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ABOUT THE COVER: Liz Lambson caught our eye with her stunning murals on the Utah Black History Museum’s Mobile Museum bus (p. 6), and we knew that her expressive figures were perfect for this Amplify Black Voices issue. You can find more of Lambson’s work on Instagram @lizzylambson.

T.J. Taylor

Contributor Limelight
Guest Writer

T.J. Taylor takes part in this year’s Amplify Black Voices issue as a guest writer to discuss the importance of Black creativity and cultural expression in the state of Utah. A local comedian and podcaster, Taylor has exercised these roles in organizing Black-centric events like the Black History Show at Winerygus and works to continue cultivating a sense of community within these scenes. Listen to his podcast The Downstairs on Spotify where Taylor and co-hosts Antii and Sheep discuss everyday things like Gamestop Stonks and Norwegian Car Films. Check out his article on Pg. 20 and keep up with him on Instagram @tjisfunny.

Liz Lambson

Contributor Limelight
Cover Artist

Liz Lambson is an artist, musician, writer and mother to five boys. In addition to her collection of talents, Lambson performs as a string bassist with the Ballet West Orchestra and is the creator of Utah Storytime & Songs where she performs as children’s singer-songwriter Lizzy Luna. In painting the cover for this issue Lambson says, “From varying skin tones on the subjects’ faces to the hues of their clothing to the brightness of the background, I love painting with vibrant, rich colors.” As a member of the Utah Black Artists Collective and board member of the Utah Black History Museum Lambson actively plays many critical roles in Utah’s art and culture community.

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In its first form as a traveling bus exhibit, the Utah Black History Museum is a mobile pop-up museum that travels throughout Utah to educate youth and adults about Black figures who’ve shaped our state’s history.

As part of Utah’s core educational standards, all seventh-grade students in the state take a Utah History Class described as “an opportunity for students to learn about their own family’s history as well as others of those of others.” While these lessons may make many Utahns feel a meaningful connection to their home state, Black people have been omitted from that history, despite a longstanding presence predating formal statehood. For individuals who relocated to Utah post-1980, it is largely a bust, so as John McQueen— who played the likes of Charlie Parker and Duke Ellington—lived in the musical boom in Ogden—or James Beckwourth, a futurist and explorer created with naming Cache Valley, which he frequented in the 1860s. According to this need, the Utah Black History Museum is a colorful, mural-wrapped school bus that is set to travel the state and help Black youth discover and connect to their own place in Utah history.

Liz Lambson is the museum’s bus artist and a member of the museum board of directors, and Tanielle Mitchell, the museum’s curator. The two are working with other artists, historians and activists to launch the mobile Utah Black History Museum. Last Scott—founder of the Lives Matter Utah Coalition and Founder and President of the Utah Black History Museum—mentioned Lambson, Mitchell and others with the idea for a Black history museum after hearing from young, Black students about issues they were dealing with.

Mitchell says, “We thought that if [Black students] knew the history and contributions that the Black community has made in the state of Utah, it might help with some of the situations they are dealing with. We can also provide students with more validation that their history is important, that their identities are important and that we all have something to offer to this great state.”

The majority of the state’s history is depicted as white and Mormon, and there has been a failure to adequately tell the story of the diversity that has always existed in the state. “Students and families learn so much about the establishment of communiti- es by Mormon pioneers, and often, the Black figures and the Black people who also came to the state are not mentioned,” Lambson says. “So we feel it’s important to note and share the stories of the Black pioneers who settled here and also contributed to the growth of the state, but they’ve just never been mentioned before.”

The bus itself is not necessarily the actual museum, but instead houses the pop-up experience that can be shared in any range of locations—indoors and outside. It is wrapped in murals painted by Lamb- son and Grettel Tom, which depict a mixture of Utah landmarks and imagery and portraits of some well-known local and national Black icons. Those depicted include Ruby Bridges, the first African American student to integrate an elementary school in the South, and some lesser known historical figures, such as the Buffalo Soldier, who draws attention to the prevalence of Black cowboys in the West. The bus itself isn’t necessarily the actual museum, but instead houses the pop-up experience that can be shared in any range of locations—indoors and outside. It is wrapped in murals painted by Lamb- son and Grettel Tom, which depict a mixture of Utah landmarks and imagery and portraits of some well-known local and national Black icons. Those depicted include Ruby Bridges, the first African American student to integrate an elementary school in the South, and some lesser known historical figures, such as the Buffalo Soldier, who draws attention to the prevalence of Black cowboys in the West.

While primarily aiming to reach youth, the museum will also provide opportunities for all to learn together. It’s a continually evolving exhibit that will continue to grow as the curators hear stories, further their research and acquire additional items of historical signifi- cance. Currently, the focus has been on build- ing a foundational body of knowledge around Utah’s Black history, but other national figures are also included. “We mostly focused on things that we thought students needed to know to better understand where the Black community is coming from,” Mitchell says, “stories that help share what it was like to be a Black African American person in Utah over a period of time from before Utah was even a state. This is what we’d like for them to live in the Utah Territory.”

There are plans in the future for a brick-and-mortar location, but for now, the fact that the Utah Black History Museum is mobile and can move through different neighborhoods and cities ensures that everyone throughout the state will be able to access this history. “We can set up anywhere,” Lambson says. “We can set up in parking lots, we can set up in community centers and we can set up in school gyms.” While aiming to reach Utah’s Black communities, they’ll be well-equipped to bring the museum to rural areas, which typi- cally have less access to resources of this type.

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It’s not easy for a grassroots organization to do it all, but Project Success Coalition does try. “We offer a lot of this, a little bit of that,” says Betty Sawyer, the Director of Project Success, about a lot of programs the Coalition-based organization offers. That’s an understatement. Since 1989, Project Success has committed to improving culture, education and health among the local Black and Brown community through tobacco prevention programs, health access and awareness initiatives, annual Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners for homeless and low-income communities, career development the Juneteenth Heritage Festival and even COVID-19-related education and financial support, to name a few. “We were just funded by the Office of Health and we made a commitment to participate in The Embrace Project, supporting women of color during their childbearing years to improve wellbeing and health outcomes,” Sawyer said of the day after our interview, just when I thought Project Success’s portfolio of outreach couldn’t get any longer.

According to Sawyer, the Project Success Coalition was founded in response to a series of drug busts and arrests in Ogden’s inner city in 1988. “I sat down with one of our local pastors, the Reverend Donald White, and said, ‘It’s one thing to talk about it, but what are we gonna do about it?’, says Sawyer. The two of them decided to hold a town hall meeting. Close to 200 residents showed up, including representatives from the Ogden NAACP, Hill Air Force Base, local congregations, stakeholders and other civic groups. “The young people in our community were very active in wanting to be an organization for them,” Sawyer says. And so Project Success Coalition was formed, the name an expansion on the letters “PS,” as in postscript. “It means this isn’t the end of our story,” Sawyer says. While there were no other after-school programs in Ogden at the time Project Success was founded, Sawyer says, so they began offering substance abuse prevention activities, recreation and sports. When Sawyer realized the city’s youth were struggling in school, they added an academic program as well as cultural arts. “In a small place like Utah, you’re not getting connected to your culture—the richness and greatness of it—so school,” Sawyer says. The largest of these cultural programs is the annual Juneteenth Heritage Festival, a commemoration of the day all enslaved people in the United States were formally emancipated. “It’s a huge party, a family reunion,” Sawyer says. “We’re having a festival this year it offers a time and place for people different backgrounds to come together.”

The Juneteenth planning committee meets via Zoom every first and third Saturday and is open to everyone. No idea is thrown out, Sawyer says. While it differs from year to year, festivities include everything from a reptile show to card games, a gospel mass choir, the Mr. and Miss Juneteenth Scholarship Pageant and even the Willie Moons and Billy Mason Golden Clipper Barber Battle, in which local barbers compete on the Ogden Amphitheater stage. “This year, we’re going to add branding to it because we’d like to expand and be more inclusive to all the different expressions of Black hair,” Sawyer says. Juneteenth is inclusivity is a main theme of the festival, staying true to its roots and that sense of community is so important,” Sawyer says. “Again, we’re in Utah. You get to come be a majority for a change, instead of the minority. And you don’t have to think about anything except enjoying yourself while you’re there.”

While the event is largely for fun and celebration, Project Success also views the gathering as a massive opportunity for generational and race education. The festival has led lasting, unifying consequences, such as kickstarting the formation of the Utah Black Roundtable and influencing the passage of Juneteenth as an official Utah state holiday in 2019.

Over the last 33 years, the accomplishments of Project Success have only expanded. “To me, that’s success in and of itself,” Sawyer says. “To be a small grassroots organization that’s been able to maintain its commitment and connection to the community is extremely important. When people lose hope, they give up. They stop dreaming of a better place and better opportunities.” When I ask Sawyer what other changes she dreams of seeing in the community, she lets out a sigh. “That’s a big list,” she says. “The changes that need to take place across the state of Utah are immersed in our willingness to recognize institutional inequality. We need to get rid of what’s happening in this country wasn’t by design… I believe we have to get off this denial trip of, ‘I’m not a racist’. It doesn’t matter what you are. The policy is what matters, and are you willing to change it or not? That’s the conversation. What are you willing to do? How much time are you willing to put on the table? How much money are you willing to put on the table? How much are you willing to fight back against what you know is wrong? Come to the table with what you’re willing to do and let’s take it from there.”

If you’d like to “come to the table,” Project Success Coalition is always seeking support through financial investment, volunteer work and skill sharing. These and other opportunities to support the organization can be found at projectsuccescoalition.org.
A Resource to Educate, Empower, and Encourage Young Black Girls of Power

One mother recently thanked the organization for the event saying, “It is not every day that they get to hear firsthand experiences from women at the top of their field who look similar to them. Thanks for making this happen for our girls!” Curly Mel also offers group mentoring hangouts where girls have sleepovers and tea parties. Dairsow says, “Our programming, at this point, is structured for a group of girls to continue learning interstitial skills and feel supported from their community.” The hope is that the skills they learn will give them confidence in any environment they’re a part of. But, whatever the event may be, all Curly Mel gatherings are centered around the organization’s mission statement to be “a resource to educate, empower and encourage young girls of color to be their best selves.”

Beyond the programs for the girls, parents learn how to better support their daughters in navigating the world and their important place within it. Of the event programs, Doness says, “We stand alongside families to help promote positive self-esteem/confidence. We also provide resources for parents to help be advocates on how to address certain situations in places like schools and during ‘hair time’.

Of course, achieving their ambitious mission wouldn’t be possible without their hard-working and dedicated team. Curly Mel is run and operated by five individuals: Executive Director Alyssha Dairsow, Maligha Garfield handling marketing, Latonya Howell is the Volunteer Coordinator, Ashley Cleveland handles infrastructure and Amber Mitchell oversees all fundraisers and donations. “We work together by way of acknowledging everyone’s skills they bring to the table and listening to them. Listening is the secret sauce,” Dairsow says. and she would know.

Dairsow saw underrepresentation as a problem that is especially prevalent in traditionally conservative areas like Utah. She sought out to right the wrong in hopes that future generations of women will be confident in their bodies, their minds, and their power, independent of the color of their skin. Through Dairsow’s organization, her vision for a more just world is turning into a reality.

While Curly Mel has an incredible team that works together to make magic happen, they are always looking for new and ambitious volunteers. Curly Mel says they are on the lookout for volunteers who have experience with nonprofits who are interested in joining the Curly Mel Board or various committees, as well as day-of-event volunteers. But most importantly, Curly Mel is eager to find people who, as they put it, “have a passion for Black girls and want them to thrive in all areas.” Curly Mel encourages potential volunteers to reach out to them for position descriptions or other questions by emailing hello@curlymel.org.

One Time Event: Educate, Empower & Encourage Young Black Girls of Power

As a natural hairstylist, Imani Powell understands the necessity of creating a nourishing environment for Black culture to grow and prosper. In this vein, learning how to love and care for one’s hair in its natural state fosters empowerment. Excellence of Ebony, Powell’s hairstyling and salon experience for Black individuals looking to embrace the natural power and beauty of their hair, offers a community for those who may have never had comfortable ways of embracing their hair in its authenticity. Where customized options catered to Black hair were limited, Powell saw an opportunity for societal and personal growth; Excellence of Ebony provides a nurturing environment where curly hair is appreciated, acknowledged and admired for what it is. Powell says, “the name Excellence of Ebony epitomizes Black Excellence.”

Excellence of Ebony as a hairstyling/teaching experience was almost never created. Powell, though enthralled with the arts, originally came to Salt Lake City via her interest in forensics. “Officially, Excellence of Ebony was born in June of 2020. I had no intention in launching my business that soon, and it wasn’t going to be focused on hair,” she says. “Day to day, I continued my work as a scientist and kept my artistry silent. A close friend found my old Instagram page, shared it on social media and then word quickly spread across the state.”

Powell has built her craft throughout her lifetime, learning tricks of the trade from her mother who was a licensed cosmetologist and owned a salon for over three decades. Shadowing both her mother’s and other stylists’ techniques, Powell has grown extensively in the art of styling natural hair.

“I have over 10 years of direct experience styling natural hair,” says Powell. “As a stylist, I have learned that you are both a coach and a stylist. It is my responsibility to educate myself so I can better serve and empower my clients.”

To better serve her clients’ individualized hair needs, Powell released The Crown, a personalized coaching experience that allows Black hair the space to accomplish healthy hair goals. Here, Powell has customized an individualized, virtual experience—which can be conducted over the course of one day to six months—in which she sits with the individual one-on-one and provides hair coaching for clients to better understand their natural density, formation, style and texture.

She says, “As the head coach, will review the client’s goals and needs and design a plan for their hair journey.” Depending on the selected Crown service and the individual’s needs, Powell will provide a bundle of appropriate products, accessories, tools and materials. “I remove myself from the equation to give my client autonomy of their desired style,” she says. “Hair styling is more than just copying a style from Instagram—it’s about their goals.” Powell purchases all of her wares from Black-owned businesses. While Powell teaches and consults clients virtually with Essence of Ebony, she also offers in-person, salon services to her clients.

To expand on this environment of community, Powell ensures that clients know she accepts her hair in its natural state. “Blow drying, flat ironing and any additional heat or chemical treatments are not required or suggested to book an appointment,” she says. “I can be comfortable for Black individuals in Salt Lake City and surrounding areas to locate a stylist that is comfortable with their hair.”

While Powell teaches and consults clients virtually with Essence of Ebony, she also offers in-person, salon services to her clients.

For Black individuals or for parents who are interested in trying to better understand how their child’s curly hair can maintain balance in their health and balance. The Crown is a premium resource. As Essence of Ebony’s website mentions, “This is an intimate experience that helps you enjoy and appreciate this journey of learning about your CROWN.”

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Keith McDonald is always working to make the world better. McDonald’s actions are driven by the idea of creating a better community for young people and making a positive impact.

McDonald is a tour de force in the community who uplifts artists and the youth through his KRCL show, “Friday Night Fallout,” and his own nonprofit, the Carlos Antonio Fisher Foundation, among other forums.

When he was learning to DJ and Uprok, McDonald connected with Uprok when he was learning to DJ and they’d let him practice on their turntables. After a while, McDonald decided to start holding events at Uprok, and they supported him all the way. It started as one back-to-school drive and became an annual event.

The work evolved into the Carlos Antonio Fisher Foundation, which McDonald founded and has been running for seven years. The foundation works to provide youth programming for local businesses and organizations. “I’ve found that places like Uprok … wanted ways to help young people, but they didn’t have the way to get it to them conveniently,” McDonald says. “If you had a business and you wanted to teach kids about financial literacy, I would take a group of kids to your business. Or if you, like Uprok, had a paint shop and you wanted to get the word out to young people about a safe and fun place where you can come in and paint walls, I would take you to that place.”

The foundation—also called the Community Action and Fellowship Foundation—is named after McDonald’s younger brother, who passed away at 19. McDonald credits his brother with much of his motivation to do this community work, which is why the foundation is in his name. “When he passed, it really changed me as a person,” McDonald says. “I really had to think a lot about the things I was doing … if I would’ve been focused on the right things maybe he would’ve been focused on the right things. If my brother had the opportunity to see me, [I’d] want him to be proud of me.”

The work McDonald puts in is tiring, he says, but it’s necessary to create change. As far as our roles as a community, he thinks people need to take superficial ideas of diversity and put action behind it, especially with hip-hop culture. “I encourage everybody who wants to learn about hip-hop culture to learn about African American culture, to find an elder to talk to, to read, read, read and read some more,” McDonald says. The work may be scary, but that means things are moving in the right direction. McDonald says, “Good change doesn’t happen until you get a little bit scared and uncomfortable.”

You can catch “Friday Night Fallout” every Friday from 10:30 p.m.–1 a.m. on KRCL, and to connect with McDonald’s foundation, email keith.mcdonald@utah.edu.
Twisted Roots
Bringing Afro-Caribbean Style and Community to Downtown SLC

By Taylor Hartman • mr.taylor.hartman@gmail.com
Photos by Bonneville Jones

For Iboou Fall, Owner of Twisted Roots on Main Street in Downtown SLC, making space—owning space—is more than selling merchandise and items. It’s about supporting a community.

Stepping into Twisted Roots, the bright colors of the Senegalese flag—red, yellow, and green—immediately greet you, hanging on the walls and appearing on merchandise, from backpacks to shirts to hookahs and tobacco products. The sweet smell of incense wafts slowly from the counter, and more often than not music libriy throughout the store, sometimes playing full dance parties inside or out on the sidewalk. Fall is often posted up behind the counter, beamng at customers as they walk in to check out his merchandise.

Fall describes Twisted Roots as an “African, bohemian and hippy store,” a description he says is even shifting from month to month, based on what might be in stock or what Fall might decide will be on sale at the time. “There’s a headshop-meets-surf shop present vibe throughout Twisted Roots. Reggae music plays, Bob Marley’s face grins on merchandise throughout the shop, jerseys and paper are sold behind the counter and an occasional Beatles Abbeys Road shirt walks its way into Fall’s inventory.

But what stands out in Twisted Roots, and what makes it a unique store in the melting pot of Downtown SLIC, it’s Afro-Caribbean influence and the way it gives back to Utah’s African and Caribbean community. Fall hails from Senegal. Fleeing poor conditions in his home country, he originally moved to California in 1997 and came to Utah in 2002. “We needed to get out of Senegal; things were not great there,” Fall says. “We needed a change and the US was a good place for that.”

When Fall and his family arrived in Utah, they loved the affordability and the landscape with the mountains framing the city on either side. When thinking of what he wanted to do for work, Fall says he noticed there weren’t many Afro-Caribbean stores in Salt Lake City and decided he wanted to change that. “There was no one in Utah selling this kind of merchandise—African-Caribbean merchandise—we started to pioneer it,” Fall says.

Fall and his family began leasing a location on Main Street, and Twisted Roots was born. Soon after opening, Fall says immigrants from African and Afro-Caribbean countries began to trickle in. “They start to hear about us with word of mouth, trying to find some Afro-Caribbean clothing that reminds them of home,” Fall says. “And we’re the only place that has those things for these people.”

Like many small business owners across the country and globe, Twisted Roots has suffered and sales have dropped since COVID-19 swept through the nation over a year ago. Fall says he was forced to close and reopen the store in fits and starts, and even though they’re back open, things are still quite slow. “We survive on foot traffic and regulars from offices near here,” he says. “There’s been so few of us, even through Christmas, which is our busy time. Now we’re back to the slow season after not much picking up in December.”

Sticking around and remaining committed to helping his community during these crazy times is the least thing he can do for the city Fall says he’s grown to love and call home. “It’s not full-time work, or if they need something we have at the store, I want people to know we can work it out for them,” Fall says. “Everyone is struggling and no one is immune, so why should we ask someone to pay full price when we know how tough it is? We’re here for Utah. Utah’s here for us.”

Now, Twisted Roots stands as a gathering place for a community of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Fall says the store has transformed over the years from something that offers merchandise to a pillar of the community area, a valuable place to find help. He says that he sees his store as a staple in the Downtown area as well, which has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. “We like it on Main Street, even though at times it’s been hard,” Fall says. “We bring a booth to all the Downtown music festivals and want to help make Main Street strong. There are drawbacks to being Downtown—no one can park easy, people live out in West Valley, West Jordan—but we have lots of regulars, too. Just hope it comes back soon after these pandemic.”

In addition to his fondness for soaking, Hewett also had experience with soap-making, which began years earlier as an apprenticeship of sorts. “As a child, I would watch my mother make soap. "I used to watch her and mean she made soap," he says. Alexandira would often ask Hewett to help in the process, a skill set that now serves him well as the owner and tinkering-in-chief of Ya Mon Soaks.

Hewett, whose personal nickname inspired the name of the company, self-describes his soap-making process as “by the book.” In the “About Us” video on the company’s website, Hewett is shown in his workstation carefully mixing ingredients in test tubes, beakers and measuring cups. As he works, he taps lightly on a container and explains with a smile, “Man, I put love into everything!”

By Austin Bock-Doss
Photos by Dominic Jordan

John Hewett founded Ya Mon Soaks for one very important reason. “My wife and I dig each other,” he says. “We wanted to start a business together. Now, the Ogden-based company is open to full line of handmade, all-natural items including bath bombs, body and face scrub, shower steamers and after shave bars.

When Ya Mon Soaks began, Hewett had already been making and using his soaps and bath crystals for years. Now, Ya Mon Soaks sells over 20 unique products out of their Ogden storefront and online. Everything that the company sells is made by Ya Mon’s four-person team in Ogden.

Hewett and his wife faithfully arrived at the idea of Ya Mon Soaks while Hewett was midweek in the tub. “My wife [Brinda] said, “Why don’t we sell those bath soaks that you soak in all the time?“ I said, I like, “right.”” The couple was seeking a business plan that would allow them to work together. “We both agree that it is counterproductive to spend more time with your work than with your own spouse,” Hewett says. Within moments of Brinda’s epiphany, the couple knew they had identified the perfect shared project.

In constructing his products, Hewett sticks to natural ingredients and is thoroughly convinced that natural bath products are the better option when choosing what to apply to one’s skin and hair.

For customers checking out Ya Mon Soaks for the first time, Hewett recommends trying his essential oil-packed shower steamers. These puck-shaped products are the showerer’s answer to the bath bomb, and, as Hewett says, “They can really liven up your shower time.” Place a shower steamer on the floor or shelf in your shower, and it will give off a power- ful and enjoyable steam, creating an in-home aromatherapy spa. “Our Breathe EZ steamer is packed with menthol and will open your sinuses. Each person seems to have their own way of using our steamers,” says Hewett. Soon, Ya Mon Soaks plans to release a new line of shower steamers without essential oils that feature various relaxing aromas.

Ya Mon Soaks products can be purchased at yamonsoaks.com, via Amazon or at their store in Ogden. Currently, the products are made in small batches to ensure freshness. The business can also be found on Instagram @yamonsoaks and Facebook under “Ya Mon Soaks.” Also, keep an eye out for new product releases on the digital and physical shelves—Ya Mon is always tinkering.
By Parker Scott Mortensen • @_coldbloom

**Performance with Alexandra Barbier**

After all the bad that 2020 offered us, dancer/performance artist Alexandra Barbier wants to celebrate what’s good with you in her piece **TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD!**

Barbier, a Salt Lake transplant who arrived in 2017, didn’t recall exactly when she conceived of **TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD!** but the collaboration with an unannounced, randomly chosen artist and a group of people is clearly building on the foundation of her thesis project she completed as part of her MFA program, which she completed at the U in the spring of 2020.

"It makes sense to me that this is what comes next," she says. "For my thesis, it was in person and interactive. It's built on Barbier's lifelong history of dance as her foremost practice. In her time studying dance in the University of Utah her emphasis on playful improvisation is extremely welcome in a more distanced way. "It was a response to the nature that really enjoys surprise and playfulness and spontaneity," she says.

In 2020, if it wasn’t one thing, it was another. Barbier’s emphasis on playful improvisation is extremely welcome after months of identical days and isolation from each other. Though this performance doesn’t necessarily focus on dance, it’s built on Barbier’s lifelong history of dance as her foremost practice. In her time studying dance in the University of Utah’s MFA program, Barbier has focused on tapping into the ways dance has historically brought people together.

"So much of how I think about dance now has changed because of coronavirus," Barbier says. "I’ve gotten really interested in Black vaudeville dance, particularly of minstrel shows [and] vaudeville shows from the late 1800s and early 1900s." Those forms of dance were happening in the social dance clubs in Harlem during its renaissance, and they are the forebears of what we understand today as jazz and tap. The movements that made up those dances eventually became self-evident vocabulary and became easily repeatable but still gave room for individual expression, Barbier says, and they were activities that made communities come together.

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"It makes sense to me that this is what comes next," she says. "For my thesis, it was in person and interactive. It’s built on Barbier’s lifelong history of dance as her foremost practice. In her time studying dance in the University of Utah her emphasis on playful improvisation is extremely welcome in a more distanced way. "It was a response to the nature that really enjoys surprise and playfulness and spontaneity," she says.

In 2020, if it wasn’t one thing, it was another. Barbier’s emphasis on playful improvisation is extremely welcome after months of identical days and isolation from each other. Though this performance doesn’t necessarily focus on dance, it’s built on Barbier’s lifelong history of dance as her foremost practice. In her time studying dance in the University of Utah’s MFA program, Barbier has focused on tapping into the ways dance has historically brought people together.

"So much of how I think about dance now has changed because of coronavirus," Barbier says. "I’ve gotten really interested in Black vaudeville dance, particularly of minstrel shows [and] vaudeville shows from the late 1800s and early 1900s." Those forms of dance were happening in the social dance clubs in Harlem during its renaissance, and they are the forebears of what we understand today as jazz and tap. The movements that made up those dances eventually became self-evident vocabulary and became easily repeatable but still gave room for individual expression, Barbier says, and they were activities that made communities come together.

Barbier will not have seen the submissions until the moment she reads them, so combined with the set activities from the wheel, **TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD!** provides Barbier a structure in which she can improvise her celebrations.

"What I’m trying to focus on in this performance is the unexpected nature of performance art," says Barbier. While the collaborative act on the wheel are predetermined, the order of the performance can’t be rehearsed. "Improvisation leads to unpredictability. There’s some part of my nature that really enjoys surprise and playfulness and spontaneity," she says.

After all the bad that 2020 offered us, dancer/performance artist Alexandra Barbier wants to celebrate what’s good with you in her piece **TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD!**

You can offer up your success to Barbier for potential celebration at her website, abarbier.com, in preparation for the SLC Performance Art Festival this April 2–3. More information on the festival is available at events.saltlakeart.org/event/4880736. If you miss the live show, you can also watch Barbier’s archived version on her site, abarbier.com, where she’ll upload the footage within two days following the festival. Follow Barbier on Instagram for more information @helloselexandra, and be sure to show up ready to celebrate.

**SLUG Mag** STANDS WITH YOU IN DEMANDING EQUITY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL.

An Acronym for Salt Lake UnderGround, SLUG Magazine’s mission is to amplify Salt Lake City’s thriving alternative and underrepresented music, arts, lifestyle and events subcultures with thoughtful media coverage and exclusive event curation.

SLUG Mag recognizes the long history of racism and discrimination that continues to live in the independent arts and lifestyle communities we exist within and cover, not just here in Salt Lake but across the country. We’re working internally to review our processes and practices to reevaluate whether we’re truly accomplishing our core mission of diversity and inclusion across all the fields and disciplines we cover.

If you have any comments, questions or feedback for us, please reach out to our Executive Editor, Angela H. Brown, at: angela@slugmag.com.
Jay Warren is a careful artist, in the sense that he’s very strategic and detail-oriented about every moment of his creative process, from how he records his songs to how his ideas are formed and even down to the chord progression of his tracks. Ultimately, this carefulness has paid off for him—his debut album, Give Love, charted #1 on the iTunes R&B charts, making Warren the first Utah artist to accomplish this. In my review of Give Love for SLUG, I noted that the album seemed to be “a true labor of love itself.” This careful attention to every aspect of music is something that Warren developed when he was young.

“I’ve been singing since I can remember,” Warren says. “My mom tells a story of me trying to sing along with Whitney Houston’s ‘I Will Always Love You’ at 11 months old.” Warren’s first real musical memory comes from the 2nd grade, where he sang solo in front of the class. From there on, he was involved in school and church choirs, bands and more. He taught himself to play piano in high school then started writing his own songs.

While there’s not a specific moment Warren can recall where he fell in love with music, he does have a chronological Spotify playlist of 23 albums that have “shaped who he is absolutely loved it.” “No, the team would pass the tracks back and forth with revisions. It all comes back to the same careful consideration Warren has had throughout his career. Give Love was “in the making for three years,” and he specifically wanted to wait until he had a significant fan base to release the album.

Over those three years, Warren and Wade worked on the album in almost stolen moments, since both of them have families with young kids. “Most of the album was recorded between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m.,” Warren says. But there were memorable moments during the recording process—like with the lead track, “On Slow”—that actually happened by mistake. “I was trying to finish writing ‘As I Am,’ and I was trying to find another chord progression because I felt like it was getting too repetitive,” Warren says. “I was going back and forth between these two chords and I started playing it a little bit faster, and I was like, ‘Oh, I think this is a different song.’

While the pandemic has thwarted plans for live productions, Warren has been working to make sure that the songs go over well live. “When the time eventually comes. He says, “The silver lining [of the pandemic] was that I could spend a lot more time on the album than I normally would be able to.”

As the light at the end of the tunnel for live shows begins to grow brighter, his team is ready for the next phase of his career. “I think we’ve done a really great job of trying to get my name and face in front of people in the region, and so the next thing is to go national,” I don’t doubt that with such a careful approach to his craft, Warren will succeed nationally. But, we won’t forget him here in Utah—nor he us.

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Utah singer-songwriter Bri Ray is all about creating music in its purest form, an album that is an exploration of emotions and experiences that are too powerful for words. The album, “Give Love,” was released last month on March 17. She strives to continue making music that speaks to her soul and the emotions of others at the same time. Check out Bri Ray’s music at thebriray.org.

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For Julius Thompson, the Owner and Head Chef at Sauce Boss Southern Kitchen, the path toward his culinary career was a personal one. “Everyone in my family has skills in the kitchen,” he says. “Growing up with little to no food made me appreciate it even more. My grandmother was the most talented cook in my family, and whenever I could, I would shadow her and try to absorb as much as I could when she was in the kitchen.” Such a framework—a combined reverence for family traditions and the glorious necessity of food—provided Sauce Boss with its deftly performing approach to the healing powers of comfort cooking.

After a stint in the pharmaceutical industry, Thompson decided that food and being a restaurateur are his true calling. “I realized that even though being a pharmacist would make me money, it wouldn’t make me happy,” he says. “I was already a good cook, and I realized that food is one thing that brings people together. Whether they are of a different cultural, country, religion or orientation, everyone wants and enjoys good food! When I was at my lowest, food brought me peace, and I wanted to bring that to others.”

When it came to selecting a focus for his restaurant, the choice of cuisine was an obvious one for Thompson. “Southern/soul food is near and dear to me,” he says. “Stories were given scraps and unwanted pieces of meat and had to turn it into something edible to eat and survive. The learned techniques and methods for turning something undesirable into something wanted are the base roots of soul food … Many African Americans don’t need to be from the South to know Southern/soul food, because it was taught and fed to us by our elders—it’s in our DNA!”

With an emphasis on deep-fried foods, rich fats and spices that heat you up from head to toe, the Southern/soul cooking tradition provides the ideal base for Thompson’s food-as-family and food-as-force of life ideals. His approach shines in a tried-and-true, authentic take on Southern classics, from entries such as Catfish ($14.29), Blackened Pork Chops ($11.59) and Shrimp and Grits ($12.59) to a mouthwatering sides menu that boasts an array of delectable options, collard greens, candied yams and a mac n’ cheese dish among them.

For my recent visit, I started out the meal with the staple of Fried Green Tomatoes and Okra ($6), served with the restaurant’s house-made ranch sauce. The deftly performed technique at Sauce Boss, found across a number of dishes from my meal, stands as one of the restaurant’s greatest achievements. The thick, fried shell is made out of a grainy cornmeal breading, a dredge full of papery spices and flavor-packed herbs. And the fact that each fried food held its crunch and shape even after my 20plus-minute winter drive back to Salt Lake from the store’s Draper location testifies to the fry mastery found at Sauce Boss.

The second factor that separates Sauce Boss’ fried foods from the rest arrived through the interior vegetables. The tomato pieces burst into my mouth from the first munch, and the bite through the okra was soft throughout, from stem to shell to core. Like the fried veggies, my Catfish entree touted an almost unaffordable combination between a crispy exterior and a gooey-soft interior. The same commingled breading provided the body-warming spice, and the catfish inside was cooked to perfection—buttery, rich and apt to fall to pieces at the slightest touch of a fork. If the fish itself was a marvel, the accompanying “soul sauce” was the push that reaffirmed the verisimilitude of Sauce Boss’ name, retaining a king-wage fly balance between the smoky, hotpepper flavor of the sauce and the spices found in the deep-fry dredge.

Each plate comes with the choice of one or two sides (depending on the entrée choice), and I tiptoed between the eight options before settling on the Collard Greens and the Black-Eyed Peas. If the catfish was a gorgeous explosion of heat, the collard greens offered a more nuanced flavor profile. Though the greens had been slow-cooked to perfection—leaves intact, stems soft—they retained an element of their characteristic bitter bite, a quality complemented by the rich, lingering sweetness of the bacon bits. Sauce Boss’ Black-Eyed Peas came in their own seasoned sauce, but the experience was less an onslaught of flavor as they—to their benefit—raved in the earthy grit of the beans’ natural flavor notes, a welcome counter to the surrounding dishes’ heat.

Of course, every entrée must also offer a “skin”—a word used liberally by Sauce Boss in its distinction from “slab” or “ mound”—of cornbread, which walked the beautiful line between side and dessert. Sauce Boss’ thick combined capitalized on the inherent sweetness of its core recipe, augmenting the sugary commingled dough with a post-bake buttermilk soak that filled each bite with a succulent satisfaction.

Though the full breadth of the restaurant’s family-oriented communism is currently on hold while the restaurant operates in a takeout-only capacity, Sauce Boss’ logos orders still provide Utahns with the chance to bring soul-food comfort into their lives. While the pandemic has been as hard on Thompson and Sauce Boss as any other business, his unswerving determination carries the business forward. “I plan to continue to cook and write until my hands fall off!” he says. Find more information at saucebossouthernkitchen.com.

Chris and Marci, the 77 E., Draper, UT | 385.434.2432 | Tue-Sat: 12–8 PM
saucebossouthernkitchen.com
I’ve been doing stand-up comedy in Salt Lake City for a while now, and the best thing about my experience so far has been the people I’ve met along the way in our local scene. While Utah is not known for being a diverse place, I can tell that more doors are being opened, and there are increasingly more opportunities for cultural divers-ity to be celebrated here. There are Black Utah groups popular on social media and Black events popping up all over the valley. Many Black men and women have come forward in this state to set up their own events, working as beacons for anyone who wants to show appreciation and support Black businesses and artists, and people are coming from all over the country to answer the call.

I started doing comedy here in 2019, and it’s been the most inspiring and fulfilling path I have ever been on in my life. I can take everything that I feel and think and break it down for people to hear the experiences of people of color in their lives. But what it does have is room in the house of its culture that is being filled one beacon at a time. Every one of those cultural beacons is vital here, in this place that is so hungry for diversity. In cap-italism, the product that is the most unique, if mar-keted comedy, will have an advantage on the competition. The value intrinsic to the growth of these diverse cultures also brings social richness and understanding to a community. Stand-up comedy is an art form based on a direct trans-lation of the experience of the comic. In a pre-dominantly white city like Salt Lake, the comics are going to bring unique experiences, but those experiences will be more directly parallel to their audience’s than a comic from a different place or of a different ethnicity. I notice that when I’m on stage, there are times I may say things in my jokes that get laughs, even when I wasn’t expect-ing them to. Usually, it’s when I say something that either the audience has never heard anyone say or they didn’t expect to hear it. Those sim-ple footfalls of relation, and the empathy they allow, can bridge gaps in people’s minds that keep this country divided.

This country is riddled with scars from years of systemic racism and white supremacy. Every po-itical attempt to heal those scars has been met with intense pushback. So, a lot of the healing has to be done socially and communally. Amer-i-ca is a democratic country, stitched together with the ideals of advancement and a right to the pursuit of happiness for all people. Promoting representation of every demographic in every field—whether that be art, politics, entertainment, business or anything else—is the best way for us to ensure that every person gets an opportunity to be heard. This is the lifeblood of democracy. I feel the most effective way to expand a person’s mind-set is to help them understand and empathize with other people from disparate places and cul-tures. Our growth is determined by our ability to adapt to our environment, and when you grow to accept other people, that’s a beautiful thing.

Comedians, in my opinion, are modern-day philosophers who value thought over every-thing else. We observe our experiences and translate it into something funny, then deliver it to you in an entertaining way. The more ethnic diversity and representation we have in stand-up comedy, the more people have a chance to hear the experiences of people of color in their community and relate to or further understand us. And that goes far more than just comedy. Any Black event that is held here is inherently valuable, and more Utahns should attend those events to be introduced to new ideas and peo-ple that could change your perspective.

In my travels across all these very different plac-es, there was one thing that remained consistent Black people. There are communities in the South that I have lived in that were made up entirely of Black and brown people. This ethnic clustering is the result of the segregation in America that established those communities, and as a result, these types of communities exist all across the country. So you can imagine the culture shock I experienced moving to Utah just six years ago. It was like going to a place you only see on TV. Utah is a beautiful state. The landscape is beauti-ful, the people are beautiful and the possibilities are endless. But because of its history with the LDS church, the state’s geographic location and several other factors, Utah doesn’t have the afore-mentioned Black communities or communities that are particular to any other marginalized groups of people. But what if we does have room in the soul of its culture that is being filled one beacon at a time. Every one of those cultural beacons is vital here, in this place that is so hungry for diversity. In cap-italism, the product that is the most unique, if mar-keted comedy, will have an advantage on the competition. The value intrinsic to the growth of these diverse cultures also brings social richness and understanding to a community. Stand-up comedy is an art form based on a direct trans-lation of the experience of the comic. In a pre-dominantly white city like Salt Lake, the comics are going to bring unique experiences, but those experiences will be more directly parallel to their audience’s than a comic from a different place or of a different ethnicity. I notice that when I’m on stage, there are times I may say things in my jokes that get laughs, even when I wasn’t expect-ing them to. Usually, it’s when I say something that either the audience has never heard anyone
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Owner and Founder Marcus Jones’ grandmother, Miss Essie, is the inspiration behind the great BBQ restaurant in Murray. Essie’s shear determination and faith laid the foundation for Jones to create a family business. Jones recalls how Essie moved her family six of children from Arkansas to California to help her father, “The community took care of her and she took care of them,” Jones says. “That relationship is what the business Miss Essie’s is. We are not just a family business and to take. We want to build something that stands the test of time.”

The lineage of determination extends further back to Jones’ great-grandfather, who owned a farm and had a small grocery store on site that provided for his family and the nearby community. “I fell in love with smoking meats and I realized there was a Black, independent man who worked hard to have his own business for his family even through opposition,” Jones says. He notes how those ideals must be translated into society today, how he is setting up a legacy for his family just as his great-great-grandfather did.

As Jones gets older, he understands just how Essie supported the entire family through her cooking. Jones says, “She would cook the family meals and Christmas dinners. My grandmother and spiritual were the backbone of the family.”

Miss Essie’s BBQ sauce and well crafted cuisine through contactless pickup. Jones has seen, even through turbulent times, that the community responds resiliently. This business, its traditions and patrons, represent something larger to Jones: “This is ours, our piece of the American pie,” he says.

Besides curbside pickup and catering, Miss Essie’s BBQ sauce can be picked up at associated Smith’s grocery stores. In the future, Jones plans on making the product even more accessible through stores such as Costco, Hannons and WinCo. Find more information at missessiebbq.com.

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Keeping Family Tradition Alive through Homemade BBQ Sauce

By Olivia Greene  •  greeneeag@gmail.com

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Miss Essie’s BBQ sauce and well crafted cuisine through contactless pickup. Jones has seen, even through turbulent times, that the community responds resiliently. This business, its traditions and patrons, represent something larger to Jones: “This is ours, our piece of the American pie,” he says.

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SLUG MAGAZINE

Build Community With Us

MUSIC • ARTS • LIFESTYLE • EVENTS
With spring just on the horizon, look no further than your local music community for some tunes to bring in the warmer weather and new growth. Start it off by bumping along with the infectious beats of DEEMRTN and Young Spit. Then, make sure to relax and enjoy some chill time with Pho3nix Child. Our April Local Music Single Roundup offers some great vibes to shake loose that winter slump.

“Wish On Me”
Self-Released
Street: 01.18
DEEMRTN = The Weeknd + PARTYNEXTDOOR

I can taste the start of an early summer party in DEEMRTN’s “Wish On Me.” It’s a fun tune that I imagine playing in the car before heading out for Salt Lake City’s nightlife with friends. It’s quite catchy with lyrics, “Don’t touch my hair / my face / I’m feeling like Solange” that do become redundant as the track goes on. The track is all about feeling good and wishing good things for yourself, and I find that important in anyone’s life. DEEMRTN’s voice stays energetic and meshes well with the beat, and could be mistaken for a track off one of The Weeknd’s albums if his voice was deeper. If you want to feel good about yourself now and for the year to come, turn on “Wish On Me.” – Kimberly Portillo

“Universe Song”
Self-Released
Street: 08.09
Pho3nix Child = Quelle Chris & Chris Keys + Open Mike Eagle

The Pho3nix Child’s “Universe Song” lives in the liminal space of effortless confidence. Atop a beat with a butter-smooth baseline and deep-pocket, neo-soul drum loops (produced by PK Beats), The Pho3nix Child cycles through a series of nonstop verses extolling the virtues of holism and mental clarity. References to meditation, selflessness and a Positive Mental Attitude float through the sidewinding bars, all leading to a series of conclusive affirmation in the track’s final verse: “I’m everything and everything is me / Blessed is how I be, no darkness touching me.” “Universe Song” proves that, for at least its sub-three-minute runtime, The Pho3nix Child lives truly as one with the stars and beyond. – Audrey Lockie

“Uwanje”
Self-Released
Street: 02.15
Young Spit = Gn Nephew + Post Malone

“Uwanje” is the musical equivalent of stepping in warm sand. Founded on standard trap sounds, the music fuses in a synthetic, woody bass that adds a comforting depth. Young Spit also uses hyper-auto tuned vocals, which produces nostalgia for the hip-hop of the 2010s. Originally from Burundi, Young Spit also blends in an unmistakable, East African flare through wooden percussion, Swahili lyrics and more. “Uwanje” is like listening to a perfect summer song for the first time. Young Spit has created a chill, warm and overall good-feeling track that may just be the thing we need to thaw out from this winter. – Marina McTee

“So Far Gone”
Self-Released
Street: 02.14
C.Valenta = Earl Sweatshirt + Iojii

Local rapper, poet and advocate C.Valenta grapples with intergenerational trauma in his new single, “So Far Gone.” The track features a swaying, stirring beat, which serves as a cradle for Valenta’s purposeful lyricism. He reflects about feeling trapped in a cycle of poverty and shame with the lyrics, “If this don’t stop now / tell me when will it?” The well-produced single ends on a note of deliverance as Valenta promises himself that he will be the one to break the cycle. He sings, “We never had role models / but we get visions.” As insightful and moving as it is catchy and cool, “So Far Gone” is masterfully layered. – Kia McGinnis Wray

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Music Reviews

serpentwithfeet – DEACON
(Secretly Canadian, 03.26)
serpentwithfeet = Bilal + Frank Ocean
~Austin Bock-Doss

Coultrain – Phantasmagoria
(Positive Elevation, 04.21)
Coultrain = The Internet + J*DaVeY + Steve Spacek
~Connor Brady

Read full reviews at SLUGMAG.COM.
DISTANCED ENTERTAINMENT
APRIL 2021

METRO MUSIC HALL
4/2: SPIRIT MACHINES • 4/3: DRAG ME TO LIFE FUNDRAISER
4/17: VIVA LA DIVA! • 4/24: VIVA LA DIVA!
4/25: VIVA LA DIVA! • 4/30: THE GALAXY BAND

URBAN LOUNGE
BY THE BACKYARD SHOW
4/2: THE BAWDILY FUNCTION COMEDY EVENT: BYS
4/3: JIM BONE ALBUM RELEASE: BYS • 4/3: COLUMBIA JONES
4/17: PIXIE & THE PARTY GRASS BOYS: BYS • 4/17: JRC DRAG SHOW
4/30: MOODLITE: BYS

KILBY COURT
4/1: DOWN RIVER • 4/2: RALLY • 4/3: BEESON • 4/8: THE NCMOS
4/29: WORMIS • 4/30: ELI JAXON

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