



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 14, 2023; 2:30PM CT

Contact: Ashley Williams, Kentuck Art  
Center  
Email: [awilliams@kentuck.org](mailto:awilliams@kentuck.org)  
Phone: (205)-758-1257

### **Music and Spoken Word Lineups for Kentuck Festival Announced**

*Performers include Gary Nichols, Thad & Company, Mike Cooley, Alabama Poet Laureate Ashley M. Jones, and Alabama Writers Hall of Fame Inductee Trudier Harris*

NORTHPORT, AL – Kentuck Art Center is excited to announce the schedules for the Brother Ben Music Stage and the Kathryn Tucker Windham Spoken Word Stage for this year's Kentuck Festival of the Arts, to be held October 14-15, 2023 at Kentuck Park in Northport, Alabama.

#### **Brother Ben Music Stage:**

Saturday, October 14

9:30-10:30am – Druid Ukes  
11:00am-12:00pm – Diablo Sandwich and the Dr. Peppers  
12:30-1:45pm – Caleb Elliot  
2:15-3:30pm – Thad and Company  
3:45-5:00pm – Mike Cooley

Sunday, October 15

10:00-11:00am – Max-Planck Gymnasium Big Band  
11:30am-12:30pm – Patrick O'Sullivan  
1:00-2:15pm – Kaydee Mulvehill  
2:30-4:00pm – Gary Nichols

#### **Kathryn Tucker Windham Spoken Word Stage:**

Saturday, October 14

9:30am – University of Alabama Undergraduate Creative Writing Students  
11:30am – Pure Products  
12:30pm – Charlie "Tin Man" Lucas, *stories about Kathryn Tucker Windham*  
1:30 – Sandy Barnidge  
3:00pm – Brooke Champagne

Sunday, October 15

10:30am – University of Alabama Undergraduate Creative Writing Students  
12:00pm – Kathryn Tucker Windham Tales  
1:30pm – Ashley M. Jones, Alabama Poet Laureate  
2:30pm – Trudier Harris, recent Alabama Writers Hall of Fame Inductee

In addition to the 2-day lineup of music and spoken word, the Kentuck Festival also features more than 270+ artists, activities for children, folk and contemporary craft demonstrations, food trucks, and local craft brews. Tickets can be purchased in advance or at the front gate, for \$15/day \$25/weekend. Children 12 & under get in free. Tickets and more info can be found here: <https://www.kentuck.org/the-festival>

**Please read more about this year's stellar lineup of performers below.**

## HIGHLIGHTS: Brother Ben Music Stage Performers

Listed in order of appearance. To view information about all performers, please [click here](#).



**Thad Saajid (Thad & Company)** is an R&B artist from Florence, Alabama, known for his effortless melodies, deft lyricism, and vibrant live performances. Saajid got his start playing church music, honing his abilities on organ and piano in the rich context of the Southern gospel tradition. 2019 saw the release of his first solo project, “The Anti-Social, Pt. 1.” Since then Saajid has released several EPs and singles, most notably 2022’s “Trash Talk,” a fresh take on neo-soul and R&B which pays homage to his gospel roots. “Trash Talk” garnered widely positive reviews, including a feature on NPR Music’s “Spotlight of the Month.” His newest project, “Wait, Be Careful With This,” is slated for release in September 2023 on Single Lock Records.



Whether battling valiantly from behind the enemy lines of his dive-bar-underground past or blowing the doors off sold-out theaters as he’s done with Drive-By Truckers for the last decade, **Mike Cooley** has proved his mettle time and time again. He’s rock & roll incarnate—Mick and Keith rolled into one impossibly cool, soul-howling, guitar rattlin’ ball of genuine unapologetic grit and swagger. At least that’s how it seems gazing up from the crowd at a packed DBT show.

So how did this modern-day rock hero feel about temporarily ditching his band and rolling back the volume for the unaccompanied acoustic performances that would become his debut solo record, *The Fool on Every Corner*?

“When you don’t do it normally, it’s terrifying,” Cooley admits. “I try to relax, but I’ll probably never be able to sit down in a chair on stage as easily as I sit down on a toilet behind a closed door. That’s the goal—somewhere in between,”

he deadpans. "I set the bar high."

Despite his bad nerves and tongue-in-cheek penchant for self-deprecation, Cooley shines on this bare-bones live set, tossing aside his guitar pick and playing almost everything with his fingers. "Strip it, strip it, strip it down," he says, alluding to the mantra that guided these performances. "What's left is the song and nothing else."



### **Kaydee Mulvehill**

Living in Birmingham Alabama, Kaydee Mulvehill started performing and writing songs at age 15. Now at 33, she continues crafting the stories that shape who she is becoming. Whether on a stage or behind the bar of a local haunt, her craft is revealed through heady conversation and introspective lyrics and a rawness that will knock you off your seat.



### **Gary Nichols**

Gary Nichols has announced his return to music with a number one single and a heart-rending album.

Gary Nichols spent seven years with The SteelDrivers, stepping in for founding member Chris Stapleton when he made his exit in 2009 to pursue a career in country music. Nichols seemed an ideal replacement, with his soulful, bluesy voice. He recorded a pair of successful projects with the band, taking home a Grammy in the process. When the Alabama native dropped out of the band, and seemingly off the planet, in 2017, SteelDrivers fans were flummoxed and confused. But Gary had decided that it was finally time to deal with his addictions.

Fully recovered, and with a newfound passion for music, he has signed with Nashville's RBR Entertainment, and begun recording bluegrass again with Billy Droze producing. Their debut collaboration, "Fire In The Dark" reached number one on both the Grassicana and Bluegrass Today charts. On a parallel path, with his producing partners Dan Hannon and Michael Shane Wright, he has completed the recording of an album in Muscle Shoals called "Learning How To Walk Again" that tells the story of his rise and fall and the road to recovery that followed.

"Man, I'm so excited to be making music again. I haven't recorded an album since the Muscle

Shoals Recordings with The SteelDrivers back in 2014. So much has happened since then and I can't wait to play for you and to tell you about it!"

## HIGHLIGHTS: Kathryn Tucker Windham Spoken Word Stage Performers

Listed in order of appearance. To view information about all performers, please [click here](#).



The Kathryn Tucker Windham Spoken Word Stage is sponsored by The Poarch Band of Creek Indians.



**Sandra Barnidge's** work centers on small towns, working-class women, and environmental themes. Her debut novel, "The Diamondbacks," is forthcoming from Belle Point Press (2025), and her short fiction has appeared in Barren, The Fiddlehead, Nimrod, Reservoir Road Literary Review, Allegory Ridge, and elsewhere. She writes a column about nature and creativity for Reckon Review.



**Brooke Champagne** is the author of "Nola Face," forthcoming with the Crux Series in Literary Nonfiction at the University of Georgia Press in 2024. Her writing appears widely in literary journals and has received various awards, including the inaugural William Bradley Prize for the Essay for her work "Exercises." She recently won the 2022 March Farness National Championship Essay Tournament with her essay on Aimee Mann's cover of the song "One." Her essays have been selected as Notables in several editions of Best American Essays, and is recipient of the 2023-2024 Alabama State Council on the Arts Literary Fellowship in Prose. She lives in Tuscaloosa, where she teaches in the MFA Program at the University of Alabama.



**Ashley M. Jones** is the Poet Laureate of the State of Alabama, 2022-2026. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Florida International University, and she is the author of "Magic City Gospel" (Hub City Press 2017), "dark // thing" (Pleiades Press 2019), and "REPARATIONS NOW!" (Hub City Press 2021). Her poetry has earned several awards, including the Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers Award, the Silver Medal in the Independent Publishers Book Awards, the Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize for Poetry, a Literature Fellowship from the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Lucille Clifton Poetry Prize, and the Lucille Clifton Legacy Award.

She was a finalist for the Ruth Lily Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship in 2020, and her collection, "REPARATIONS NOW!" was on the longlist for the 2022 PEN/Voelcker Award for

Poetry. Jones has been featured on news outlets including Good Morning America, ABC News, and the BBC. Her poems and essays appear in or are forthcoming at CNN, POETRY, The Oxford American, Origins Journal, The Quarry by Split This Rock, Obsidian, and many others. She co-directs PEN Birmingham, and she is the founding director of the Magic City Poetry Festival. She is the associate director of the University Honors Program at UAB, and is part of the core faculty of the Converse University Low Residency MFA Program. She recently served as a guest editor for Poetry Magazine. In 2022, she received a Poet Laureate Fellowship from the Academy of American Poets.



**Trudier Harris** is University Distinguished Research Professor of English Emerita at the University of Alabama and J. Carlyle Sitterson Distinguished Professor of English Emerita at UNC Chapel Hill, where she taught courses in African American literature and folklore. Among her 25 published books are "From Mammies to Militants: Domestics in Black American Literature" (1982), "Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals" (1984), "Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison" (1991), "The Power of the Porch: The Storyteller's Craft in Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Naylor, and Randall Kenan" (1996), "The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South" (2009), "Martin Luther King Jr., Heroism, and African American Literature" (2014), and "Depictions of Home in African American Literature" (2021).

She published her memoir, "Summer Snow: Reflections from a Black Daughter of the South," in 2003. In 2002, she received the Eugene Current-Garcia Award for selection as Alabama's Distinguished Literary Scholar. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill created the "Trudier Harris Distinguished Professorship" in her honor in 2014. In 2018, she received an honorary degree from The College of William and Mary, the Richard Beale Davis Award for Lifetime Achievement in Southern Literary Studies, and a Resident Fellowship to the National Humanities Center.

She received the 2018 Clarence E. Cason Award for Nonfiction Writing from the College of Communication & Information Sciences at the University of Alabama. She also won the 2018 SEC Faculty Achievement Award at the University of Alabama (a "Professor of Year" designation). On March 10, 2023, Harris was

inducted into the Alabama Writers Hall of Fame, where she joins the likes of Truman Capote, Zora Neale Hurston, Harper Lee, Sonia Sanchez, and Margaret Walker. Her latest book, "Bigger Thomas: A Literary Life," is forthcoming in 2024.

Kentuck Art Center and Festival was established in 1971. Kentuck's mission is to perpetuate the arts, engage the community, and empower the artist. The Kentuck Festival of the Arts is nationally recognized for its quality, diversity, and celebration of artistic style ranging from folk to contemporary arts and traditional crafts. The 52nd Kentuck Festival of the Arts is October 14-15, 2023 at Kentuck Park in Northport, Alabama.

###

**Our Contact Information**

\*{{Organization Name}}\*  
\*{{Organization Address}}\*  
\*{{Organization Phone}}\*  
\*{{Organization Website}}\*

\*{{Unsubscribe}}\*

