

DUKE PERFORMANCES

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DUKE PERFORMANCES ANNOUNCES *MUSIC IN YOUR GARDENS* ONLINE SERIES

DURHAM, NC — Duke Performances presents *Music in Your Gardens*, a free eight-week online concert series showcasing nationally renowned artists who call Durham and the surrounding area home. The series shifts Duke Performances' longtime summer series, Music in the Gardens, normally held outdoors at Sarah P. Duke Gardens on Duke's campus, to an online format in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every Wednesday night at 7 PM ET, from June 24 through August 12, Duke Performances will premiere a new, specially recorded performance online, free of charge, at dukeperformances.duke.edu/MIYG and on the organization's YouTube page, featuring a different artist each week. All participating artists will be paid for their performances.

The films in the series, pre-recorded in a socially-distanced manner in a garden setting, are made by a team of Durham artists, including KidEthnic (filmmakers Saleem Reshamwala and John Laww), sound engineer Ryan Pickett, and audio technician Christopher Scully-Thurston. Each performance will be accompanied by a live YouTube chat, and the featured artist will join the chat to answer questions from viewers.

Music in Your Gardens builds on Duke Performances' recent virtual programming. Following the cancellation of the remainder of its Spring 2020 season, the organization presented an eight-week Livestream series in collaboration with Duke Arts and WXDU, which helped to raise funds to support the Durham arts community. Duke Performances is currently working closely with Duke University to explore the return of live performance in the 2020/2021 season. Plans for fall programming will be announced later this summer.

Music in Your Gardens is presented in collaboration with Duke Arts, WXDU, Sarah P. Duke Gardens, Duke Continuing Studies, and Duke Summer Session. Hospitality partners include The Palace International and Locopops.

The *Music in Your Gardens* lineup includes:

June 24: Rissi Palmer

July 1: Hiss Golden Messenger

July 8: Skylar Gudasz

July 15: Shirlette Ammons

July 22: H.C. McEntire

July 29: Joe Troop

August 5: Kamara Thomas

August 12: Young Bull

Full details on each artist are found below.

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MUSIC IN YOUR GARDENS 2020

June 24: Rissi Palmer

In 2007, **Rissi Palmer** released her debut single, “Country Girl,” and became the first Black woman to chart a country song since 1987. Ever since, Palmer has woven notes of R&B, gospel, and country into a sound she calls “Southern Soul.” Soulful it is: her latest album, *Revival*, released in 2019, revels in blackness, protest, and heritage, like a twangy Aretha Franklin. Listening to *Revival* is a lot like marching in a rally: sometimes you’ll hear chants, a burst of choral response, and sometimes you’ll slow down, sit alone in a band of sunlight. Palmer, sometimes defiant, sometimes vulnerable, moves between the political and the personal with ease. (She has, after all, played at both the White House and small stage coffeehouses.) From her home in Durham, Palmer delivers anthems for the national moment.

“[Rissi Palmer]’s back with *Revival*, a potent punch of soul, rootsy R&B, and back-porch country.”

— *Rolling Stone*

July 1: Hiss Golden Messenger

Hiss Golden Messenger is the folk project of Durham musician M.C. Taylor, with a sound that David Bowie — yes, *that* David Bowie — once called “mystical country, like an eerie yellowing photograph.” Taylor’s latest release is a live album, *Forward, Children*, whose proceeds will benefit the Durham Public Schools Foundation and aid its COVID-19 relief efforts. Taylor — whose fall tour for his captivating album, *Terms of Surrender*, likewise supported the Durham Public Schools Foundation — is also a longtime Duke Performances partner artist. In 2015, at

Reynolds Industries Theater, he premiered the song cycle *Heart Like a Levee*, the result of a commission through Duke Performances' *From the Archives* project. The initiative led Taylor to a series of William Gedney photographs documenting rural Kentucky, housed in Duke's Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Like a Gedney photograph, the music of Hiss Golden Messenger evokes a vulnerable and sensual form of Americana.

"Taylor's music turns the most banal of musician woes — the tribulations of life on the road, spending extended periods of time away from family — into gorgeous meditations on love and lack."

— *Rolling Stone*

July 8: Skylar Gudasz

Durham-based singer-songwriter **Skylar Gudasz** has "a voice that attracts metaphors about hypnotism" (*Pitchfork*). Gudasz performed at Duke Performances' Music in the Gardens in 2016, after the release of her acclaimed debut *Oleander*, a record of stripped-down songs that drip with mid-century melancholia. This time Gudasz is fresh off her second album, *Cinema*, released amid quarantine in April 2020, and she's no longer a local secret. Sultry, sardonic, and self-reflexive, *Cinema* catapulted Gudasz into national outlets, with features in *The FADER* and NPR's *All Things Considered*. On *Cinema*, her songs take on a noir tint, like Marlene Dietrich lip-syncing to Joni Mitchell: a performance about performance, suited for the camera.

"[T]unes about the weirdness of love [that] by turns whisper, then snarl, then make you wonder if Gudasz is the Joni Mitchell the South never had."

— *The Bitter Southerner*

July 15: Shirlette Ammons

Shirlette Ammons is a musician and poet based in Durham. In 2011, she collaborated with Chapel Hill rock band The Dynamite Brothers to record the smoky, genre-bending EP *And Lovers Like*, which premiered at Duke Performances' Music in the Gardens. Ammons' latest release, *Language Barrier*, travels from one genre — hip-hop, R&B, folk, indie rock — and then segues to another, diffusing the borders between musical categories. To realize her project, Ammons collaborated with a number of acclaimed Durham musicians, including Hiss Golden Messenger, H.C. McEntire, Phil Cook, and Amelia Meath, as well as The Indigo Girls and Meshell Ndegeocello. Ammons is well-practiced in the conceptual — her hip-hop album, *Twilight for Gladys Bentley*, re-envisioned the life of the lesbian blues singer — and conjures worlds with her sound.

"There's a North Carolina connection between Ammons and many of her guests, but in keeping with the idea of breaking down barriers, this is music that will travel easily."

— WNYC

July 22: H.C. McEntire

Over the past decade, Duke Performances has presented **H.C. McEntire**, one of Durham's most prominent musicians, multiple times, both as a frontperson of the alt-country trio Mount Moriah and as a solo artist. McEntire grew up in western North Carolina listening to gospel and bluegrass; on her solo debut *LIONHEART*, McEntire writes biblical country music in a queer dialect, by turns visceral and delicate. *LIONHEART* showcases her singing and playing alongside a number of other local musicians — Phil Cook, Ryan Gustafson, Daniel Hart, Allyn Love — plus the likes of Angel Olsen, William Tyler, and Mary Lattimore. Broadcasting from her home outside Durham, McEntire bares her roots.

"[T]he singer-songwriter's debut is a gorgeous devotional to the South that reshapes the traditions of country music into a powerfully queer and consequential set of songs."

— *Pitchfork*

July 29: Joe Troop

Joe Troop is a multi-instrumentalist and singer-songwriter from Winston-Salem. He's also the founder of the GRAMMY-nominated string band, Che Apalache, based in Buenos Aires, which injects the sound of the Appalachian foothills with the rhythms of traditional Latin music (a style dubbed "latingrass"). Troop composes wry and well-traveled bluegrass, sung in Spanish, Japanese, and English. He wrenches old-time music into the world of contemporary global politics, creating a space for sympathy, solidarity, and a little humor. (In May, Troop released a COVID-19 single titled, "A Plea to the US Government to Fully Fund the Postal Service.") Jaunty, rhythmic, and tale-spinning, Troop plays fingerpicking mountain music for a lefty rural America.

"Joe Troop, the frontman of the eclectic international musical ensemble Che Apalache, is challenging long-held norms and bringing a classic American artform — bluegrass — to the 21st century."

— *Billboard*

August 5: Kamara Thomas

Durham-based **Kamara Thomas**' songs lean toward the starry-eyed and astral — that's to say, she writes and sings Americana from another world. (Before striking out as a solo artist, she was also the vocalist and bassist behind Earl Greyhound, an acclaimed blues rock band.) Thomas' solo album, *Tularosa: An American Dreamtime*, to be released this year, will chart the mythical New Mexican landscape of Tularosa and serve as the soundtrack for a series of multi-disciplinary staged productions. Thomas trades in every kind of art-making: in 2019, she co-produced Country Soul Songbook, a musical performance, online platform, and documentary project that showcases diverse voices in country music. With each of her works, Thomas interrogates inheritance and sound, laying bare the history that resounds in a single note.

“Channeling dusty Americana, rootsy folk, and classic rock à la Neil Young, Kamara Thomas ... spins hazy narrative paeans to America’s epic landscape and mythic past.”

— Brooklyn Academy of Music

August 12: Young Bull

Young Bull is a homegrown R&B collective, yoking Southern soul grooves to hip-hop beats. It’s the project of two former schoolmates, Mique Cameron and Solomon Fox, who graduated from Durham School of the Arts. In 2016, Raleigh-based rapper Christian Sinclair joined the group, and Young Bull released its acclaimed debut, *Sopadelic*. These days, Young Bull reaches far beyond Durham. The band has reaped over five million streams, toured along the East Coast, and had coverage in *Rolling Stone*. Its latest EP, *Young Bull is Not an Individual*, lands in a dreamy soundscape, smooth and sampled, in the tradition of J Dilla. Dispatching from its hometown and namesake, Young Bull delivers soul music that wrangles with the modern.

“They’re trendsetters with the talent to back it up, paving the way for Durham’s talent to come.”

— *INDY Week*