

# ONE THING, AFTER ANOTHER

**STEPHEN HAWLEY MARTIN TRAVELS A PATH FROM ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE ONTO THE COSMIC HIGHWAY**

BY THARON GIDDENS  
PHOTOS BY MONICA ESCAMILLA



72 OCT 2022



ONE OF RICHMOND'S MOST PROLIFIC AUTHORS IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS WORK.

Stephen Hawley Martin, a former principal at the Martin Agency, the Richmond advertising firm that brought the Gator lizard to life and in an earlier iteration proclaimed that Virginia is for Lovers, is still a creative force.

His focus these days though is less on earthly matters, and more with an eye on the paranormal. Look at his author page on Amazon, and you'll find titles including "Your Guide to Achieve Fourth Density: The Law of One, RA, and the End of Suffering," "Reincarnation: Good News for Open-Minded Christians & Other Truth-Seekers" and "The Truth About Life and How to Make Yours the Best of All."

"The meaning of life according to Martin? There is an entity, 'spirit,' at the center of everything, and we are each part of it, as is everything else. That entity wanted to know itself, and in seeking to achieve that goal it fragmented, and now it's in pieces. That includes everything, even us, and we are striving to return to the entity."

"At some point, spirit created an almost infinite number of bubbles, or whirlpools of itself, i.e., consciousness, and turned them loose so they could interact," Martin writes in "Facts About Life and Death."

From that concept, he expounds on reincarnation, soul mates, politics and political leaders, extraterrestrial beings, the Buddha and Christ, and how an awareness of the nature of the entity will cure gun violence and school shootings while in general bringing about a new age of enlightenment.

His other key tenet? No worries—you'll have infinite chances to get things right. That Judgment Day thing? Think of it as a learning assessment. "God is not going to come down and put

his finger in your face," Martin says. Now Martin is an acolyte of sorts, spreading the word about his take on how things are and what makes the universe work. It's a calling, a later-in-life drive to make people aware of what he perceives as the true state of things—the true state of everything. "I feel like I have a mission to wake people up," Martin says.

## LEAP OF FAITH

By his own account, Martin had a typical post-World War II childhood in Richmond. The son of Hawley Philippe and Evelyn Martin, he was raised in a household that was not especially religious, one more oriented toward science and rationalism.

He earned a bachelor's in economics in the late 1960s at Hampden-Sydney College. Advertising was the family business; his father had worked with Ferguson Advertising, and his brother, the late David Martin, had co-founded an ad agency in Richmond—Martin & Woltz. Stephen Martin began his professional career in Baltimore in 1969 with VanDusen Douglas; then moved to Martin & Woltz in 1973 and ran that agency's office in Washington. He then worked with his brother at the founding of the Martin Agency in 1975. He served in several positions there at various times, including director of client services, senior vice president for plans, and senior vice president for direct marketing services.

He was president and chief executive officer for Athey Martin Webb in 1979-86. That agency became Hawley Martin Partners in 1984, with Stephen serving as a founding partner with his brother and working as chief executive officer for the firm until 1989, when it was bought out by the Interpublic Group of Companies.

Richmond resident Jim Maxwell worked with the brothers and managed Hawley Martin Advertising Agency. He also co-wrote an Oaklea title with Stephen Martin, "The Martin Managing Method." Maxwell noted that the agency and the brothers built success in developing campaigns for national names, but would deliver the same top-tier work for clients in Richmond, too. "It was probably one of the highlights of my work as a professional," he says. "It's not everyday that you get work with giants."

Maxwell describes Stephen Martin as having a strong sense of self-actualization and as spiritual. "That's what drives him," he says. Maxwell says that David Martin also had a deep sense of spirituality about him. Stephen Martin says that he had "lots of deep discussions" on spirituality with his brother.

Advertising was a good life for Martin, and he focused on work, but then, he says, the mystical world intruded. Martin was 35, lying on a hammock in his backyard, when he experienced an all-or-none epiphany that the grass, the trees, the sky, his own being were all part of something greater. It was life-changing, he says, the start of his pursuit of alternative theories and knowledge, but it also was not something he was comfortable sharing with coworkers.

He says that there were two other experiences early in life that he thought nothing of at the time, but that, looking back, he believes were encounters with the extraordinary.

One happened when he was a teen and was struck by a car

Publicity photos of Steve and his brother David circa 1969 with a photo of the late Steve and his brother Phillip Martin, when Hawley was the former of a church in Arizona.

while strolling along U.S. Highway 1. He says he walked away without a scratch. "It was like a miracle. It had to be," he says. "Instead of under the car, I went over it. My shoes were 50 feet ahead of me...how is that possible?"

It wasn't until much later in life, he says, that it occurred to him that surviving that accident was miraculous—and maybe an early sign that he was here on earth for a purpose. "I didn't share that with anybody until I started writing these books," Martin says.

The second event occurred when he was in his mid-50s. He was feverish, he says, and he experienced the sensation of feeling that he was somewhere around the ceiling of his room and looking down on his physical body. He attributed it to partying, but he now thinks it was a near death encounter of sorts (see excerpt on Page 77).

After his revelation in the hammock, Martin says, his outlook on life and world views altered. He had already been reading books about metaphysics and the brain's interaction with the spirit world.

After his revelation in the hammock, Martin says, his outlook on life and world views altered. He had already been reading books about metaphysics and the brain's interaction with the spirit world. Martin reaches that conclusion from the division's reviews of cases, including those of people who claimed near-death experiences, some who apparently had sustained irreversible brain damage but recovered consciousness before death, and those of children who reportedly recalled details of someone else's life who had died.

From a religious standpoint, Martin considers his brother a Christian and often uses Biblical language, encouraging people to turn the other cheek and to love their neighbors. But he contends that traditional readings of the Gospels get some things wrong. As he puts it, if all is one, then everyone's consciousness is part of the infinite consciousness that creates physical reality.

He also says that traditional Christianity misinterprets what Jesus said and anthropomorphizes God, but that Jesus >



from the University of Virginia and its Division of Perceptual Studies in the School of Medicine. The late Dr. Ian Stevenson initiated parapsychology studies there in the late 1960s and founded the Division of Perceptual Studies. His research

more than 1,000 incidents involving people who said they had near-death experiences. For Martin, the work of Greyson and other division researchers provides "convincing evidence" that consciousness can exist independent of the brain's interaction with the spirit world.

Martin reaches that conclusion from the division's reviews of cases, including those of people who claimed near-death experiences, some who apparently had sustained irreversible brain damage but recovered consciousness before death, and those of children who reportedly recalled details of someone else's life who had died.

From a religious standpoint, Martin considers his brother a Christian and often uses Biblical language, encouraging people to turn the other cheek and to love their neighbors. But he contends that traditional readings of the Gospels get some things wrong. As he puts it, if all is one, then everyone's consciousness is part of the infinite consciousness that creates physical reality.

He also says that traditional Christianity misinterprets what Jesus said and anthropomorphizes God, but that Jesus >

was known for taking a scientific look at people who claimed they had memories of prior incarnations, and he wrote books on the subject, including "Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation."

Dr. Bruce Greyson continued that work from the 1970s on and has reviewed

**"I FEEL LIKE I HAVE A MISSION TO WAKE PEOPLE UP."**

—Stephen Hawley Martin



was talking about his Father in a way that's closer to the Hindu sense of God as both in the world and transcending it. Martin says he thinks a young Jesus may have spent time in India in an ashram before he started his ministry.

In "Facts About Life After Death," Martin cites Matthew 23:40, and Jesus saying that "whatever you did for the least of these brothers, you did for me." From that, he concludes that "we are all from God and of God," and that each person's awareness is "a tiny sliver of a larger screen [God]."

Martin contends that the one we are striving to rejoin has a side, the "love thy neighbor" side, that encourages unity, harmony and helping one another, while another side is me-oriented, selfish and harmful. He breaks it into Service to Self and Service to Others, and he suggests that those two sides are in conflict, which can be seen in the current political scene.

He's concerned that the U.S. political situation may deteriorate into anarchy and issues a clarion call to readers to be aware of political gaslighting and manipulation and to vote for candidates who are working to pull people together. "The Earth is going through a time of change," he writes. "We are moving into a new time, political chaos in this country, and hopefully we will get through it."

**OTHER PATHS** True to his professional roots, Martin is still at work, serving

as a marketing consultant, including recent work with a digital agency in Asheville, North Carolina, that specializes in recruitment for police and fire departments. Advertising was Martin's career, but books and writing were his passion. He says he started Oaklea in 1995, presenting work by other authors, his own titles and some ghost-writing for clients, too. As of this summer, he had six books in the queue to edit and publish. His clients find him; many of them have written works with a spiritual theme. Martin says that's to be expected. "Google my name, and all these digital podcasts and books come up. That's where I am now."

James King, an English citizen who lives in France, says he found Martin in late 2020 through "Afterlife: The Whole Truth." They began a correspondence and Oaklea last year published King's "The Story of Us: Extraterrestrial Explain Who We Are and How Our Universe Came to Be." "We found many things concerning spiritual evolution of interest to us both," King says in an email. "Stephen's books provide answers of a broad, understandable nature."

Oaklea Press features about 16 titles that Martin has written or co-written, as well as works by others. His titles cover the basics, ranging from "The Secrets of Successful Entrepreneurship" to "The CEO's Guide From God to Great."

His other titles include some fiction and his own writings on the paranormal and other New Age topics. He writes with one, just as he talks, and writes quickly. In June, days after the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, Martin released "A No-Brainer Way

to Stop the Killings." The book's solution is to teach the kids most likely to engage in mass shootings that they are part of something greater and will never die. "And you know what? Once every 18- to 20-year-old male knows the truth, the killings will stop. That by itself is reason enough to get the word out," he writes.

His titles on life after death are his best-sellers. In mid-September, his book "Afterlife: The Whole Truth: Life After Death Books 1 & 2" was No. 1 in Amazon's Kindle rankings in the category New Age Reincarnation, and No. 10,237 overall in the Kindle store.

Martin says he does one or two podcast interviews each week, and that's where most people become acquainted with him and his books. Most of the podcasts he works with focus on spirituality or metaphysics. "There's a lot of them out there," he says. "I think there is a whole movement of people who are waking up to this reality."

He had an online radio show from 2007-2009 that dealt with a range of topics, focusing on the truth about life as he sees it, talking with people who said they had experienced reincarnation or had been clinically dead, academics who study the paranormal and reincarnation, ESP, near-death experiences—the gamut of the paranormal.

Martin has been married twice and has been with his second wife, Hilary, since 1987. He has three children: Hawley, Hans and Hannah Grace. Martin's passion for metaphysics draws mixed reactions from his immediate family.

His wife, he says, thinks it's just "woo-woo." "We don't talk a lot about it," he says. Hilary Martin describes herself as a traditional Christian, and they attend church together. She says that her husband's out-of-the-mainstream, metaphysical pursuits are simply a part of his personality.

"His just very interested about anything, really, all kinds of topics," she says. "He loves to tell a story. He's passionate about books and reading and literature, and getting [them] into the hands of readers."

Not that he would have occurred to me in a million years to look for one. ■

## A NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE

An excerpt from Stephen Hawley Martin's "Facts About Life After Death: Three Books in One Volume"

**"LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY NDE [NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE], AND WHY I DO** not think it would have been pleasant if I had not returned to life. I'm not proud of why it happened. I was in my mid-twenties, and like many young men at that age, I thought I was immortal. I was a tactician living in an apartment in an old townhouse with two other young men in the Bolton Hill neighborhood of Baltimore. I had a bad case of the flu, it was Saturday night, and I was upstairs in my bedroom, nursing the flu and reading a book, when I heard people downstairs coming into the apartment.

Before long, there was a party going on. Well, nursing the flu in my bedroom was not where I wanted to be on a Saturday night. At age 25, one is not about to miss out on a party no matter how sick one might be. So, even though I felt woozy, I climbed out of bed, put on some clothes and went downstairs to join in. I smoked and I drank, and before long I realized I could hardly stand up. I practically knee-walked back upstairs and flopped on the bed, which seemed to spin like a helicopter propeller at liftoff. I felt nauseous, the spinning continued, and I was about to throw up. But I didn't think I could possibly stand up and get to the john.

Lying there, feeling awful, I felt my body rise up and come back down with every breath—like maybe I was actually going to lift off like a helicopter, when a sort of pressure started building up inside me. It kept building, and after a few moments, I had the sensation that I—my body—popped. Everything seemed to shift, and for a moment I panicked—had I exploded? The next thing I knew, I realized I was up near the ceiling looking down at my body on the bed.

I thought, "What am I doing up here?" I kept looking down at myself all sprawled out like road kill, and I thought, "Oh my God, am I dead?"

With that, my awareness shifted. I could think, but it was a different type of thought—a much clearer thought process. I realized I was up near the ceiling, which puzzled me. I thought, "Wait a minute, I'm up here—not down there. How can I be up here?" And suddenly it dawned on me that I identified with whatever part of me seemed to be bumping against the ceiling, which meant it wasn't actually me down there on the bed—even though I was sure that was my body down there.

I had an epiphany. "Wow! I'm not my body—we aren't our bodies—we people aren't bodies." With that, I flipped upside down and was inches from the ceiling. I recall that I saw all the texture of the ceiling as though it were under a microscope—all the little dents and grooves and textures of it because it was so close to me. Then I swiveled and looked down at my body again. It looked very pale, and everything went black. The next thing I knew it was Sunday morning and I was awake, back in my body, feeling much better than when I'd crashed on the bed the night before.

Okay, so why do I think that I had remained dead, it would not have been pleasant? Because I was an atheist. Now, don't get me wrong. I don't think someone would be punished for being an atheist. It's just that, as a Scientific Materialist atheist, I didn't think there was such a thing as life after death. I thought that when you die, that's it. Lights out like when you pull the plug on a TV set or vacuum cleaner. Since I believed that was the case, I didn't know I needed to head for the light. Not only did I not see a light, I would not have occurred to me in a million years to look for one. ■



74 OCT 2022

RICHMONDMAG.COM 75

76 OCT 2022

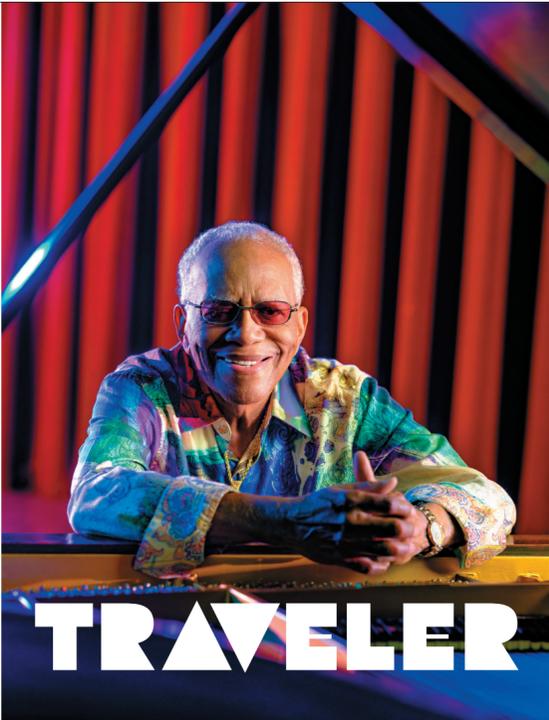
# COSMIC

Keyboardist

**LONNIE LISTON SMITH**

transcends the boundaries of jazz, inspiring future generations to innovate in their own ways

BY DAVY JONES  
PORTRAIT BY ZAID HAMID



# TRAVELER

## Call it the Big Bang of the cosmic sound.

In 1970, at the storied Record Plant recording studio in Los Angeles, Lonnie Liston Smith Jr. first sat at a Fender Rhodes electric piano. While he waited for the other players to unpack at a recording session for the Pharoah Sanders album "Thembi," Smith familiarized himself with the Rhodes. Then, as he began to play, history happened.

"Everybody ran over," Smith recalls, "Pharoah, the engineer, everyone said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'I don't know, I'm just writing this song. It's the first time I've played the Fender Rhodes!' They said, 'We've got to record this right now. What are you going to call it?' It was studying astral projection, and it sounded like we were floating, so I said, 'Let's call it 'Astral Traveling.'"

Smith, a Richmond native, is credited with establishing a vast and influential area of the jazz landscape, one defined by a fluidity of sound and an uplifting spiritualism. As he sat at that Rhodes piano in L.A., his career was soaring skyward. Slints with great jazz players were already in his rearview mirror. But that particular moment found Smith drifting in a sonic direction that would soon reach across the globe and that has since spawned generations of musicians who have followed in his footsteps.

"Seems like all the songs I did—Give Peace a Chance and 'Expansions'—people say they need that now," Smith says. "They definitely need 'Visions of a New World' because I think this is the first time in the history of mankind when the whole world is shut down at the same time."

**A MUSICAL UPRISING** Smith, 81, who now lives in Twin Hickory in Short Pump with his wife, Louise, grew up in Church Hill, surrounded by musicianship to a rare degree. His father, Lemmie Sr., sang with the nationally known gospel group The Harmonizing Four, rubbing elbows with some of the genre's biggest names.

All the gospel groups used to come by the house," the younger Smith remembers. "Sam Cooke when he was with the Soul Stirrers, the Duke Hummingbirds, Sister Rosetta Tharpe. She was crazy about my father and the Harmonizing Four... She moved to Richmond, and I used to listen to her play guitar and sing. 'Wow, this is different.'"

Smith says his father was always on the lookout for new sounds, and not just within the world of gospel. "He loved all

kinds of music, and that was a great influence. In New York, The Harmonizing Four would do the Apollo, then he'd go and listen to all types of music, and he'd tell me about all these great musicians when he got back home.

Richmond also bustled with touring talent in the 1950s and '60s, at venues such as the Hippodrome, the Market Inn and the Mosque (now the Altria Theater). As he soaked it all in, Smith searched for his own voice.

Smith graduated from Armstrong High School in 1957. He speaks highly of his experience there—of the new facility the school moved into, and of the care he received from his teachers. He sought to make the most of every musical outlet, including the choir which he led as president in his senior year. (He was also named the "Friendless" and "best dressed" male student in his graduating class.)

"We used to all sing," he recalls. "I have two younger brothers, and they have the same beautiful tenor voice that my father had, but I can only sing the bass... I was in the marching band all the way from elementary school through college, singing in the choir, singing the bass parts, and of course, meanwhile, I was playing piano."

He continued his musical education at Morgan State University in Baltimore and joined the house band at the city's Royal Theatre. The Royal was part of a circuit, with sister theaters in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia. "All these top acts would do seven days in each city," Smith recalls. "When they came through Baltimore, you were playing behind all the Motown acts. Curtis Mayfield, all of those."

Smith had found his calling, but his searching continued. In 1963, he remembers, "I wanted an opportunity to play with all the top names in the 'Harmonizing Four'—four stories originated."

"When I went to New York," he remembers, "I wanted an opportunity to play with all the top names in the 'Harmonizing Four'—four stories originated."

Smith says his father was always on the lookout for new sounds, and not just within the world of gospel. "He loved all

**"I was STUDYING astral projection, and it sounded like we were FLOATING, so I said, 'Let's call it 'ASTRAL TRAVELING.'"**

Jazz Messengers, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, all the singers—Betty Carter, Dakota Staton, Joe Williams. These are the people that I used to go watch at the Mosque."

**PUSHING BOUNDARIES** But Smith sought more than escalating levels of success. The business he explored after joining saxophonist Pharoah Sanders' ensemble in the late 1960s pushed at the outermost boundaries of jazz instrumentation.

"When I got with Pharoah," Smith explains, "I had to try to figure out ways to get more sound. So I'm using my 10 fingers, but then sometimes you might use your forearm. You're not banging, you're trying to get more sound. Some—"

A handmate of John Coltrane's when Coltrane was venturing deep into the avant-garde, Sanders looked to extract more human sounds from his instrument—growing and overflowing that evoked an intense range of emotions. Smith helped Sanders create major entries in the spiritual jazz canon, including the albums "Karma," "Journals of Thought," and the aforementioned "Thembi."

Richmond-based saxophonist and Pharoah's childhood friend James "Yonky" Branch was living in San Francisco at the time, and he'd see Sanders play at every opportunity. He calls Smith's playing "essential to what Pharoah was doing."

"It combined the rhythm of jazz and African music along with what I called invocation-type music—a prayerful suspension of chord changes, performing this music based on how it feels... Lonnie made that modal music have body, spirituality and substance."

"When I got with Pharoah," Smith explains, "I had to try to figure out ways to get more sound. So I'm using my 10 fingers, but then sometimes you might use your forearm. You're not banging, you're trying to get more sound. Some—"

"I solidly believe that we should be connected to the music before us," Daddy-O adds, praising Smith's willingness to confer artist to artist. "There's absolutely no reason that the kind of fall that happened between me and Lonnie Liston Smith Jr. should not be an ongoing thing."

"It demonstrates yet again his openness and his expansiveness," Branch says of Smith's embrace of sampling. "The idea of expanding yourself beyond what you immediately see. He's just been a really important figure in jazz music."

Morgan State University's board of regents agrees, and on May 15, 2024, the class of '68 alum was awarded an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree. He calls it a "proud moment"—a highlight during a year in which public appearances were scarce. Smith has continued performing, often standing at his keys in recent years.

Plans to tour are on hold, owing to pandemic concerns and travel restrictions. He's featured on the eleventh volume in Adrian Young and Ali Shabazz Muhammad's "Last to Die," collaborative LP series, out later this month. And he has intends to return to the stage when conditions improve.

"Lonnie would say to me, 'Hey, man, I just want to bring people some beauty,'" Miller says. "He didn't have to take a jazz appreciation course to do it. That was his mission, to create music that had a vibe, that had depth to it, but also had something that would bring the community together." ■



Photo: Pharoah Sanders and Lonnie Liston Smith, 1977

Thiele, the producer and Flying Dutchman label owner who recorded countless jazz greats, including John Coltrane. Thiele's interest responded quickly, and within months, Smith left Davis' ensemble to form his own. While he saw similar success with his second effort, "Cosmic Funk," his third album, "Expansions," launched his career as a bandleader into the stratosphere. "That just took off worldwide," Smith says.

The music database Discogs lists 33 pressings of "Expansions," including multiple editions from 1975, the year it was released, manufactured as far away as Germany, France and South Africa. "Bob Thiele was dealing with RCA Records and they started scrambling," Smith says. "They had to go back and reprint thousands and thousands." Smith's breakthrough LP landed at No. 10 on Billboard's year-end jazz albums chart for 1975.

"Back in the days when he released the 'Expansions' album, there was no genre called smooth jazz," says Branch, a founder of the Richmond Jazz Society. "He would be the bridge between smooth jazz and spiritual jazz, because his music is very smooth and very appealing and very spiritual." Smith says, "I was expanding on making it more universal. That gospel and that spirituality that I received from them. Let's take it to the whole world and expand their minds, so we can have a vision of the new world, everyone living in peace and harmony."

Those themes remained at the forefront of Smith's music, from a string of late-1970s albums on Columbia Records to an early-1980s one on Bob Thiele's newly formed Doctor Jazz imprint. A key col-

**"I had to try to FIGURE OUT ways to get more SOUND. So I'm using my 10 FINGERS, but then sometimes you might use your FOREARM."**



Photo: Zaid Hamid

laborator during this period was two-time Grammy winner Marcus Miller. The iconic bassist and composer was just 16 when he was introduced to Smith, yet Miller quickly earned Smith's confidence, and some of Miller's earliest compositions found a home on Smith's Columbia-era albums.

"He provided me with that stage as a writer," Miller says, "and he would let me arrange the band and tell them what I thought they should play which was kind of crazy because I'm this little, 17-year-old kid instructing the older guys. But he got a kick out of it."

Identifying and empowering promising young players is among the highest callings a masterful jazz musician can answer. Miller draws a direct line from Smith's support to that of Miles Davis, with whom Miller would also go on to collaborate.

"Once [Smith] figured out that I had some talent," Miller recalls, "he's like, 'C'mon, do your thing.' And I'm doing the same thing with young guys in my group. I don't know if Miles had a mentor, or if it came from him, but that's a tradition that's being passed down through generations."

**LEGACY AND INFLUENCE** There may be no better lens through which to view Smith's lasting impact than that of Denonne Harris, who plays keys for Richmond group Butcher Brown and produces beats as DJ Harrison. "Here's a guy who took his dream and his vision and actually made it happen," Harris says. "For a lot of creatives who are here in Richmond, that's definitely influential."

Harris grew up surrounded by Smith's music—"My dad had a lot of his records," he says—and she sought out those same albums upon starting his own collection. He's since continued down Smith's trail-blazing path by commissioning the soundtrack to his keys. "He creates his own textures," Harris says. "I've definitely picked up on that from him."

Smith returned to Richmond from New York in 1988, seeing in his hometown qualities that local artists such as Harris continue to benefit from: a location that's convenient for East Coast touring and easy access to air travel. Ironically, Smith was in Atlanta being interviewed for radio when Butcher Brown first crossed his radar a handful of years ago. "The interviewer said, 'Man, have you heard this group from Richmond, Butcher Brown? Let me play this record for you,'" he recalls. Smith made contact via the group's drummer Corey Fonville, and he arranged to visit the Butcher Brown home studio. "We jammed a little bit, we hung out, he played the Rhodes and started playing some of his bits," Fonville recalls. "It was a very special moment."



Photo: Denonne Harris and Lonnie Liston Smith, 2018

plunging is paying homage," Harris says. "We grew up on this, and we want to show the artist we're sampling. They know about that, and we're trying to keep it alive."

Richmond DJ Zak Young, whose beats as DJ Mentos, cites Smith's use of space as another reason his tracks are revered.

"With music that's real dense, it's harder to find isolated sounds," Young says. "But with a Lonnie Liston Smith record, you might have an organ sound or a synth sound, and the vibrations that go along with it. That airy sparse sound that we appreciate in his music would allow a producer to isolate something more specific."

The openness with which Smith approached music throughout his life extends to hearing his songs sampled. "I look at it like it's an arrangement," Smith says. "When they sample it, they arrange it differently. That's what we do with songs. We arrange it our way, but somebody else might record it and say, 'OK, I can put this right on it.'"

Smith got to close that loop and collaborate in real time on the groundbreaking 1988 album with funk group Sly and the Family Stone, which pushed back against accusations of artistic insensitivity associated with sampling. It incorporated the distinctive, looping bass notes from "Expansions," and when the time came to negotiate rights issues, including Branford Marsalis, Donald

Byrd, Gary Barnacle and Roy Ayers. "I learned a lot in that situation," Smith says, "because I was around the rappers. They used to tease me, because I'm so laid back. I'd come in the room, and they'd say, 'Oh, man, get my coat. A cool breeze just came in.'"

It wasn't the first time he helped break down a barrier between the two genres. In 1988, hip-hop group Street Sects released "Talkin' All That Jazz," with lyrics that pushed back against accusations of artistic insensitivity associated with sampling. It incorporated the distinctive, looping bass notes from "Expansions," and when the time came to negotiate rights issues, including Branford Marsalis, Donald

**"When they SAMPLE it, they ARRANGE it differently. That's what we do with SONGS."**

Byrd, Gary Barnacle and Roy Ayers. "I learned a lot in that situation," Smith says, "because I was around the rappers. They used to tease me, because I'm so laid back. I'd come in the room, and they'd say, 'Oh, man, get my coat. A cool breeze just came in.'"

It wasn't the first time he helped break down a barrier between the two genres. In 1988, hip-hop group Street Sects released "Talkin' All That Jazz," with lyrics that pushed back against accusations of artistic insensitivity associated with sampling. It incorporated the distinctive, looping bass notes from "Expansions," and when the time came to negotiate rights issues, including Branford Marsalis, Donald

Byrd, Gary Barnacle and Roy Ayers. "I learned a lot in that situation," Smith says, "because I was around the rappers. They used to tease me, because I'm so laid back. I'd come in the room, and they'd say, 'Oh, man, get my coat. A cool breeze just came in.'"

It wasn't the first time he helped break down a barrier between the two genres. In 1988, hip-hop group Street Sects released "Talkin' All That Jazz," with lyrics that pushed back against accusations of artistic insensitivity associated with sampling. It incorporated the distinctive, looping bass notes from "Expansions," and when the time came to negotiate rights issues, including Branford Marsalis, Donald

Byrd, Gary Barnacle and Roy Ayers. "I learned a lot in that situation," Smith says, "because I was around the rappers. They used to tease me, because I'm so laid back. I'd come in the room, and they'd say, 'Oh, man, get my coat. A cool breeze just came in.'"

It wasn't the first time he helped break down a barrier between the two genres. In 1988, hip-hop group Street Sects released "Talkin' All That Jazz," with lyrics that pushed back against accusations of artistic insensitivity associated with sampling. It incorporated the distinctive, looping bass notes from "Expansions," and when the time came to negotiate rights issues, including Branford Marsalis, Donald

Byrd, Gary Barnacle and Roy Ayers. "I learned a lot in that situation," Smith says, "because I was around the rappers. They used to tease me, because I'm so laid back. I'd come in the room, and they'd say, 'Oh, man, get my coat. A cool breeze just came in.'"



# FALL ARTS PREVIEW

2022

New sounds from Shockoe, festival faves, arts on campus and local galleries frame the scene

Music • Performance • Festivals • Art

RICHMONDMAG.COM 71

## MUSIC

### A NEW SOUND IN TOWN

Built on experience and guided by artists, Shockoe Records drops the needle on Richmond music

**SINGER-SONWRITER ELIZABETH WISE DIDN'T** know what to do. In January of last year, she pondered the fate of her latest album, "Reckless Sophistication," after her marketing manager dropped out. She paused to text her agent, the PBS television producer Craig Martin (co-host of "The Good Road"). Over the next several months, Wise's challenge evolved into Shockoe Records.

**TURN THE PAGE** A cofounder of 1's Your Ear studio, Carlos Chafin is the producer for "Reckless Sophistication." Martin and Wise met with him to determine how to advance her work. A vast gulf separates working midrange artists from radio airplay hitmakers. Streaming services offer title compensation, leaving few options for recording artists.

**I AM A ROCK** Meetings commenced, involving 20 to 25 interested parties ranging from entertainment lawyer Ashley S. Brooks to Plan 9 Records founder Jim Bland. The three initiators agreed that they needed to form a legal entity. They needed a name.

**IT'S NOT LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE** "I've not seen anything like it," says Weldon Hill, a Richmond native and veteran jazz pianist, composer and educator who's one of the five founding artists in Shockoe Records. "It's a lightweight partnership. We've been waiting for something like this for a long time."

**THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE** Into this mix entered a relative newcomer to Richmond who is no stranger to making things happen: Queen 'Y' Marti, a Brooklyn native who worked on films by Martin Scorsese and Joel Schumacher and started Carter Magazine, a publication with the motto "Where History Meets Hip-Hop" that earlier this year

off, we split 50/50 with the artist," Chafin says. "That way the artist makes money, and they recoup their production costs, and we're equal partners in making the mechanism work. If it goes crazy, we profit — if it doesn't, we don't lose anything."

**READY TO GO** The Richmond Symphony presents Steve Hackman's *Broken* at the Richmond Center for the Performing Arts at 8 p.m. \$11-\$85. richmondorchestra.com

**Oct. 4** Rock & Roll Hall of Fame members ZZ Top bring their blend of blues and rock to the John Theater. 555-5299.50. zznation.com

**Oct. 22** Virginia-based rapper Pusha T returns to the city with his latest album, *Pusha T's The Last Airborne*. 555-5299.50. zznation.com

**Nov. 17** County icon Crystal Gale, known for her hit "I'm Not Making My Room" returns to the Richmond Center for the Performing Arts at 8 p.m. \$11-\$85. richmondorchestra.com

**Nov. 27** The Grammy-nominated rapper Pusha T returns to the city with his latest album, *Pusha T's The Last Airborne*. 555-5299.50. zznation.com



The five founding artists of Shockoe Records: Elizabeth Wise, Carlos Chafin, Queen 'Y' Marti, Weldon Hill, and Jim Bland.

## PERFORMANCE

### BIG SHOW ON CAMPUS

University of Richmond's Modlin Center for the Arts is back with a full slate of performances

**AFTER A PANDEMIC HIATUS,** the Modlin Center for the Arts at the University of Richmond opens its doors again for in-person performances. This year's lineup features acclaimed jazz bassist Christian McBride, country music royalty Rosanne Cash, folk musician and former member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops Leyla McCalla, and the Grammy-winning bluesy band Sleep Canyon Rangers. "This coming season, it's our reestablishment and the emerging of our continuing relationship with both the campus and the community of Richmond



80 SEPT. 2022



A student performance at the Preservation Hall in New Orleans.

ed in any other venue in the region." Marketing and Strategic Communications Manager Erika Stanley says. "And as a part of this ongoing work to lift up the arts, it's really important to hear from so many different perspectives, because that's what makes our culture vibrant." Next month, the play "Smart People," a comedy about racial and sexual politics on the eve of Obama's first election, will be staged for two nights (Oct. 14). On Oct. 6, folk musicians Rhianon Giddens and Francesco Turrisi perform, and later in October there is "Step Afrika. Drumfolk," a musical about what happened when enslaved Africans were banned from using drums. In November, the Preservation Hall Jazz Band plays as part of their 60th anniversary celebration, and the play "Miss You Like Hell," about a mad trip with a troubled teenager and her estranged mother, comes to the center. "What I'm very pleased with this year is the high number of women artists, women-led art ensembles and organizations, and artists that are committed

to our season," Brohan says. "A few artists visiting the campus will also interact with university students and the community. Singer-songwriter Rosanne Cash, daughter of legendary country singer Johnny Cash, comes to the campus in February for a sold-out show and will participate in a discussion on how the arts can strengthen women as leaders. Syrian American spoken-word artist Amal Kasir will perform at the Modlin Center on Nov. 12, and the following semester, she'll return to work with a small group of students at the university. The students will develop their storytelling skills and write and perform their pieces at the end of the workshop. "It's not just about artists that we can bring to the stage, but people need to see themselves reflected, both onstage and in the audience — because the arts are for all of us," Stanley says. "People from all over Richmond and beyond can see just incredible performances and transformational experiences, right in their backyard." —EMILY CARTER

### PERFORMANCE PREVIEW

**Sept. 20-25** The Richmond Ballet's season opens with a Studio Series performance of "Scarlet Boquey" (Charkopowka/Blumen) and a world premiere by Mc Coo. Showtimes vary. \$25-\$55. richmondballet.com

**Oct. 14-16** The Virginia Opera presents "The Valkyrie" at the Dominion Energy Center at 8 p.m. on Friday and 2 p.m. on Saturday. \$65-80-\$492.50. virginiaopera.org

**Oct. 23** Singer Sanaa De La Santos performs at the University of Richmond's Modlin Center for the Arts as part of its Family Arts Day Celebration at 2 p.m. Activity tables, art projects and food will be available in the South Lobby until 3 p.m. \$5-\$25. modlincenterforthearts.com

**Oct. 25-26** Comedian Chris Beck comes to the John Theater at 8 p.m. \$49.50-\$178. Altairtheater.com

**Nov. 12** Singer and poet described "a vibrant artist" by *Rolling Stone*, Regina Rogers performs her show "Come on Over" in the Center for the Arts Center at 8 p.m. \$40. Artspain.com

**Nov. 17-18** The Richmond Center for the Performing Arts presents "The Nutcracker" at 8 p.m. \$11-\$85. richmondorchestra.com

**Nov. 27** County icon Crystal Gale, known for her hit "I'm Not Making My Room" returns to the Richmond Center for the Performing Arts at 8 p.m. \$11-\$85. richmondorchestra.com

## FESTIVALS

### FALL OF FESTIVALS

The season of gathering returns with two major city festivals

**FOR THE ORGANIZERS OF TWO OF RICHMOND'S** biggest festivals, last year was a test. It was their first attempt to resume the large events they were known for since pandemic restrictions had shut down mass gatherings. By most accounts, the Richmond Folk Festival and the 2nd Street Festival returned to form, attracting thousands of people for music, food and good times. "I really didn't think we were going to get a lot of people at all," says Sharon Bassard, events and booking manager for Venture Richmond, the organization behind the 2nd Street Festival. "So, I was just blown away by the number of people who came out on both days." Bassard said attendance at last year's festival was about 35,000, near their normal totals. This year is the 34th the festival, a celebration of the history of Jackson Ward, a downtown neighborhood that was once the cultural hub of the African American community. This year's free event happens Oct. 1-2. A few days later, the Richmond Folk Festival, also produced by Venture Richmond, returns to the city after a virtual version in 2020 and a return to in-person events last year. Stephen Lecky, Venture Richmond's director of events, concedes that preparing for this year has been different. "We do feel the pinch of... staffing and ordering things early [and] costs being higher. We're still working on COVID protocols with our artists and staff and some key volunteer spots," Lecky says. "So, there's still some... similarities to last year, but it certainly feels different than a couple of years ago. That's for sure."

One thing that's changed is the diverse and eclectic lineup of artists and musicians at the festival. "This year, there's blues from Grammy winner Cedric Burnside; Zimbabwean a cappella quintet Black Uhuru; a performance from the Korean Performing Arts Institute of Chicago, and Mexican marimba from Son Rompe Pasa. "The 2nd Street Festival has added some things to its entertainment schedule. This year marks the return of the Kids' Zone, an area just west of the Children's Museum of Richmond that features crafts, activities and other stuff kids like. Also, 'kind of new' is a mini parade recognizing the work of African American benevolent associations, such as the Beneficial Club, the Order of the Eastern Star and historically black fraternities and societies. "Between the 1800s and the 1900s, these organizations came to uplift Richmond's Black community during that time," Bassard says. "It's great to draw our attention to recognize them."

Venture Richmond has gotten attention in recent weeks for something that isn't connected to one of their signature events. The organization held a contest to name the city's new street sweeper that will park the bike lanes clear. The winning name, MF Broom, "is an homage to the late rapper MF Doom, known for the metallic mask he was rarely seen without. MF Broom isn't on the artist list for the festival, but Lecky seemed intrigued by the idea. "Oh, my gosh, you know what, we really should have a parade and have MF Broom [clean] that," he says. "I'm shocked at how much attention it's got."

Last year, the festival was facing a decline in volunteers, as longtime festival staff aged out of the event. That hasn't been the case this year. "We're definitely seeing more folks signing up right now — than we saw last year at this point," Lecky says. "I think there was a bit more uncertainty last year at this point. People feel more comfortable making plans... So numbers are good, but we definitely can always use more, that's for sure."



There's more than music at the Richmond Folk Festival. Singer Anthony Green is seen in the background at the festival's Kids' Zone.

of the festival, but Lecky seemed intrigued by the idea. "Oh, my gosh, you know what, we really should have a parade and have MF Broom [clean] that," he says. "I'm shocked at how much attention it's got."

Last year, the festival was facing a decline in volunteers, as longtime festival staff aged out of the event. That hasn't been the case this year. "We're definitely seeing more folks signing up right now — than we saw last year at this point," Lecky says. "I think there was a bit more uncertainty last year at this point. People feel more comfortable making plans... So numbers are good, but we definitely can always use more, that's for sure."

of the festival, but Lecky seemed intrigued by the idea. "Oh, my gosh, you know what, we really should have a parade and have MF Broom [clean] that," he says. "I'm shocked at how much attention it's got."

Last year, the festival was facing a decline in volunteers, as longtime festival staff aged out of the event. That hasn't been the case this year. "We're definitely seeing more folks signing up right now — than we saw last year at this point," Lecky says. "I think there was a bit more uncertainty last year at this point. People feel more comfortable making plans... So numbers are good, but we definitely can always use more, that's for sure."

Last year, the festival was facing a decline in volunteers, as longtime festival staff aged out of the event. That hasn't been the case this year. "We're definitely seeing more folks signing up right now — than we saw last year at this point," Lecky says. "I think there was a bit more uncertainty last year at this point. People feel more comfortable making plans... So numbers are good, but we definitely can always use more, that's for sure."

Last year, the festival was facing a decline in volunteers, as longtime festival staff aged out of the event. That hasn't been the case this year. "We're definitely seeing more folks signing up right now — than we saw last year at this point," Lecky says. "I think there was a bit more uncertainty last year at this point. People feel more comfortable making plans... So numbers are good, but we definitely can always use more, that's for sure."

Last year, the festival was facing a decline in volunteers, as longtime festival staff aged out of the event. That hasn't been the case this year. "We're definitely seeing more folks signing up right now — than we saw last year at this point," Lecky says. "I think there was a bit more uncertainty last year at this point. People feel more comfortable making plans... So numbers are good, but we definitely can always use more, that's for sure."

## ART

### SIGHT & SOUND

The fall arts scene is full of fascinating rhythms

**PAINTINGS AREN'T MUSICAL,** except when they are, and you'll find out how in the **Virginia Museum of Fine Arts** exhibition "Stories Strung: The Guitar in American Art," opening Oct. 8. The presentation includes 25 works spanning 200 years by such artists as Rembrandt, Thomas Hart Benton, William Lightfoot, Jacob Lawrence, Annie Leibovitz and Charles Wilson Peck. Also on display are 35 guitars made by Fender, Gibson, Gretsch and Martin. Amid the audiovisual kiosks of performances will be a recording studio created in collaboration with Richmond's 1's Your Ear Studios, Durham's Michalek photographic studio, and down tracks. Videos of their performances will be released on the VMFA's website and YouTube channel.

The exhibition is curated by Leo G. Mazow, the VMFA's Louise B. and J. Harold Cochran Curator of American Art, who himself enjoys playing the guitar. "Without sounding too mystical," Mazow explains, "the guitar allows us to hear stories, all kinds of them, and in large part this comes from the instrument's affordability and portability. The guitar can reach people in profound ways, and I'm not saying our instruments can't, but the guitar can get nearly everywhere with almost anyone."

The exhibit is \$18 for adults. For more details, visit [vmfa.org](http://vmfa.org).

**EXHIBITION PREVIEWS** **Museums and Art Centers** At the **University of Richmond's** Main Street Station, Oct. 14-16, for more details, visit [uorarts.com](http://uorarts.com).

**At Manchester's Art Works** from Sept. 29-Oct. 24, "19 From Ashes: A Life in Clay" presents examples of Lee Hazlegrove's 35 years as a ceramic artist, while "Trains" presents elements of the locomotive life and a "Train Day" event on Sept. 24, in conjunction with the nearby Richmond Railroad Museum. Chris Semtner's "Plumage Build" (Sept. 9-Oct. 2) with a group of multidisciplinary artists, Lukasz Bondman-Versilinis, Václav Pospisil, and J.L. Lamberson and the All the Saints Theater Company. All three use puppetry, performance and procession to create collective and personal moments of celebration, resistance and reflection. This

**At the Galleries** The artist-run nonprofit **1708 Gallery** turned a significant corner in its 43-year history with the recent purchase of its



An image from the new Washington Square "Guitar in the Past" exhibit at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

## BIG GIG GUIDE

**Sept. 13** Pop band Lake Street Dive, a Richmond favorite, plays Virginia Center for the Performing Arts at 7:30 p.m. \$32-\$50-\$67.50. vasuive.com

**Sept. 17** R&B singer Bryll II Moa brings their smooth and soulful sound to the John Theater. Event Park at 6 p.m. \$39-\$99. afterhoursconcertseries.com

**Sept. 24** The Richmond Symphony presents Steve Hackman's *Broken* at the Richmond Center for the Performing Arts at 8 p.m. \$11-\$85. richmondorchestra.com

**Oct. 4** Rock & Roll Hall of Fame members ZZ Top bring their blend of blues and rock to the John Theater. 555-5299.50. zznation.com

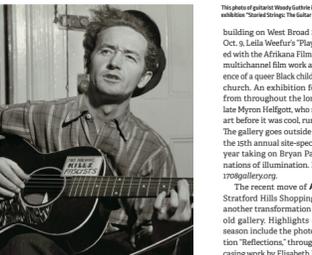
**Oct. 22** Virginia-based rapper Pusha T returns to the city with his latest album, *Pusha T's The Last Airborne*. 555-5299.50. zznation.com

**Nov. 17** County icon Crystal Gale, known for her hit "I'm Not Making My Room" returns to the Richmond Center for the Performing Arts at 8 p.m. \$11-\$85. richmondorchestra.com

**Nov. 27** The Grammy-nominated rapper Pusha T returns to the city with his latest album, *Pusha T's The Last Airborne*. 555-5299.50. zznation.com

RICHMONDMAG.COM 71

### GALLERY GUIDES



**Sept. 2-Oct. 22** **Orchids Are Fine!** presents work by multimedia artist Hedy Nuccella, a child of immigrants and political refugee. Nuccella's work addresses matters of identity, migration and self-discovery.

**Sept. 15-Nov. 13** **The Cultural Arts Center at One Allen** at the Dominion Energy Center. "Kaleidoscope: Rekindling a History" showcases a variety of quilts from the Kumbia African American Quilting Guild, featuring traditional patterns and contemporary designs.

**Sept. 15-Nov. 13** **Quik Galleries** the musical theater company presents "The Wiz" on the Main Gallery, and the local artist of James Keys on the Pink workroom.com featuring work by those returning creative through their challenges. [quikgalleries.com](http://quikgalleries.com)

**Sept. 15-Nov. 13** **Perkins Museum of Art** presents "The Art of the Book" featuring works by the faculty of Virginia State University's Department of Book Arts. [perkinsmuseumofart.com](http://perkinsmuseumofart.com)

**From Sept. 23** **Orchids Are Fine!** presents work by Matt Phillips, the Brooklyn, New York-based painter of both the portrait and abstract, in an exhibit. [orchidsarefine.com](http://orchidsarefine.com)

**Opens Oct. 6** **The Broad Museum of Architecture and Design** "Charlotte" features work by photographer Fre Shaik. [broadmuseum.com](http://broadmuseum.com)

RICHMONDMAG.COM 81

RICHMONDMAG.COM 85