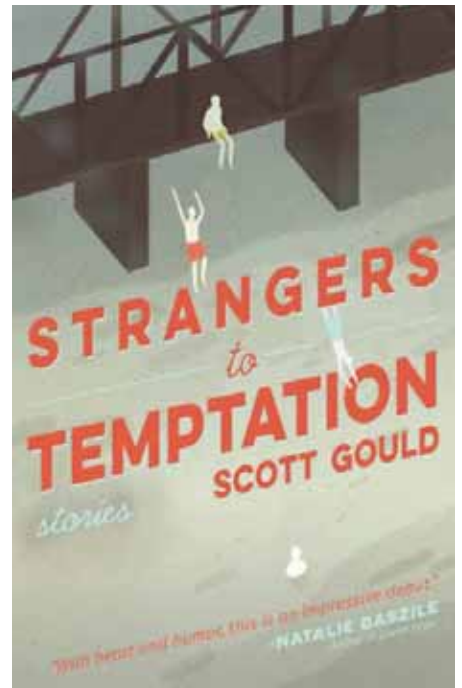
*Anthropocene Blues* is an important contribution to an emergent body of poetry steadily reimagining what it may mean to be an ecologically-minded poet. And it does so in a language that takes heed of debates raging in the scientific and literary worlds in a way that makes those worlds legible to one another and to anyone with ears to hear. Digging down and building up, repeated readings of the poems of *Anthropocene Blues* will remind readers of the geologist and the barracuda circling above the reef, building over time a “new colony of ideas and images” to delight and terrify.

# Scott Gould's *Strangers to Temptation*

REVIEW BY  
CINDI BOITER

On the surface, *Strangers to Temptation* (Hub City Press, 2017) is a book of short stories about a boy and his buddies in a small Southern town in the early 1970s. But, for those of us on the tail-end of boomerdom, Scott Gould's debut collection is so much more. It's a journey back in time to our unique days of coming of age. Discussions of race, sex, gender, and issues of social inequality were making their way down to Southern white America and that pang of wanting to do the right thing, even in the face of not always realizing what we were doing wrong, can be felt in almost every story Gould writes. "... We weren't bad kids." He writes. "We were just young and weak and curious and normal. We were simply strangers to temptation." He captures not only the sense of pre-enlightenment, but also the moment in our young lives when our personalities and politics were set—when we saw the problems for what they were and began the debates within ourselves on what we would do about them.

Despite the inherent politics in these internal rumblings of moral clarity, in *Strangers to Temptation*, the story is the thing. Gould gives us tightly grounded tales of sometimes "decent indiscretions" and re-introduces us to characters we already knew. His stories are populated with cars (think the Chevy Bel Air, Impala, a Buick, an Olds, a Country Squire, or sitting the summer away in an air-conditioned 1972 grey Lincoln Continental), the kinds of sports that children play, trains that lead in and out of town—their tracks bisecting the people with a scar they were only partially responsible for creating, the most utilitarian of houses, and usually, to a greater or lesser degree, alcohol. The local grocery is the IGA. Children ride bicycles almost everywhere they go. Adults are mysterious even in their flaws. And Mother knows best, but not always.



The stories in *Strangers to Temptation* acknowledge and validate a subset of the American South that, it can be argued, has been underrepresented in literature and popular culture—imperfect people, almost always white, who want to do better and be better than the culture they were born into. Saddled with oppressive gender roles, racial tensions, religious dogma, and an economic landscape left barren by a legacy of hate and heat and indifference, we see the seeds of a better South in these stories of enlightened adolescent angst. And as the stories end we find ourselves wanting to know what happened next. What did the narrator of these stories do with the agency awarded him as a white American man? What are the next chapters in the lives of these strangers to temptation?

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