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QUEEN CITY NERVE



CHARLOTTE SPRING GUIDE 2026

Let's Take This Outside

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The NCIA Vocational Training Center offers workforce development classes. Photo courtesy of NCIA

NOBODY BENEFITS

New SNAP eligibility requirements could take residents out of critical workforce development programs

BY ANNIE KEOUGH

In fall 2025, after Congress failed to agree on federal funding allocations for the new fiscal year, resulting in the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, the US Department of Agriculture told state Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) agencies that the government would discontinue allocation of benefits for the program beginning Nov. 1.

Hunger relief organizations and grassroots organizers mobilized, holding food drives and fundraisers to meet the urgent need amidst the crisis. As time passed and the government opened back up, the news cycle moved on, but SNAP remains at risk.

Eligibility changes and funding cuts included in President Donald Trump's so-called Big Beautiful Bill Act could impact more than 1.4 million North Carolinians who rely on SNAP. While food remains the main benefit to Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), these changes could affect more than meals. Many folks rely on their SNAP eligibility to qualify for other programming funded by North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

One such program in Charlotte is NCIA's Vocational Training Center (VTC), which offers career paths into trade industries like automotive maintenance, HVAC/R and commercial transportation.

VTC students must be receiving SNAP benefits, also known as food stamps, in order to qualify for the program, leaving a number of folks ineligible for VTC classes and certifications who would have previously qualified.

VTC HVAC student Casper Pollins pointed out that programming like he's participated in at the Vocational Training Center is what helps people climb out of a situation where they're struggling financially.

"NCIA offered me an opportunity to rectify that financial situation by giving me training that I'm taking now so that I can find [better] employment opportunities to put myself in a beneficial position … to further my life financially as well," he said.

The latest cohort of VTC students, including Pollins, will graduate on March 6. Now, SNAP federal eligibility changes are putting future students at risk of losing their benefits and access to a career path.

The new SNAP eligibility rules, paired with a funding deficit at the NC DHHS, expose two major barriers that will impact countless individuals.

SNAP eligibility changes

"Some of those new guidelines, rules and regulations that [the Food and Nutrition Service] has implemented, it is disqualifying … We're denying people's food stamp applications and furthermore denying them of being in the program," said Danielle Ellis, a social worker with the state's More Than A Job program who works with NCIA.

"[Newly disqualified people] are not able to take the opportunity of a paid training to better themselves and be able to go into the workforce," she continued.

DHHS is also NCIA's number one grant funder, Poltawsky said. The money from the state was the reason NCIA was able to establish a VTC in Charlotte.

DHHS only funds certain programs in NCIA according to the SNAP eligibility of the people the organization serves. When the government endured the longest shutdown in US history in October 2025, NCIA footed the bill to continue training DHHS-funded students.

The next cohort of students includes a waitlist of 85 people who want to train for a commercial driver's license but do not qualify for SNAP, Poltawsky said.

While NCIA is looking to diversify funding so it can accept folks outside of the FNS restraints, DHHS funding remains the only option right now — an unfortunate reality given the new SNAP qualifications.

One of the major changes falls on able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), which refers to folks aged 18-64 with no children.

With the new regulations, which took effect on Jan. 1, a person is now considered an ABAWD once their youngest child turns 14, the legal working age in North Carolina. This means that even if a family has five children, once the youngest turns 14, the parents or guardians are considered childless under new federal law, Poltawsky said.

The requirements under an ABAWD status are different from somebody without children or children under 14 years old. If a person fills out a SNAP application under ABAWD status, they are required to complete 80 hours of work or training every month and provide evidence of those hours to maintain benefits.

If a person is unemployed or doesn't provide evidence of those 80 hours for three months, their benefits will be taken away and they will not be able to reapply for another three years.

"I think there's an element of it that's trying to discourage people from wanting to apply, period," Poltawsky said. "And then it's just cutting the amount of people who are eligible, which then in turn is going to affect our ability to enroll people, because not as many people will qualify."

Another major barrier is a change in the definition of "homeless."

"It used to be [that] if you're in a shelter or you're on the streets, that's considered homeless," Ellis said. "Homeless is homeless, right? You don't have your own roof over your head. But now they have set a criteria to what 'homeless' looks like."

Under new regulations, one must be "critically homeless," meaning physically on the street and not living in a shelter or in their car, to qualify for benefits.

Ellis is already seeing the impact of federal eligibility changes in her everyday work with her clients.

She said that if someone is trying to recertify their SNAP benefits in March and their youngest has turned 14, it completely changes the structure of their whole home. Though FNS sends a pages-long explainer of their new status, many people don't understand why their benefits are changing or getting revoked.

Some folks find themselves either not compliant with the 80-hour work or training requirements or they haven't been reporting what they're doing correctly to the agency. The system then automatically marks them as noncompliant and they either lose their benefits or become ineligible for VTC classes.

That is why Ellis' work is so important. DSS caseworkers and ABAWD liaisons can walk people through eligibility changes and manually correct automatically closed cases.

Pollins told Queen City Nerve his benefits were paused for a reason outside his knowledge and, had his case manager not been there, he still wouldn't have any answers as to why.

"I got my case manager and [she's] a great help," Pollins said. "They help me out a lot … because most of us was in the dark, just like I am, like 'Why hasn't my benefits been restored?' Most of the stuff I could never do on my own, as far as what they're doing for me.



New SNAP eligibility rules will mean less people qualify for VTC classes. Photo courtesy of NCIA



NCIA opened the center in Charlotte in 2020. Photo courtesy of NCIA

"More than just taking a class, it's really a personal friendship or personal thing between you and ... the facilitators there because they really care," he added.

Help means more than food

Formerly known as the National Center for Institutional Alternatives, has connected underserved individuals in the Baltimore area to employment, educational and housing opportunities for 47 years. It began offering services in Charlotte in 2020.

While NCIA started as a criminal justice reform organization, it redirected its programming as time progressed to respond to the needs of the community, launching residential and career programs for people with intellectual disabilities and schooling opportunities for at-risk youth.

As a response to the death of 25-year-old Freddie Gray, who died due to a severe spinal cord injury he suffered while in the custody of Baltimore police after being arrested in a high-poverty area of the city in 2015, NCIA created a VTC in Baltimore to provide workforce resources that could help get folks out of poverty.

VTC students participate in 17-week training modules that are offered three times a year to earn industry-recognized certifications. The center offers half-day schedules so those with current jobs can work while attending class.

"From there, they kind of got into the trades, because there's also the element that we like to serve people who may have been justice involved," VTC's program director Christine Poltawsky said. "We were trying to find things that people could be trained in fairly quickly and turn their life around in a decent amount of time."

The VTC serves people that not every nonprofit will serve, Poltawsky said. According to the NCIA website, the organization focuses on vocational training, career preparation and employment support to citizens returning from incarceration, veterans, SNAP recipients and recent high school graduates.

The centers also have an employment specialist and case manager on staff to overcome barriers to growth including lack of housing or introductory qualifications to the program such as acquiring a license. The case worker also educates students on financial literacy and creates a budget for newly earned income.

After NCIA co-founder Herbert J. Hoelter visited his daughters in Charlotte, passing through the Charlotte Transit Center across from the Spectrum Center in Uptown during his trip, he recognized a similar need in our city that existed in Baltimore, according to Poltawsky.

The Charlotte VTC opened in 2020 at 517 Blairhill Road. Since its opening, the center has partnered with local organization Roof Above to assist students with housing, graduating and employing 400 individuals with an 80% graduation rate.

Economic and personal impact

Since NCIA moved to Charlotte in 2020, VTC's 400 graduates have an employment rate of 70% while the remaining withdrew before NCIA could connect them with an employer, Poltawsky said.

Hiring 400 employees at an average annual salary of $40,000 results in $16 million in total annual earnings flowing directly into the hands of workers in the Charlotte area, she noted.

The earned income then becomes purchasing power spent on essentials like housing, groceries, transportation and entertainment. Because many of these expenses are local, this income stays within the region and supports local shops, services and landlords, Poltawsky said.

That circulation of earnings is what economists call a "multiplier effect," in which initial government spending leads to a larger national income.

VTC-offered training in trades like HVAC technicians, automotive maintenance and commercial driving are high-demand skills in North Carolina. Restricting access to FNS benefits in turn affects access to employment rates.

"Food stamps [are] essentially good for a lot of people because it brings them into programs like mine that can pay for them to go to training for free, or help them get a job," Ellis said. "But then they have these new guidelines and rules that's coming and working against them, that's hindering them."

Despite this, Poltawsky believes her position as program director on orientation day is to let the new students know that the VTC is a positive environment.

"There's a lot of negativity out there," she said. "I want this to be a place where, when you come in, you shut all that out, you can focus on you, which may have never been the case, and take the time that you need to invest in you," she said.

"There's plenty of evidence out there that having work and having purpose really works hand in hand with people's quality of life," she added. "I think that we're definitely contributing to that and I think that if we weren't here we wouldn't be able to do that."

Poltawsky and NCIA are asking the community to make state representatives aware of the importance of funding for workforce training and programming.

NCIA is accepting donations to maintain enrollment for those cut out of FNS eligibility on its website.

For now, however, Pollins is focused on the footwork.

"Now it's time to go to work, put all the information to work," he said. "These guys, what they're doing for me now will rectify the situation and I'll be okay ... [I'm] cleaning up as a result of the records of my past. The main thing [is] that things will ... turn around soon if I stay the course."

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Ken Koontz's car was towed from the Wilmore Bojangles on Feb. 20. Photo by Ken Koontz

IMMOBILE

Wilmore Bojangles incident sheds light on predatory towing issue

BY RYAN PITKIN

A legendary Charlotte newsman is speaking out after having his car wrongfully booted last week, striking a nerve with followers who have had similar experiences and shedding light on the practice of predatory towing in Charlotte.

Now he says he wants to take legal action against the tow company that targeted him and is even considering a class-action suit that would hold the entire industry accountable.

Ken Koontz, known as the man who broke the color barrier in local news when he became WBTV's first Black reporter in 1969, took to Facebook on Feb. 20 to warn friends and followers about an experience he had at a local Bojangles earlier that day.

Koontz, now 77 and recovering from prostate cancer, said an employee with the Fort Mill-based company Hitch and Haul Heroes placed a boot on his car while he went inside the Bojangles at the corner of West Boulevard and South Tryon Street to use the restroom.

When he returned to his car to retrieve some money to buy food after using the restroom, the tow truck driver stopped him and pointed out the demobilizing boot on his tire. The driver said he entered the restaurant to ask whose car was parked in the lot while Koontz was in the restroom.

Koontz said that, while the driver was sympathetic, he claimed he could not remove the device unless he was given $400 in cash.

Koontz called the police, who told him they could not help him and even threatened to write him a citation on top of the tow fees if he did not hand his keys over to the tow truck driver. The driver towed Koontz's vehicle to a lot on Beatties Ford Road, where he was charged $750 to get it out.

"I thought some new rules, regulations, laws and local ordinances were recently implemented to stop this very type of predatory booting," Koontz wrote on Facebook. "Obviously CMPD (at least those two responding officers) turned [a] blind eye."

North Carolina's Commercial Vehicle and Cargo Protection Act went into effect in December 2025, but it only restricts towing companies from targeting commercial vehicles or impounding the cargo of tractor trailers.

The law made booting commercial motor vehicles for parking enforcement a Class 2 misdemeanor, but there are still not many protections on the books for residents like Koontz.

Bojangles and tow company give conflicting explanations

His drive to get to the bottom of a story still strong, Koontz followed up with ownership at Hitch and Haul Heroes (HHH) as well as the Bojangles corporate office to find out who was at fault, getting conflicting stories from each.

Koontz said HHH ownership originally told him they were under contract with Bojangles to tow any unauthorized cars from the lot and to do so aggressively, as the previous company had been fired for not acting aggressively enough.

The HHH owner even told Koontz the company had called Bojangles' corporate office and gotten the go-ahead before towing his car.

However, Koontz also reached out to Bojangles' corporate office himself and met with the store's manager along with district and area directors in the same parking lot where the incident happened.

According to Koontz, the Bojangles leaders reimbursed him and told him the incident "never should have happened," adding that HHH wrongfully placed signage in their parking lot and had since been banned from their property.

They denied ever being under contract with the company, but reporting from Queen City News on Thursday showed there may have been an under-the-table agreement.

An unidentified HHH owner spoke with Queen City News for the story, showing them text messages between himself and the store manager that confirmed the two had been working together.

Aside from showing that the manager would text HHH when they wanted a car towed, the texts also implied that HHH was offering a cut of the resulting revenue to the manager.

In a conversation that appeared to show the manager inquiring whether the signage in the parking lot had been installed, the HHH owner told her "[yo]ur kick back will start today."

Queen City Nerve contacted HHH but was told nobody was available to comment on the incident or how it reimburses companies that allow the company to operate in their lots.

We also reached out to Bojangles' corporate office for comment and have not heard back at the time of this writing.

Koontz said he plans to take legal action against HHH.

"The company's obviously predatory practice likely violates local city ordinances and perhaps other applicable laws including and not limited to trespassing," he wrote. "The incident was an obvious embarrassment to me personally while [effecting] extreme emotional trauma, pain and suffering."

Speaking to Queen City Nerve a few days later, he added, "I know the [North Carolina] attorney general has had a particular interest in this issue, and hopefully, they will be responsive to my reaching out to them to explore this."

NC AG gets results in predatory towing case

Koontz's experience came just days after the NC Department of Justice (NC DOJ) ruled against a separate Charlotte company for racially targeted towing and price gouging during the pandemic.

In the state's first discriminatory towing case, the NC DOJ's Consumer Protection Division and Civil Rights Unit ordered David Satterfield, owner of Charlotte-based companies A1 Towing Solutions and Automobile Recovery and Parking Enforcement, to pay $30,000 in restitution to drivers whose vehicles were unlawfully towed by his companies or who were required to pay excessive prices to get their vehicles back.

The NC DOJ sued Satterfield in 2020 for unlawfully booting and towing trucks that were delivering food, water and other medical supplies during the pandemic, then charging upwards of $4,000 for the release of those vehicles.

CMPD data showed that Satterfield's drivers "towed vehicles owned by African Americans at an alarmingly high rate and almost exclusively operated in areas of Charlotte that have a majority African-American population," according to the NC DOJ.

Furthermore, some Black consumers alleged that Satterfield called them racial slurs and assaulted them while attempting to tow their vehicles.

"We had evidence that the defendant broke price gouging laws and engaged in racially targeted towing" stated NC Attorney General Jeff Jackson in a release announcing the ruling. "This judgment will force him to pay back the victims and it will set a clear precedent: If you run a towing company that breaks that law, we are going to take you to court, and we're going to stop you."

Koontz said he plans to reach out to Jackson's office to gauge his interest in pursuing another, larger case.

"I'm getting so many comments from people who have gone through this similar experience, I'm getting a sense now of class action against the entire industry," Koontz told Queen City Nerve. "It's not just me, but for others who have wrongfully been victims of predatory towing. There are stories out there, man, that you just won't believe. And this guy ain't the only guy, that's what pisses me off."

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Hitch & Haul Heroes charged Koontz $750 to get his car back. Photo by Ken Koontz



Jamil Whitlow with his daughter, Naomi. Photo courtesy of Whitlow family

A PLEA FOR HELP

Sneak CLT owner Jamil Whitlow seeks kidney transplant due to rare condition

BY RYAN PITKIN

On April 5, Jamil Whitlow will mark the two-year anniversary of Sneak CLT, a popular cocktail lounge he opened in Elizabeth's Pecan Point shopping center in April 2024.

Having spent years in corporate America before entering the hospitality industry, the opening of his own establishment was the realization of a longtime dream. As exciting as it's been to see that dream come to fruition, however, it's been a dream complicated by a largely unseen struggle — one that's held him back as an entrepreneur and family man.

In 2021, shortly before the birth of his daughter, Whitlow was diagnosed with focal segmental glomerulosclerosis (FSGS), a rare but serious kidney disease that disproportionately affects African American men.

He's been on dialysis since January 2025, when his doctor realized he was approaching renal failure, a deadly condition in which someone's kidneys can no longer function at a capacity needed to keep them alive. The treatments have stolen countless hours of his life since — from three to four hours a day for four days a week — sidelining him from the activities and quality time he aspires to with his wife Lara and daughter Naomi.

Whitlow has been unable to swim with his child due to a permanent catheter that's implanted into his chest and traveling is extremely difficult as he needs to coordinate with a dialysis center at whatever destination he wishes to visit.

Now as he wraps up an intensive, months-long vetting process to get approved for a potential kidney donation, Whitlow is looking to the community in search of a donor who can help give him the life he's dreamed of for years.

"It's a very challenging component to be someone that used to have so much freedom when it comes to everything I was doing in my life and now my life being so restrictive," he told Queen City Nerve. "I'm not saying that getting a kidney transplant is going to completely change everything, but what a kidney transplant for me will do is give me the peace of mind that I've been yearning for."

"It's hard to see somebody that you love who is so spectacular, it's just really hard to see them sick," added Lara. "I want us to be able to do the things that we love. Traveling is huge for us, showing our daughter different places and different cultures. [A kidney donation] would just be life-changing."

It started with swollen legs

Jamil Whitlow said he'll always remember the day he realized his jeans were fitting just a bit too tight. He knew he hadn't gained that much weight, so he chalked it up to his recent workout routine.

When the swelling didn't go down, he went to urgent care, and when they couldn't help him he checked himself into a local hospital. As it turned out, the swelling was a condition called edema, an early symptom of FSGS.

What followed was a seemingly never-ending series of appointments with different nephrologists and other specialists. His treatments remained relatively non-invasive until January 2025, when his brush with renal failure made near-daily dialysis a necessity.

In June, he was struck with a life-threatening staph infection, which hospitalized him for a full week and forced him to cancel his 40th birthday celebration.

He has been seeking a donor since October 2025, though now that he's finally nearing the end of the stringent vetting process, he's renewing his search for potential connections. He is hoping for a living donor, as a kidney donated by a living person on average stays viable around a dozen years longer than one from a deceased person.

The most common living organ donation, kidney donation is not shown to affect the life expectancy of the donor.

In 2024, we spoke to local musician Krystle Baller a year after they offered one of their kidneys as a donor to help close friend Ruth Ava Lyons fight polycystic kidney disease.

Baller described how the surgery inspired them to quit smoking and drink more water.

"All the recommendations after kidney surgery is just live a healthy life; go be a healthy person, eat healthy, don't eat a lot of red meat," Baller explained. "It's all things that people are supposed to do anyway. Now I have a reason."

A focus on mental health

Whitlow's reasons for wanting the donation abound, but he also hopes to someday help mentor young Black men as they navigate treatment for FSGS. As a patient himself, he's seen firsthand how punishing the process can be to one's mental health.

"The physical side is the physical side, and I think if it was only the physical side that we dealt with, it wouldn't be as hard," he said. "Your body heals; you can get over a surgery, you can get over a couple of procedures, you can get over needles being in your body. But the mental [component] is where it's tough.

"You spend a lot of alone time in that chair. You're going to be going to the hospital a lot. You're going to end up back in the hospital again for something related to your condition. Those long stays where you're going to be sitting there for several days," he continued. "When you hear certain information, you're like, 'Is my life over? Am I dying?' It's just a lot. So there's a big mental piece that goes along with it that I don't think is fully discussed."

For now, however, his focus remains on his family and finding a donor to help him reach a place where he can be the mentor rather than the patient.

"A lot of people in the community have known Jamil for a really long time, and just his stride, his tenacity, his personality, his outwardness," said Lara. "The Jamil Whitlow that everybody knows and loves, I'm not saying he's not that person, but it's really hard seeing him be sick and seeing him be tied to a chair when there are a million other things that I know he wants to do in his life."

The Whitlows are asking that potential donors fill out the Atrium Health Charlotte Living Kidney Donor Questionnaire at tinyurl.com/JamilWhitlowDonor, entering Jamil's name and date of birth at the bottom (Jamil Whitlow; July 1, 1985). You can learn more about kidney donation at tinyurl.com/AtriumKidneyInfo. All testing leading up to a donation as well as the surgery itself will be covered by the Whitlows' insurance, according to Lara.

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Jamil with his wife, Lara, and Naomi. Photo courtesy of Whitlow family

SIP & SHOP W/ FIN & FINO

March 4 • 6-8 p.m. • Trope Bookshop, 1516 Lyon Ct. • Free • tinyurl.com/SipNShopTrope

"Hot people read," says the signage on the front of Trope Bookstore. The all-romance book shop was launched in March 2025 to create a safe space for smut where all are welcome. (Lest you scoff at steamy reading material, consider that romance is currently one of the fastest-growing genres in the publishing industry.) Now the woman-owned business, which specializes in women authors and hard-to-fine romances, brings the bar team from Fin & Fino into its Plaza Midwood bookstore for a friendly happy hour featuring curated cocktails, racy titles to quench every reader's thirst and a cozy setting for an evening of sipping, browsing and discovery.

CAVE SHINE, MODERN MOXIE, REDWOOD SLEEPER

March 6 • 8 p.m. • Petra's, 1919 Commonwealth Ave. • $13 • petrasbar.com

A bill of Charlotte pop-rock artists demonstrates the genre's elasticity. With a celestial cloudbank of cyclical guitars, skirling synthesizers and buried near-subliminal vocals, Cave Shine — a dream-pop vehicle for Taylor McClain — conjures tracks like "Your Spirit Sleeps Upon My Chest," which examines how loved ones react in the face of loss. Indie alt-rockers Modern Moxie draw upon retro cool forebears ranging from Bowie to Nancy Sinatra, but it all becomes vibrant and fresh with crunchy guitars, a soupcon of psych and singer-songwriter Madison Lucas' sizzling charisma. Drawing on shoegaze and psych, Redwood Sleeper crafts oneiric, smokey-voiced reveries like the elliptical "First Goodbye."

HYPER-BOIL

March 6-13 • times vary • Goodyear Arts, 301 Camp Road • Free • goodyeararts.com

Hyper-Boil draws together artwork from Winthrop University's undergraduate and alumni populations. Looking inward to ourselves and outward at society in humorous, grotesque and transcendental pieces, the artists challenge our understanding of the self as shaped by advertising, corporations and media influencers. The show features works by interdisciplinary sculptor-painter Mars Simpson, photographer Forest Rain, painter-illustrator Adelle Pruitt, photographer-videographer Cassi Bleitz, interdisciplinary illustrator-sculptor Zoe Gumangan and more that pokes fun, expands perception and cuts away at expectations to reveal the depths of the inner self. It all kicks off with an opening reception on March 6 from 6-9 p.m.

B2K, BOW WOW

March 7 • 7 p.m. • Spectrum Center, 333 E Trade St. • $95-$203 • spectrumcentercharlotte.com

B2K might be best known for launching the solo career of Omarion, whose steamy slow jams topped the R&B/hip-hop charts in the early aughts. B2K was arguably the best urban boy band of its day, dropping the No. 1 single "Bump, Bump, Bump" in 2002. The iconic R&B group reunites on its 25th anniversary, co-headlining with former rap prodigy Bow Wow, who made his stunning debut at age 13. It's been 20 years since B2K and Bow Wow first shared the stage in 2002. The generous, nostalgic bill includes Jeremih, Waka Flocka, Amerie, Yung Joc, Crime Mob, Franchize Boyz and Pretty Ricky.

KIRAN DEOL

March 8 • 7 p.m. • The Comedy Club at Duckworths, 330 N. Tryon St. • $29-$41 • thecomedyclubatduckworths.com

"I dated a British guy," says Indian American comedian Kiran Deol. "You never know. Does he like me for me — or is it for the tea, and the spices and the trade routes that I bring to the table?" An Emmy-nominated filmmaker, who wrote, directed and starred in the dramatic short film *I Would Never* (2021) and won an International Documentary Association award for her debut doc about the Nepalese revolution *Woman Rebel* (2020), Deol also gained kudos for her starring role in the zombie apocalypse indie comedy *Didn't Die* (2025). She's created projects for HBO and Sundance in addition to performing funny and fearless stand-up.

BRIZB, BEDRUMOR, LUCID AMETHYST

March 11 • 9 p.m. • Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St. • $12 • snugrock.com

Charlotte's Vietnamese American pop-rock singer-songwriter BrizB launched her career with wistful lo-fi tunes like the limpid, dreamy "Saturn & Stars." In more recent work, like her February 2026 single "Heavy," BrizB's airy vocals thread through a violent soundscape delineated by winding and thrashing guitars to depict the moment when affairs of the heart seem like a scarred and moonlit battleground. Enfolding Lazuli Ortiz's feathered vocals into Ryan Mole's plangent coils of guitar, Greensboro's Bedrumor crafts yearning indie-rock gems like "Moon And I." With Aubria Battle's R&B-inflected vocals and multi-instrumentalist Aaron Armwood's retro electro-insect sounds, Greensboro duo Lucid Amethyst creates jazzy and soulful experimental pop.



Modern Moxie
Photo by Ryan Pitkin
3/6



'Carmina Burana'
Courtesy of Caroline Calouche & Co.
3/14-3/15

THE STRAY LIONS, CAMP CALICO, MARISSA MISSING, BEN BOURNE

March 12 • 8 p.m. • The Milestone, 3400 Tuckaseegee Road • $10 • themilestone.club

With chiming bent-note guitars, space invaders sound effects, sinuous bass, blown-out guitars and vulnerable everyman vocals, Roanoke, Virginia's The Stray Lions essay dynamic, finely crafted alt rockers like "Cigarettes and Coffee (Yeah Yeah Yeah)." Charlotte existential indie rockers Camp Calico employ rippling guitars and arching multi-octave vocals to create melodic alt rock that manages to sound both soul jazz and yacht rock adjacent. Stylistically rangey singer-songwriter Marissa Missing can evoke '90s pop rock ("I'm With the Band") or folk-inflected singer-songwriter confessionals ("Treadmarks On My Heart"). Cambria Iron Co. guitarist-keyboardist Ben Bourne plays a set of acoustic-guitar driven original tunes.

KEVIN SHANUS CHARITY RAFFLE AND PINBALL TOURNAMENT

March 14 • 1 p.m. • Super Abari Game Bar, 1015 Seigle Ave. • Free • superabarigamebar.com

Kevin Shanus did much to help the Charlotte area pinball community, organizing local tournaments and serving as the NC state pinball representative for the International Flipper Pinball Association (IFPA) for several years. Since Shanus' sudden passing in 2023 at age 44, Super Abari Game Bar has hosted an annual charity raffle and pinball tournament in his honor. The third iteration of the event raises funds for Mental Health America of Central Carolinas, with all donations going to the charity in Shanus' name. Tournament competitors will play for a 1990 Diner Williams Pinball Machine grand prize, plus other prizes. Registration is required.

'CARMINA BURANA'

March 14-15 • times vary • Halton Theater, 1206 Elizabeth Ave. • $36-$59 • carolinecalouche.org

In 1934, composer Carl Orff came across a collection of poems in a medieval manuscript called *Carmina Burana*. Orff set the poems, dealing with nature, love, lust, fate and fortune, to music that has become famous for its primal, rhythmic power, epic yet accessible sound, and iconic opening "O Fortuna." Now Caroline Calouche & Co. tackle this classic with a fusion of dance and circus arts, transforming the musical masterpiece into a captivating experience. Calouche, who has long dreamed of performing this work with a live orchestra and choir, will do just that as her organization celebrates 20 years with more than 130 performers sharing the stage in a monumental collaboration.

BRAXTON COOK

March 15 • 6 p.m. • Middle C Jazz, 300 S. Brevard St. • $46 • middlecjazz.com

Alto saxophonist, vocalist, songwriter, producer and composer Braxton Cook blends jazz, soul and alt-R&B into a distinctive rhythmic and melodic sound. Cutting his teeth on iconic Washington DC jazz venues at age 18, Cook went on to play with performers ranging from trumpeter Christian Scott to international pop star Rihanna. As a composer, Cook has collaborated with multi-instrumentalist, singer, composer and bandleader Jon Batiste on the Academy Award-winning Pixar film *Soul*. With its mix of soulful melodies, groove-driven rhythms and sophisticated improvisation, Cook's 2025 LP *Not Everyone Can Go*, evokes classics of the genre like Grover Washington Jr.'s *Winelight* and George Benson's *Breezin'*.


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An artist at work at a past Art, Beats + Lyrics event. Photo by Kat Goduco/AB+L

BRING BACK THE VIBES

Art, Beats + Lyrics makes anticipated return to Charlotte

BY KIA O. MOORE

The sound of the crowd hums in rhythm with the hip-hop beats permeating the space. The transformed nectar of Jack Daniels Tennessee Honey whiskey teases the taste buds of patrons who roam the room to see wall upon wall of artwork.

This is not your ordinary art exhibition; it's a multisensory overload of contemporary art and hip-hop culture. This is Jack Honey Art, Beats + Lyrics (AB+L) — an art and music exhibition where the gallery meets the concert while libations of Tennessee Honey whiskey flow, and for one night in March, it's back in Charlotte.

It's been 7 years since AB+L touched down in the Queen City. Jack Honey AB+L founder Jabari Graham recalled that the last time he brought the event to Charlotte was during NBA All-Star Weekend in 2019, the pre-COVID era.

Launched in Atlanta more than two decades ago before hitting the road to tour nationally, Graham calls Charlotte a "cornerstone for AB+L since day one," adding that the hiatus from our city only occurred so he and other organizers could "spread the love" to multiple markets.

"We try to spread it out," Graham told Queen City Nerve. "We go to some markets and then some markets we don't go to for the next three or so years. We try to spread the love the best way we can. And I think COVID had something to do with [the hiatus], too."

The return of Jack Honey AB+L to Charlotte is scheduled for March 28 at Blume Studios, the immersive venue opened by Blumenthal Arts in September 2024. The event will usher in the spring with music from headliner Premo Rice and artwork compiled by AB+L curator Dwayne "Dubelyoo" Wright.

"You can expect new, innovative installations with artists leveraging their creative talents to showcase not only the intersection between hip-hop music and visual art, but also using their craft to highlight 'The New Art History,'" Wright said in a release announcing the event's anticipated return to Charlotte.

What Art, Beats + Lyrics means to Charlotte

Jack Honey AB+L holds a special place in the hearts of the Black creative class of Charlotteans. For Dammit Wesley, artist, entertainer and owner of BLKMRKTCLT, attending AB+L was the first time he had ever been in an art space where everyone looked like him and the art looked like something he would create.

"It exposed a lot of people in our community to what has been missing from museums and galleries," he shared. "They were on the forefront of promoting and presenting Black art and Black artists in a way that was not seen in the academic and collegiate spaces ... It just sort of rewired my brain with how I would engage with the arts in general."

You can see and hear the influence of Jack Honey AB+L in Dammit Wesley's BLKMRKTCLT art studio in Camp North End. Bold colors underscore images of Black faces and bodies covering every inch of the wall. R&B music from the 1990s played in the background on a recent visit, warmly greeted by both Wesley and a neon sign that boldly states "Colored Only."

Wesley has displayed artwork at past AB+L exhibits, but this year he's been recruited to bring sonic art through music selection as one of the DJs scheduled to perform, which he called a "full-circle moment."

"I did not consider engaging with DJ culture until I went to Art, Beats + Lyrics," he recalled. "Not too long after that I was able to see DJ Jazzy Jeff in a Red Bull Freestyle Experience. That's when I pivoted from traditional fine art into finding ways I could incorporate fine art into nightlife."

If Charlotte's Black creatives have a special appreciation for AB+L, the feeling from its organizers is mutual. Graham shared that Charlotte was the first spot outside of Atlanta where they took the show.

The event was held at CenterStage on North Davidson Street, now home to Urban District Market.

"The reception that we got was amazing," he recalled. "Being away from Atlanta, and doing it outside of Atlanta for another city and it being a good reception was reassuring that we were doing something pretty dope. I'm glad that we can come back and do it again."

Wright added, "Charlotte was a proof of concept ... Once we did it in Charlotte, that gave everybody the green light to say, 'Hey, this is something that we can do in other markets.'"

Charlotte-based mixed media artist, metalsmith, and Su Casa founder Jasiatic Usher has attended multiple AB+L events in both Atlanta and Charlotte. She pointed out that, with so many people moving into the Charlotte market in any given year, so many will have a chance to experience AB+L for the first time.

"Even though Jack Honey Art, Beats + Lyrics is a travelling show and they are in each city, there's so many people that are hitting me up that never heard of it," she said. "They've never experienced it. So I'm just looking forward to seeing what and who it brings together, and what that looks like now compared to the early 2000s."

AB+L has made stops in most major American cities since its founding in 2004, visiting 14 on its 20th anniversary tour in 2024 alone. Over that time, the vibes remain the same.

Curating a vibe

Eric Ndelo, creative director and owner of global streetwear brand DRC ApeParel, described Jack Honey AB+L as "an open air art market where there's just crazy, good energy in the building because everyone is there for the artwork."

He continued, "It has just so much good art vibes, and everyone is dressed to the nines. There are great art activations ... To me it's a nice spiritual vibe."

Ndelo has caught the exhibition in Charlotte, Greensboro and Miami, recalling the "high vibrational, electric vibe every single time."

That vibe and energy comes from the curation of artists, both visual and musical, who participate in each event.

Usher has had her work displayed at Jack Honey AB+L in the past and said the experience "shifted" the way she views and experiences art.

"I just remember going in early to drop off work and just being amazed at how expansive and colourful and impactful the talent among all the artists was," she said. "Then going to the actual show and just being, I guess I'd say, overwhelmed by the talent of artists."

There are a limited number of venues that can host an AB+L show in Charlotte, so the addition of Blume Studios since the event's last stop in our city created a fortuitous opportunity.

Bree Stallings, director of artistic experiences



Curator Dwayne 'Dubelyoo' Wright Photo by Diwang Valdez



AB+L founder Jabari Graham (left) with Dwayne 'Dubelyoo' Wright Photo by Jorge Sigala

at Blumenthal Arts, said Blume Studios offered a mix of two things: "The freedom of an immersive experience in a wide open space, but also supported by our theater, light and technology."

Patrons can expect to come across interactive sculptures both inside and outside the warehouse space. They will be able to freely roam the space and visit multiple bars. There will be a main stage and multiple art activations.

Blume Studios is a creative hub located in the budding Iron District, located on South Clarkson Street at West Morehead Street, adjacent to Bank of America Stadium. Stallings said Blume Studios staffers jokingly call the venue "Tenant Zero" since they are the first to be set up in the location.

Once more join, the area will effectively become a bridge between Uptown, the Wesley Heights neighborhood in west Charlotte and the northwestern tip of South End.

"People drove past it for so many years, even though it was in such a popular area, right off of Morehead, not many people knew what it was. So we're just excited that we've now invited a couple hundred thousand folks into that neighborhood," she said, referring to the programming held there over its first 18 months.

"We're honored to be the first ones to kind of help shape the audience's behavior for how they'll come to experience that space."

Jack Honey AB+L returning to Charlotte is like a "homecoming," said Wesley.

For Usher, just like a homecoming event, it brings out family.

"For me, Jack Honey AB+L means family. It means a gathering space for creative folks really throughout the Black Southern US. So, when I would go to AB+L, I would see all of my people from Atlanta and just kind of throughout the Southeast.

"We're all in the space together showing artwork or looking at each other's artwork throughout this area," she continued. "So for me, it means family, connection and just magic in so many ways."

Honoring the city as a touring show

As curator, Wright ensures that there are no white walls at the show; everything is turned up, from the music to the visuals.

"The artwork is set up so that the walls have murals on them in the background because we want the walls to enhance the viewing experience," Wright told Queen City Nerve. "We have large 8-foot-by-8-foot light boxes, and while that's going on the music is steadily going."

The art show culminates with a musical performance that the DJs build up to throughout the evening.

He continued, "It's increasing as the evening goes on, and it culminates with a performer, a big performance." Based out of Prince George's County, Maryland, this year's headliner Premo Rice is known for blending hip-hop, soul and funk.

"Charlotte has been a cornerstone for AB+L since day one," said Graham upon announcing the return. "Bringing Premo Rice to Blume Studios, surrounded by dope visual art, feels like the perfect way to honor Charlotte's influence on our culture."

AB+L is a national brand that brings in a local appeal by tapping into the creative ecosystem of each market that they visit, Ndelo pointed out.

"It was a huge venue with hundreds and hundreds of people there to observe the art," he recalled of his Charlotte experience. "And, to be able to see some of my homeboys like Marcus Kiser and God City to have their pieces in the Art, Beats + Lyrics. It felt like we made it."

He said the return of AB+L to Charlotte offers a spotlight on the city, showing how it has grown since the last event in 2019. It is also another opportunity for the creative community of Charlotte to "come out and be fly" while "gathering to showcase how cool and dope we are," he said.

When it comes down to it, Jack Honey Art, Beats + Lyrics is something that a creative individual, art collector or nightlife enthusiast can look forward to.

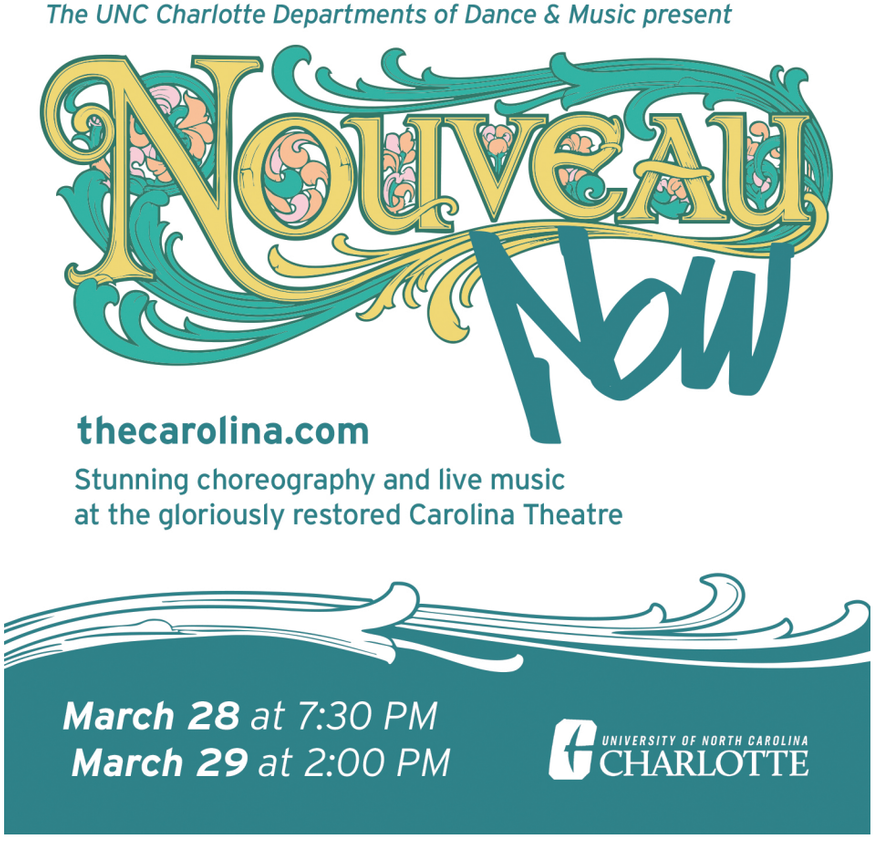
"For me personally, there were two big things that I looked forward to in Charlotte when I was younger: CIAA was definitely one, and two, Art, Beats + Lyrics without fail," said Wesley. "I knew every September or October, AB+L was going to be here and I would make plans for it to happen."

On the second weekend of spring this year, it's time to make plans again.

Jack Honey Arts, Beats + Lyrics will take place on March 28, 7 p.m.-midnight, at Blume Studios, 904 Post St. Attendance is free but RSVP is required, with limited capacity. Must be 21 or older with a valid ID. RSVP and/or find more info at jackhoneyabl.com.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM





SPRING GUIDE
2026



The 'Tawba Walk Arts & Music Festival is scheduled for April 25. Photo courtesy of TWAMF

Spring Guide 2026
Let's take this outside

BY QUEEN CITY NERVE STAFF

The weather is warming up and it's time to get outside again, so we've compiled our annual list of spring events happening around the Queen City to help you do just that.

SPORTS

CHARLOTTE FC
Bank of America Stadium, 800 S. Mint St.; charlottefootballclub.com

March 21 vs. New York Red Bulls
April 4 vs. Philadelphia Union
April 11 vs. Nashville SC
May 9 vs. FC Cincinnati
May 13 vs. New York City FC
May 16 vs. Toronto FC
May 23 vs. New England Revolution

CHARLOTTE INDEPENDENCE
American Legion Memorial Stadium, 1218 Armory Drive; charlotteindependence.com

March 27 vs. Spokane Velocity FC
May 6 vs. Athletic Club Boise
May 15 vs. Pittsburgh Riverhounds SC
June 10 vs. Union Omaha

CAROLINA ASCENT FC
American Legion Memorial Stadium, 1218 Armory Drive; carolinaascent.com

March 28 vs. Fort Lauderdale FC
April 11 vs. Lexington SC
May 16 vs. Sporting JAX

CHARLOTTE KNIGHTS
Truist Field, 424 W. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.; milb.com/charlotte-knights

March 27-29 vs. Durham Bulls
April 7-12 vs. Memphis Redbirds
April 21-26 vs. Nashville Sounds
April 28-May 3 vs. Gwinnett Stripers
May 12-17 vs. Norfolk Tides
May 26-May 31 vs. Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp
June 9-14 vs. Oklahoma City Comets

COLLEGE BASEBALL AT TRUIST FIELD
Truist Field, 424 W. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.; milb.com/charlotte-knights/events/collegiatebaseballseries
March 24: University of South Carolina vs. UNC Chapel Hill
April 1: Wake Forest vs. Clemson
April 14: UNC Charlotte vs. Clemson

CHARLOTTE HORNETS
Spectrum Center, 333 E. Trade St.; nba.com/hornets

March 21 vs. Memphis Grizzlies
March 24 vs. Sacramento Kings
March 26 vs. New York Knicks
March 28 vs. Philadelphia 76ers
March 29 vs. Boston Celtics
April 2 vs. Phoenix Suns
April 3 vs. Indiana Pacers
April 10 vs. Detroit Pistons

CHARLOTTE MOTOR SPEEDWAY
5555 Concord Pkwy. S; charlottemotorspeedway.com

April 9-11: Charlotte AutoFair/Heritage Invitational
April 24-26: NHRA Four-Wide Nationals
May 22: NC Education Lottery 200
May 23: Charbroil 300
May 24: Coca-Cola 600

TRUIST CHAMPIONSHIP
Formerly the Wells Fargo Championship, this event returns to Charlotte this year, with the top names in golf battling it out over the week as Sepp Straka defends his title.
More: $52 and up; May 7-10, times vary; Quail Hollow Club, 3700 Gleneagles Road; pgatour.com

BANANA BALL
While the famed Savannah Bananas won't be returning to Charlotte this year, fellow Banana Ballers the Texas Tailgaters and Firefighters without a home will square off at Truist.
More: Tickets TBD; June 4, time TBD; Truist Field, 424 W. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.; bananaball.com

ARTS, CULTURE, RETAIL

QUEEN CHARLOTTE CARNIVAL
Say hello to that fresh spring air with thrilling rides, carnival games, food, live performances and more entertainment.
More: $8-$13; March 12-22, times vary; Route 29 Pavilion; 5650 Sandusky Blvd. Concord; queencharlottecarnival.com

MAXIMUM AIR
An Air Max Day celebration where style meets sole. This culture-forward experience will honor one of the most iconic sneaker franchises of all time, bringing together sneakers, fashion and community.
More: Free with RSVP; March 26, 4-9 p.m.; Blume Studios; 904 Post St.; posh.vip/e/maximum-air

NO MAN'S LAND FESTIVAL
Celebrate all women with hands-on workshops, breakout sessions, and photo ops while supporting small women-owned businesses based in Charlotte.
More: Free; March 21, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Camden Road; nomanslandclt.com

SOUTH END SPRING FLING
Live music, vendor market, Easter egg hunts, face paint, bounce houses and more at this family-friendly event.
More: Free; March 22, noon-2 p.m.; Pritchard at South End; 1117 South Blvd.; tinyurl.com/SESpringFling26



The Charlotte Knights start their season at home on March 27. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Knights



Esrawe + Cadena's 'Los Trompos' installation at Charlotte SHOUT! Photo courtesy of Charlotte SHOUT!

ART, BEATS + LYRICS

Producer and rapper Premo Rice performs alongside a curated lineup of visual artists and DJs, transforming one of the city's newest venues into a multisensory gallery-meets-concert experience.
More: Free with RSVP; March 28, 7 p.m.-midnight; Blume Studios; 904 Post St.; jackhoneyabl.com

CHARLOTTE SHOUT!

Charlotte SHOUT! is back, showcasing local artists, musicians, dancers, poets, photographers, chefs and more with interactive installations and panels.
More: Free; April 3-19; times vary; locations vary; charlotteshout.com

CHARLOTTE IDEAS FESTIVAL

The Charlotte Ideas Festival is a celebration of curiosity, connection, and imagination — bringing together thinkers, creators, and community members to explore ideas worth sharing.
More: April 9-14, times vary; locations vary; thecharlottecenter.org

FESTIVAL OF INDIA

Experience Indian art cuisine, culture and community with dance performances, street food, a marketplace, saree draping, henna tattoos and a visual art gallery.
More: Free; April 11, noon-6 p.m.; Stumptown Park; 120 South Trade St., Matthews; iacofcarolinas.org

LOCH NORMAN HIGHLAND GAMES AND SCOTTISH FESTIVAL

On the 32nd anniversary of this traditional Scottish festival, attendees can enjoy traditional Scottish music and dance performances, athletic competitions, cultural demonstrations, Scottish food trucks, Celtic vendors, historical reenactments, and educational presentations about Scottish history and culture.
More: $12; April 18-19, times vary; Historic Rural Hill, 4431 Neck Road, Huntersville; lochnorman.com

CAROLINA TINY HOUSE FESTIVAL

Discover the world of tiny houses to see innovative designs, creative solutions and sustainable living.
More: Free to $53; June 5-7, times vary; Cabarrus Arena & Events Center, 4751 State Hwy 49, Concord; tinyhousefest.org

'TAWBA WALK ARTS & MUSIC FESTIVAL

See over 100 local artists and vendors, drink beers from local craft breweries, eat good food, participate in giveaways and more.
More: Free; April 25, 2-8 p.m.; Downtown Cornelius; tawbawalk.com

GARIBALDI FESTIVAL

Be part of Charlotte's vibrant art community and saturate yourself with creativity, culture, expression, craftsmanship and more. Walk around to see the open-air gallery, chalk art and artisan vendors to the sounds of live music.
More: Free; April 25, noon-7 p.m.; Stowe Park, 24 S. Main St., Belmont; downtownbelmont.org

BOOM CHARLOTTE

The ninth annual BOOM Charlotte arts festival brings its multifaceted and immersive experience to a new home in University City. Attendees will be met with an eclectic mix of dance, theatre, poetry, visual art, film and more with free and ticketed performances taking place throughout the weekend.
More: Prices vary; May 1-3, times vary; The Shoppes at University Place, 8931 JM Keynes Drive; boomcharlotte.org

KINGS DRIVE ART WALK

This spring counterpart to the popular Festival in the Park returns after a construction project shut it down for some time.
More: Free; May 2-3, 11 a.m.; South Kings Drive, Midtown; boomcharlotte.org

CAROLINA CLAY MATTERS POTTERY FESTIVAL

Experience the work of more than 80 local potters alongside food vendors, flowers, live music and more.
More: Free; May 9, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Ford Building, Camp North End, 1774 Statesville Avenue; carolinaclaymatters.org

REEL OUT CHARLOTTE

See stories written and made by those within the LGBTQ+ community through independent film at a local scale.
More: Prices TBD; May 15-17; times vary; The Independent Picture House; 4237 Raleigh St.; charlottepride.org/reelout

OUTDOOR WELLNESS

WALKS, RUNS & RACES

March 21: Charlotte Dog Jog
March 21: Run Jen Run 5K
March 21: 3-2-1 Dash for Down Syndrome 5K & Fun Run
March 28: Communication Counts 5K, Fun Run, Kids Dash & Mascot Race
April 4-5: Charlotte Spartan Event Weekend
April 11: Five Points 5K
April 25: PurpleStride Charlotte
April 25: Water for People 5K
April 26: Girls on the Run Greater 5K Celebration
April 29: Corporate FunRun 5K
May 17: Mental Health Matters 5K & Festival
May 30: NoDa 5K
June 12: Healthy Achievement 5K

FLOW STATE: A SPRING WELLNESS KICKOFF

This community gathering is designed to reconnect you to movement, recovery and sustainable wellness — not perfection.
More: $15-$20; March 28, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m.; NoDa Brewing Co., 150 W. 32nd St.; posh.vip/e/flow-state-3

USNWC TUCK FEST

This festival celebrates all outdoor lifestyles with cash prize competitions, exhibitions, demos and live music.
More: Prices vary; April 24-26, times vary; US National White Water Center; 5000 Whitewater Center Parkway; tuckfest.whitewater.org

ASC GREENWAY EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

Everyone receives free entrance to the Anne Springs Close Greenway on Earth Day weekend to enjoy time in nature by camping out, taking part in the bass-fishing tournament, check out the recycled art contest or visit the Earth Day Community Village expo.
More: Free; April 17-19, times vary; Anne Springs Close Greenway, 2573 Lake Haigler Drive, Fort Mill, SC; ascgreenway.org

CHARLOTTE EARTH DAY

Charlotte's largest annual Earth Day celebration brings together community members to celebrate the environment, engage families with educational activities, foster lifelong connections with nature and connect attendees with local environmentally conscious organizations and businesses.
More: Free; April 11, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; Independent Picture House, 4237 Raleigh St.; charlotteearthday.com

FOOD & DRINK

SAVOR CHARLOTTE

Indulge in hand-crafted food from talented chefs during hands-on classes or by ordering from exclusive menus.
More: Prices vary; March 11-28, times vary; locations vary; charlottesgotalot.com/savor

CHARLOTTE BREWFEST

Sample unlimited beer made by over 25 craft breweries while listening to live music, playing games and participating in a raffle drawing.
More: $24 and up; April 4, 1-4 p.m.; South End Station, 1435 South Tryon Street; tinyurl.com/CLTBrewfest26

STREATS UNCORKED

Kick off the coming Charlotte StrEATs Festival with this walk-around tasting experience celebrating North Carolina's thriving wine industry.
More: $71; April 3, 6-9 p.m.; Wells Fargo Atrium, 301 S. Tryon St.; cltstreatsfestival.com/uncorked

CHARLOTTE STREATS FESTIVAL

Experience options from the city's top culinary vendors, a neighborhood cook-off, vendor market, cocktail demonstrations, tastings and cooking demonstrations.
More: Free; April 12, noon-4 p.m.; First Ward Park, 301 E. 7th St.; cltstreatsfestival.com

UPTOWN FARMER'S MARKET: SPRING MARKET

Buy local produce and home-grown food from farmers.
More: Free to attend; April 11 through the end of spring, Saturdays, 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; 300 S. Davidson St; uptownfarmersmarket.com

SOUTH CAROLINA STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

This outdoor venture is jam-packed with activities: corn hole, a car show, a strawberry-eating contest, rides, vendors, food trucks, live entertainment, music and more.
More: Free; May 1-2, times vary; Walter Elisha Park, 345 N. White Street, Fort Mill, SC; scstrawberryfestival.com

JAPAN FEST

Urban District Market's annual celebration of Japanese culture includes matsuri games, music, food and drinks, origami, a cosplay contest, martial arts and a karaoke contest.
More: Free; May 16-17; noon-9 p.m.; Urban District Market; 2315 North Davidson St.; udmmilldistrict.com/japan-fest

CHEERWINE FESTIVAL
The South's most treasured possession is Cheerwine, a cherry soda created just up the road in Salisbury. After celebrating its 100th birthday in 2017, the city vowed to make the festival an annual tradition and has since kept its promise.
More: Free; May 16, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Main Street, downtown Salisbury; cheerwinefest.com

BEER, BOURBON, & BBQ FESTIVAL
This festival is every Southerner's favorite day, filled with booze, bacon, biscuits, bluegrass and more. Play ping pong, listen to seminars, dance to rock and blues music and shop with local vendors.
More: $25 and up; May 9, noon-6 p.m.; Ballantyne's Backyard; 11611 N. Community House Road; charlotte.beerandbourbon.com

LIVE MUSIC

TRULIANT AMPHITHEATER
707 Pavilion Blvd., truliantamp.com

April 17: Mt. Joy
April 25: Peso Pluma, Tito Double P & Friends
May 7: Riley Green
May 9: Kid Rock
May 13: Kid Cudi
May 14: Godsmack
May 16: Dave Matthews Band
May 18: Sting
May 20: Pitbull w/ Lil Jon
May 30: Hank Williams Jr.
May 31: MGK
June 6: The Black Crowes and Whiskey Myers
June 16: Rüfüs Du Sol
June 18: Evanescence

SKYLA CREDIT UNION AMPHITHEATRE
1000 NC Music Factory Blvd., skylacuamp.com

April 15: Bush
May 7: Bilmuri
May 15: Ole 60
May 31: Young the Giant
June 4: Yungblud
June 5: Sam Barber
June 6: Ari Lennox
June 9: Yellowcard
June 15: Khalid
June 18: Wale & Smino

BANK OF AMERICA STADIUM
800 S. Mint St., bankofamericastadium.com

April 18: Zach Bryan
April 29: Bruno Mars
June 9: Post Malone & Jelly Roll
June 20: Chris Stapleton's All-American Road Show

THE AMP BALLANTYNE
11115 Upper Ave., ampballantyne.com

April 11: The Spring Mix
April 18: Gov't Mule
May 9: Yacht Rock Revue
June 16: Claypool Gold
June 19: The String Cheese Incident
June 20: The Human League

THE MUSIC YARD AT SOUTHBOUND
2433 South Blvd., eatsouthbound.com/the-music-yard

March 21: Girls Room
March 27: Shakedown Street: A Night of Grateful Dead
April 3: Derrick Carter
April 4: SUNDREAM: Indie Dance Party
April 11: KinAhau
April 18: J Worra
April 24: Of Good Nature
April 25: Krooked Kings w/ Night Cap
May 1: Masane x Qrion
May 29: Fulton Lee
June 5: Forester

MATTHEWS SUMMERFEST
This festival formerly known as Beach Fest now features a wider range of musical genres along with shag dancing, carnival rides, food vendors, craft beer and more.
More: Free; May 8-9, times vary; Stumptown Park, 120 S.Trade St., Matthews; tinyurl.com/MatthewsSummerfest2026

CORNELIUS JAZZ FESTIVAL
Get swept away by the blues and tunes of local jazz bands from Cornelius and the greater Charlotte area with food trucks, craft beer, local vendors and more.
More: Free; May 16, 6-10 p.m.; Smithville Park, 17738 W. Catawba Ave.; tinyurl.com/CorneliusJazzFest26



This year's Cheerwine Festival is scheduled for May 16. Photo courtesy of Cheerwine Festival



Charlotte Symphony Orchestra
MOVIE SERIES

Disney CONCERTS

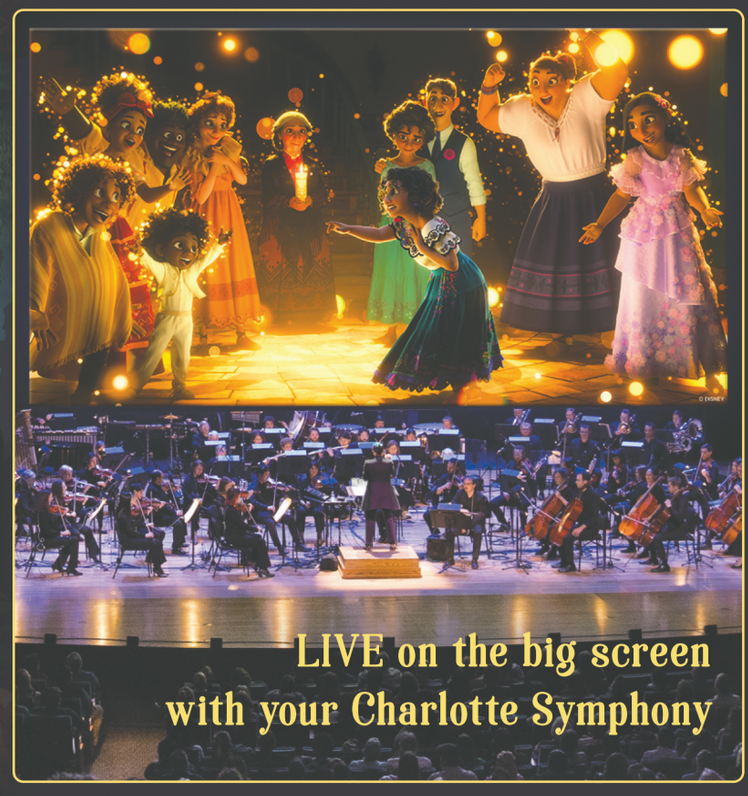


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Lamar will perform at Petra's on March 20. Photo by Bobby Kerns

THE STARS AREN'T ENOUGH

Lamar weaves a spell of heart and soul with Moonseeker trilogy

BY PAT MORAN

Screeching tires cut through the sounds of onrushing traffic before we hear the sudden crash of crumpled steel and breaking glass. A few seconds of silence follow. Then Lamar's husky whisper emerges amid the chirping of crickets: "*In shadows cast by silver light/ A wonder roams through the night/ With dreams as vast as the starlit sea/ The moonseeker longs to be free...*"

In this dramatic fashion, "The Moonseeker" opens Lamar's trilogy of the same name, three albums tracing the artist's life through autobiography, metaphor and mysticism. Lamar calls the Moonseeker trilogy's ethereal, soulful music "third-person nonfiction," but its emotive, mythic storytelling transcends the concept of self.

Moonseeker traces a trip through the cosmos that fosters a greater appreciation of life — Lamar's, yours, someone you love, or possibly someone you've yet to love. So why does it open with a shuddering impact?

"I never experienced a car crash," Lamar says. "It's a kind of catalyst, [and] it felt like it had to happen."

He's referring not to a literal car wreck that he survived but a personal inflection point, the moment he pivoted from a career as a ballet dancer to a singer-songwriter — a gifted vocalist whose messages grow continually richer and deeper.

"The Moonseeker" is the kind of track an artist usually uses to kick off a record, much less a trio of connected albums, but Lamar is not a standard singer-songwriter. With a voice that seamlessly ascends from a fine-grained tenor to a vertiginous falsetto, he delivers lyrics both mystical and autobiographical, universal and personal.

Lamar brings his soulful dance-inflected alternative R&B to Petra's on March 20. The show is the first stop on his Moonseeker: Seek the Moon tour, the second leg and continuation of his 2025 Moonseeker tour.

Born Aaron Lamar Atkins to a biracial family, Lamar grew up in low-income housing in Lancaster, South Carolina. Both his mother and sister were dancers, and Lamar fell in love with dancing and singing at 6 years old, devising and directing skits with his cousins.

'[Dancing] pushed me forward first," he says. "I never had the guts to let people know I really wanted to be a singer."

Lamar attended the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts & Humanities in Greenville, where he trained in conservatory-style dance. At the same time, Lamar had been posting his singing and nascent songwriting on MySpace. At age 17, he was scouted by an A&R man with Arista Records and signed to a development deal. When the agent who signed Lamar was fired, Lamar was let go. He went back to what he knew, accepting a dance contract with Ballet Savannah.

"I went into my shell and put being a singer on the back burner," he says.

When the ballet company subsequently went bankrupt, Lamar decamped to New York.

"Me being gay, being a dancer [and] coming from humble beginnings, I couldn't go back to Lancaster," Lamar says.

In New York, Lamar was offered a contract with Ballet Hispanico, where he danced as Aaron Atkins. Then he encountered the metaphoric car crash/ catalyst he references in "The Moonseeker."

"All of a sudden it was like this hard stop in my head," Lamar remembers.

He decided to leave Ballet Hispanico and launched his own company, Ballet Inc., in 2012. He has served as the company's artistic director since its inception. In 2017, the state of New York awarded Ballet Inc. The Multicultural Award of Excellence.

Around the time of the company's launch, Lamar acknowledged that his love of music and his urge to sing had never really vacated his heart, but it took an evening out singing karaoke in a Hell's Kitchen bar to spark the next phase of his career.

A Roc Nation A&R agent saw Lamar's karaoke performance and approached him.

"It felt like this fire inside of me was rekindled," Lamar says.

He realized his future would hold more than being a ballet dancer. This time, when contract talks came up, Lamar was more discerning. He signed a distribution deal with Jay-Z's Roc Nation, where he controls his music and his masters as an independent artist.

In addition, he also set up an LLC, Lamar Music, in 2021, which sends his music out through independent digital music distribution service DistroKid.

Discovering you are loved

By the end of 2019, Lamar was back in Charlotte, though his work with Ballet Inc. brings him back to NYC and other cities where the troupe may be touring. Living in Ballantyne, he started posting cover songs online to change people's perceptions of him from a dancer to a singer. He saved enough money to go into the since-closed Studio Evolution in Charlotte to record his debut single as a singer-songwriter "Moonlight."

"The track was inspired by a night out in New York where I had met this guy and we had an amazing night," Lamar says. "Then he got in a cab and I never saw him again."

With romantic, wistful lyrics that evoke the moment when your guard is down and your heart is open, the song recaptures that moment: "*I remember your face in the moonlight/ As we said our goodbyes/ I went back to me/ But I still remember...*"

When Lamar initially recorded the tune and posted it on TikTok, it was a lo-fi slow burner. He took it to Studio Evolution in 2022 just as the facility was beginning to shut down and started working with Eric Carter.

"We were just trying to get the song as close as possible to how [Lamar] envisioned it," Carter says.

It soon became clear that the collaboration would be much more than a one-off project. When Carter suggested a tempo change, the song came together. Lamar pulled up a more rhythmic track and sang the lyrics to that beat. "Moonlight" became an irresistible electronic dance song. It all came together on the first take.

"I was learning how to be a producer and manage an artist.," Carter offers. "I always wanted that experience, and I'm grateful it happened. [Lamar] taught me how to truly collaborate with an artist."

Carter has continued to collaborate with Lamar, engineering all his subsequent recordings. Those include two 2023 singles, the ebullient self-affirmation "Evermore" and the bright and dancey "Brand New Day."



Lamar (bottom) with his family as a young child. Photo courtesy of Lamar

"It's very uplifting, like 'Get up, get out there, get it,'" Lamar says of the latter track. "When you come from humble beginnings ... and have nothing to come back to, it's a mindset that's stimulating to an artist."

Both "Evermore" and "Brand New Day" appear on Lamar's *You Are Loved A-Side*, a five-song EP that dropped in September 2023.

Already, Lamar was thinking beyond individual songs to song cycles, serial EPs and albums that develop and convey concepts. *You Are Loved*'s concept is right in the title, Lamar insists.

"I wanted to convey the message that 'You are loved,'" he says. "I felt like it was a message to myself. I've been through it, [and] these are the songs that helped me get through it."

The concept of navigating love and relationships that fuels *You Are Loved A-Side* is continued by Lamar's follow-up six-song EP *You Are Loved B-Side*, released in January 2024.

Lamar, who draws from an eclectic range of musical inspiration inspired by his mixed Nigerian-Scottish ancestry, says the *B-Side* collection differs from its forebear.

The *A-Side* EP is more dance-pop, even verging on adult contemporary in tracks like the limpid and lyrical "Love You Much." In contrast, the *B-Side* EP is inspired by 1990s R&B artists like SWV and Escape.

"The *A-Side* is like me being happy in love and all of those things that come along with that feeling," Lamar says. "The *B-Side* is when you get cheated on, when life feels like shit."

A two-EP project examining the byways and crossed circuits of love might seem an ambitious enough undertaking for any artist, but Lamar was not finished with overarching concepts.

When he had previously crafted songs exploring themes of love, loss and self-reflection, Lamar began composing and planning a unique song and sound cycle that creates connections between the listener and the cosmos, a sonic experience both personal and otherworldly: The Moonseeker trilogy.

Lamar embraced the first LP of the cycle, the seven-song *Moonseeker I*, as an opportunity to display his versatility.

In addition to the experimental spoken-word-meets-soundscape title track, *Moonseeker I* makes space for tunes like "Seek the Moon," where Lamar's caressing enfolding vocal croons: "*I hear the sands of time/ In the middle of the night/ No more shadows/ No more fears...*"

Moonseeking collaborators

In the run up to the trilogy, Lamar collaborated with musician-dancer-DJ Chris Washington on the 2024 single "You and I." Washington recorded the single as DJ BLKARTS and currently creates as Vixxen.

"What really made me want to collaborate on something fun and pop-driven was watching Lamar take the stage and fully live in his truth," Vixxen says. "There was something so magnetic and unapologetic about it. You could tell he wasn't just performing, he was owning the moment."

"You and I" appears on *Moonseeker II*, released in January 2025. The nine-track medial chapter of Lamar's ethereal musical vision remains rooted in alt-R&B but pushes boundaries with its cosmic production and emotional storytelling.



Lamar performs at Charlotte Pride. Courtesy of CLT Pride

Tracks like the skirling, mysterious "Pluto Love" suggest an otherworldly yet tactile collaboration between Prince and Smokey Robinson.

By early 2025, Saad Howard, who creates as Daas, had joined Lamar's team as a creative consultant.

"I was excited to begin collaboration with Lamar ... because he had an ambitious, cinematic vision for R&B that felt fresh," Daas says. "He wasn't interested in following trends; he wanted to experiment. He moves quickly because he's so driven and that ambition creates momentum."

In March 2025, the tropicalia-tinged, rhythmic "Pisces Groove" served as a foretaste of the 10-track *Moonseeker III* LP. The song grew from a groove Lamar heard in his head, and his vulnerable, surrealistic lyrics reflect his point of view as a Pisces man.

"Being more sensitive emotionally — it's not the sort of adjective a lot of people use to describe a male," he says. "In today's age we're starting to open up to what new adjective is okay for a cis man. Who cares that you're gay? Who cares that you're whatever? It's the emotions that are connecting with other humans that are most important."

In addition to "Pisces Groove," *Moonseeker III* also includes one of Lamar's more experimental interludes, the moody, mysterious and jazzy "Batman & Robin." While the Moonseeker trilogy draws inspirations from the stars, it's also relatable and universal, with tunes about breakups and feelings of abandonment.

The albums' experimental transition pieces in particular invite the listener into Lamar's thought processes.

'It's like, this is in my head," Lamar offers. 'If you want to get to know me, you listen to the Moonseeker trilogy."

With music that contains cinematic concepts and imagery like a car crash signaling a life change or a wanderer among the stars spread across the sky, it's not surprising that

Lamar is developing a series of short films to tie in with *Moonseeker I*.

Taking a cue from the horror film franchises like Scream and Halloween that Lamar loves, the project will be a trilogy, consisting of three short films that draw visual inspiration from avant-garde cinema.

Directed by Lamar's friend Robert Grant, a model-turned-photographer/videographer baed in NYC, and produced by Charlotte's Bobby Kerns Productions, the three films will interpret the entire *Moonseeker I* album. The first installment is scheduled to release in the summer.

"The short films are intended to give a deeper understanding [of Moonseeker]," Lamar maintains. "Although [they will] leave room for introspection."

In the meantime, Lamar continues to perform live. Hot off of playing the main stages at Pride in the Park Charlotte, Famously Hot SC Pride in Columbia and Charlotte Pride in 2025, Lamar will take his Moonseeker: Seek the Moon tour to NYC's Delancey on April 30.

"Lamar has such a sharp eye for stage design and presence," Vixxen says. "The way he thinks about the full experience — not just the song but the visual and the energy."

"He's constantly learning how to refine his vision into something tangible that will grow his audience and continue to push R&B music forward," adds Dass, who says Lamar is "totally deserving" of the recognition he's begun to receive in the Charlotte music scene that he loves so much.

Lamar's longtime engineer Carter says his collaborator's superpower is vision and perseverance.

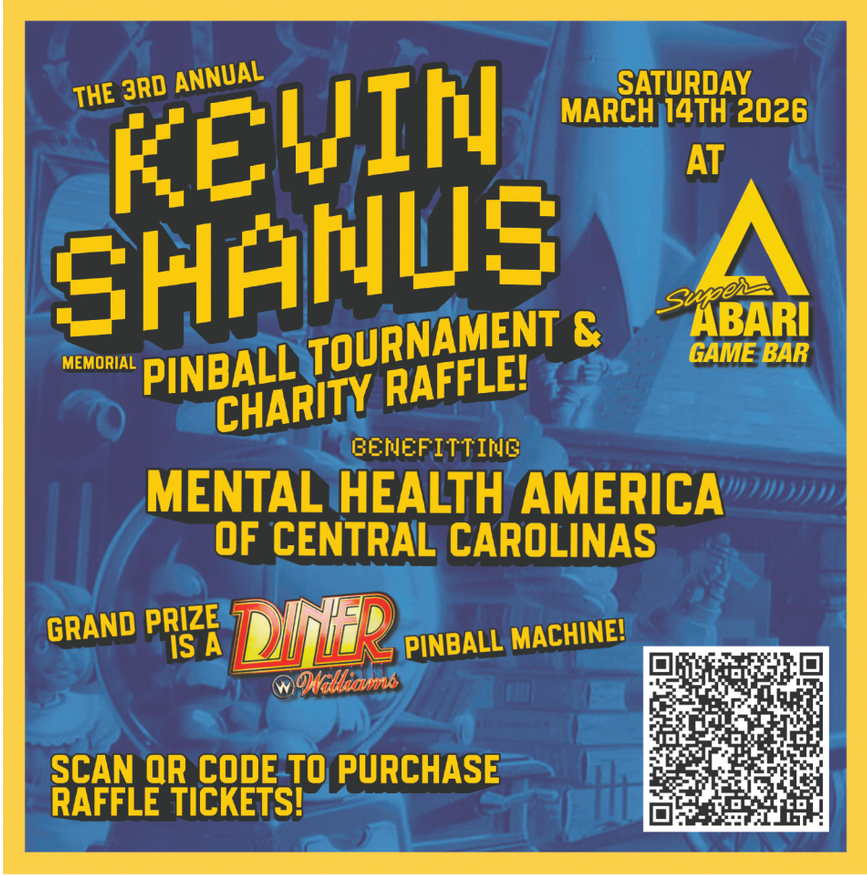
"He fully embodies himself as Lamar the artist," Carter maintains. "He's been doing shows, putting himself out there, and growing as a person and an artist."

As Lamar has expanded his artistic palette from dancer to moonseeking music-maker to captivating stage performer and now to outré filmmaker, he keeps his message to listeners and showgoers direct yet deep. He hopes people experiencing his cosmic but down-to-earth music feel love — but not just as a warm and fuzzy word.

"I want people to embrace the feeling of love," Lamar insists. "Whether that takes you to a melancholy space, or [a] robust space of abundance and happiness."

It's not a surprising wish for a soulful, mystical R&B artist who finds a needed course correction in a metaphorical car crash, or a human connection among the moon and the stars.

PMORAN@QCNERVE.COM



SOUNDWAVE

WEDNESDAY MAR. 4

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Kat & the Hurricane w/ Daisy & the Dead Pines, Tail Light Rebellion, January Knife (The Milestone)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Lotus (Neighborhood Theatre)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Low Groves w/ Jackson Harden, Dom Dixon (Evening Muse)
Josh Daniel & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
NC Bluegrass Jam Night (Birdsong Brewing)
LATIN/WORLD
IL Divo (Ovens Auditorium)
JAZZ/BLUES
Albert Castiglia (Middle C Jazz)
Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
The Mad Tea Party w/ Group Therapy, STEV, Wilde Green (Snug Harbor)
COVER BANDS
Eternally Grateful (Comet Grill)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY MAR. 5

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
DJ NPC w/ Mozart's Bird, Ashley!, Sad and Pathetic (The Milestone)
Robert Jon & the Wreck w/ Sam Morrow (Neighborhood Theatre)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Bedroom Division w/ William Hinson (Evening Muse)
Twin Flame: DJ Maal & DJ She's A+ (Petra's)
JAZZ/BLUES
Shana Blake (Eighty Eights)
Jarrod Lawson (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Jade Moore (Comet Grill)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Matisyahu (Booth Playhouse)
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

FRIDAY MAR. 6

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Five Door Sedan w/ Brown Oak Assembly (Evening Muse)
Wolves & Wolves & Wolves & Wolves w/ Shehehe, South Side Punx, A Life Worth Taking, Aloha Broha (The Milestone)
Mo Lowda & the Humble (Neighborhood Theatre)
Cave Shine w/ Modern Moxie, Redwood Sleeper (Petra's)
Home For The Day w/ Brenden Starr (The Rooster)
Destructo Disk w/ Reveri3, Those Dogs (Snug Harbor)
Ottoman Hogs w/ Untethered Soul, Tiny City (Starlight on 22nd)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
The Wood Brothers (Carolina Theatre)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Boots 'n Beats (Amos' Southend)
Desert Dwellers (Blackbox Theater)
Dirtwire (Visulite Theatre)
Machine Girl (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
Blackhawk (Eighty Eights)
Eric Darius (Middle C Jazz)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Charlotte Symphony: Revel's Bolero (Belk Theater)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Randy & Jesse (Goldie's)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Strictly Liquid (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)

SATURDAY MAR. 7

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Wonder Years (The Fillmore)
Little Heart Machine w/ Sugardeer, Vien Kohl, Mandako (The Milestone)
Alexsucks w/ Dogma Society (Neighborhood Theatre)
Bad Marriage w/ The Midnight Devils, The Last Sin (The Rooster)
Council Ring (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
Temptress w/ Friendship Commanders, Cosmic Reaper (Snug Harbor)
Jordan Sledge & The Saucepan Band w/ AquaLads, Chanclas (Starlight on 22nd)
Katatonia (The Underground)
JAZZ/BLUES
Willie Walker & Conversation Piece (Eighty Eights)
Eric Darius (Middle C Jazz)
Queen City Blues Festival (Ovens Auditorium)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
B2K w/ Bow Wow (Spectrum Center)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Dayshift (Blackbox Theater)
Alyssa Jolee (Blackbox Theater)
Emo Night (The Music Yard)
Chrissy Chlapecka (Petra's)
Beatfreaq (Starlight on 22nd)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
David Childers (Comet Grill)
Sarah Mootz w/ Caroline Keller, Ellie Morgan (Evening Muse)
Mike Massé (Stage Door Theater)
CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
Charlotte Symphony Youth Orchestra Spring Concert (Belk Theater)
Charlotte Symphony: Revel's Bolero (Belk Theater)
COVER BANDS
Caligula Blushed (Smiths & Morrisey tribute) (Amos' Southend)
The Dialtones w/ Drew Nathan (Goldie's)
Barstool Rodeo (Widespread Panic tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY MAR. 8

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Dear Maryanne w/ Arcadia Grey, Dear Cincinnati, Pretty Bitter, Junk mail (The Milestone)
I See Stars (The Underground)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
bbno$ (The Fillmore)
JAZZ/BLUES
Lovell Bradford (Eighty Eights)
Veronica Swift (Middle C Jazz)
Nexus Jazz Group (Stage Door Theater)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
LATIN/WORLD
Humbe (Ovens Auditorium)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Satsang (Neighborhood Theatre)
COVER BANDS
Ballantyne School of Music Spring Jam '26 (Amos' Southend)

MONDAY MAR. 9

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Heet Deth w/ Rita's Gift, Boy A/C, Maxwell Williams (The Milestone)
Balaclava w/ DD Island, Patois Counselors (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Bluegrass AllStars (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Khamari (The Underground)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY MAR. 10

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Los Straitjackets w/ Deke Dickerson (Neighborhood Theatre)
The Summer Set (The Underground)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Bob Fleming & the Cambria Iron Co. w/ Adam Faucett, William Blackart, Ryan Lockhart (The Milestone)
Universal Light w/ Micah Cottingham (Petra's)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Brendan James w/ Jesse Ruben (Evening Muse)
OPEN MIC
Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

WEDNESDAY MAR. 11

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Overturn w/ Direct Measure, Last Gasp, Out 4 Blood, Reality (The Milestone)
JAZZ/BLUES
Bywater Call (Middle C Jazz)
Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Bill Noonan & Tom Kuhn (Comet Grill)
Ma w/ Sam Reckard-Perry (Evening Muse)
Josh Daniel & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
BrizB w/ Bedrumor, Lucid Amethyst (Snug Harbor)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Jordan Ward (The Underground)
OPEN MIC
Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY MAR. 12

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Stray Lions w/ Camp Calico, Marissa Missing, Ben Bourne (The Milestone)
Faye w/ Flannelmouth, Moonshaker (Petra's)
Julia. w/ Zones, The Oyster (Snug Harbor)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Pat & Kay Crouch (Comet Grill)
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Leela James (Carolina Theatre)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Ballyhoo! w/ Artikal Sound System (The Music Yard)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Lowen w/ Bonfire (Evening Muse)
JAZZ/BLUES
Kenya Templeton (Eighty Eights)
Envision Presents: R&B Legends (Middle C Jazz)
LATIN/WORLD
Santiago Cruz (The Underground)

FRIDAY MAR. 13

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
Catchbliss w/ Ajena, Field Day, Haunt3d, 3.V.13 (The Milestone)
Buried Asunder w/ Group Therapy, Orchids (Petra's)
Filth w/ Autumn Lies Buried, JawJacked (The Rooster)
Clearbody w/ How Come, Bible Belt (Snug Harbor)
JAZZ/BLUES
Omari Wilkerson (Eighty Eights)
Keiko Matsui (Middle C Jazz)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Keith Allen Circus (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Buffalo Traffic Jam w/ barrett (Evening Muse)
Stacey Blanton w/ Riverstone (Goldie's)
Carter Faith (Neighborhood Theatre)
Love Bug Junkie w/ Bailey Marie Griggs, Mak Marie (Visulite Theatre)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
All the Feels (The Fillmore)
Wake Me Up: 2010s EDM Throwback (The Music Yard)
Gary Numan (The Underground)
COVER BANDS
ABACAB (Amos' Southend)

SATURDAY MAR. 14

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Free the Witness w/ Modern Medicine, SWAE (Evening Muse)
Sticky Fingers (The Fillmore)
Jiu-Jitsu w/ Asleepbeneaththesoil, Prone, Vanta, Respair (The Milestone)
The Menders (The Rooster)
POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
Penelope Road w/ Tobbaco Road (Amos' Southend)
Virtual Riot (Blackbox Theater)
Krista Lynn Meadow w/ Bald Brothers (Goldie's)
Flamingosis (The Music Yard)
Donuts & Daisies: Native Tongues Tribute (Starlight on 22nd)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
Cody Gentry w/ Mac Leaphart (Evening Muse)
Keith Allen Circus (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Blue Dogs (Booth Playhouse)
Hunters Travesty (Comet Grill)
JAZZ/BLUES
Euphonius Collective (Eighty Eights)
Keiko Matsui (Middle C Jazz)
FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
Eggy (Neighborhood Theatre)
Opus & The Frequencies w/ Waking April, Ivory Layne (Petra's)
Lua Flora (Primal Brewery)
COVER BANDS
A Tribute Night to The Eagles (Knight Theater)
The Mad Hatters (Tom Petty tribute) (Visulite Theatre)
Pandora's Box (Aerosmith tribute) (The Underground)

SUNDAY MAR. 15

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Varia w/ Who They Fear, Distant Fires, The Harbor Divide, The Johnstown Flood (The Milestone)
JAZZ/BLUES
OOF (Eighty Eights)
Braxton Cook (Middle C Jazz)
HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
Xaviersobased (The Underground)
SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
Evan Blackerby & the Bandwagon (Primal Brewery)

MONDAY MAR. 16

JAZZ/BLUES
The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)
COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
Bluegrass AllStars (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)
Chloe Kimes w/ Ryan Lockhart, Ian Pasquini (Snug Harbor)
OPEN MIC
Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Saarta Hannah (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY MAR. 17

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
Red Rocking Chair (Comet Grill)*
Two Stroke w/ Sewer, Outcast, Fleshworm (The Milestone)
King Cackle w/ Big Loaf, Old Tyme (Snug Harbor)
COMEDIC
Swell: Musical Improv (The Long Room)

**WEEKLY EVENTS THAT MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. VISIT QCNERVE.COM FOR THE FULL SOUNDWAVE LISTING*


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HOROSCOPE

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MARCH 4 - 10

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) A little woolgathering is good right now. It helps you sort out some problems before you try to work out their solutions. But don't be out of it for too long, or you'll miss getting in on something important!

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) Your acquisitive self will find this to be a favorable time for buying something that you've wanted for a long time. Meanwhile, your inquisitive self leads to the disclosure of some important facts.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) It's time to come down to earth and face the reality about someone in your life. Get to the truth, then decide what you'll do about the relationship.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Relationships on the job and in your personal life seem to be up in the air at this time. Trying to get a handle on things is frustrating and probably futile. Wait for events to return to a steady, even flow.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) You might be everyone's idea of a cool cat, but you'd really prefer going somewhere warm for a while. This is the time to do it! Expect good news from someone who is working hard on your behalf.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) Things seem to be slowing down. Use this quieter time to do some much-needed meditation. You'll come away with a new understanding of what compels you to do what you do.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Marriage and mergers are favored at this time. Relationships, both personal and professional, might appear to be unraveling. But quick action can make long-lasting repairs.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) A loved one reacts happily to a romantic suggestion. Consider a cruise or a trip if you have the time and money. But a movie and dinner will do just as well.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Don't wait for someone to help you bridge an emotional gap between you and a loved one. You need to take the initiative yourself. The result will be worth all the effort that you put into it.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) Stop blaming yourself for a problem at work. Someone else set the situation in motion, leaving you on the spot when something had to be done. So, perk up! You have lots of people on your side.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Positive aspects continue to favor explorations of new career opportunities. While you're eager to check these prospects out, you also need to spend more quality time with your family.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Cupid has an arrow with your name on it. But you need to help him find his target by getting out into the social swim where, with luck, the chubby cherub could pin two hearts with one arrow!

BORN THIS WEEK: You are honest and loyal. People trust you with their secrets. You would make a wonderful counselor or member of the clergy because you know how to listen to the heart, as well as the voice.

MARCH 11 - 17

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Keep an open mind about a suggestion that you see as unworkable. Give it a chance to prove itself one way or another. The results could surprise both supporters and detractors.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) News about an upcoming venture causes you to make some last-minute adjustments in your plans. But the extra work will pay off as you come to learn more about the potential benefits of opening up.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) A more positive aspect grows out of your determination to reach your immediate goals. Continue to keep your focus sharp and on target by steering clear of petty quarrels and other pesky problems.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Avoid adding to an already turbulent situation by acting as a voice of reason. You might have to shout over the tumult, but your words will ultimately be heard and heeded.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) The possibility of a new acquisition always makes Leonine eyes light up. But be careful that what you see is what you want. Appearances can often be deceiving.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) No matter how much you might feel that you're in the right, resist saying anything that could reignite a still-unresolved situation. Let the matter drop and move on.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Help with a personal problem comes from an unexpected source. You might also find that workplace pressures easing. Use this period of calm to restore your spent energies.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) You might have to share the credit for a project that you're working on. But there'll be enough credit to go around, and your efforts will be recognized and rewarded.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Details need to be dealt with before you can move on to another area. Make sure you don't leave any loose ends that could later cause everything to unravel.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) News about a change in the workplace carries with it a challenge you could find difficult to resist. Check it out. It could be what you've been waiting for.

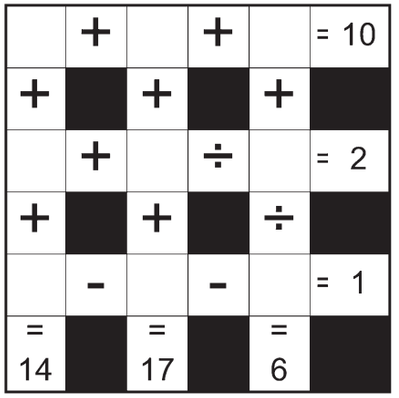
AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) Allowing your artistic nature to fully express itself will help restore your spirits and put you in the mood to take on a new career challenge. Meanwhile, a Libra creates excitement.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Expect to happily plunge right into a hectic social whirl starting at the week's end. Your aspects favor new friendships, as well as the strengthening of old relationships.

BORN THIS WEEK: Your spiritual strength is an inspiration to others. You give people around you the faith to go after what they want.

GO FIGURE!

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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Even Exchange

by Donna Pettman

Each numbered row contains two clues and two 6-letter answers. The two answers differ from each other by only one letter, which has already been inserted. For example, if you exchange the A from MASTER for an I, you get MISTER. Do not change the order of the letters.

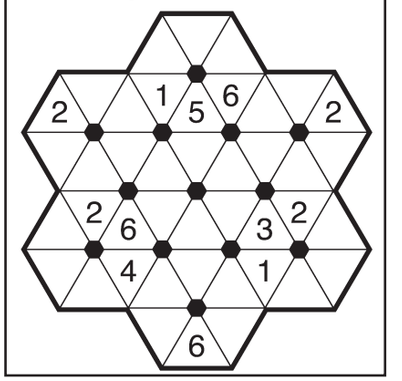
1. Geometrical figure	__ __ __ A __ __	English landowner	__ __ __ I __ __
2. ___ con carne	__ __ __ __ I	Put in the refrigerator	__ __ __ __ L
3. Paper boundary	__ __ __ G __ __	Lee or Gaye	__ __ __ V __ __
4. Canoe oar	P __ __ __ __ __	Cowboy's seat	S __ __ __ __ __
5. Cherub	__ __ __ __ L	Wrath	__ __ __ __ R
6. Like snow	__ __ __ T __	Whimper	__ __ __ N __
7. Land property	__ __ __ __ T __	In actual fact	__ __ __ __ L __
8. Noggin	__ __ U __ __	Knack	__ __ I __ __
9. Gadget	__ __ __ __ G	Ponder	__ __ __ __ K
10. Wanted sign	__ __ S __ __ __	Railroad attendant	__ __ R __ __ __

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SNOWFLAKES

by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



CryptoQuote

AXYDLBAAXR
is **LONGFELLOW**

One letter stands for another. In this sample, **A** is used for the three L's, **X** for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each week the code letters are different.

VDH VMNH VC AHQGB MY
ODHL UCW RCL'V DGZH
VMNH JCA MV.
— YURLHU DGAAMY

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CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: **R** equals **H**

IONYGBM YFPNYC CNQT GT
QRGWR FJFYXENBX ONJFP
PGTZGTZ PMWYFB RXLTP NI
DYMGPF: DPMOL EFMWR.

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TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. U.S. STATES: Which state is home to the Acadia National Park?
2. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which president was an avid dog breeder who gave his hunting hounds funny names like "Sweet Lips" and "Madam Moose"?
3. MOVIES: Who is the antagonist of "Shrek" in the first animated movie?
4. LITERATURE: What is the pseudonym of the 20th-century author who was born Adeline Virginia Stephen?
5. TELEVISION: What's the family's last name in the TV sitcom "The Middle"?
6. HISTORY: Which famous nurse was known as the Lady with the Lamp?
7. GEOGRAPHY: Ringgit is the common currency in which Southeast Asian country?
8. ANATOMY: Which human organ stores bile?
9. LANGUAGE: What does the Latin phrase "Cogito, ergo sum" mean in English?
10. MATH: What is the next prime number after 7?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

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8				4	5	6	7	
	5	6	2		7	4	3	8
3			6		1	2		9
2		5				7		
7						1	2	
					4	8		
5	3			7		9	6	2
	8				6	5		7
		7	1				8	4

PLACE A NUMBER IN THE EMPTY BOXES IN SUCH A WAY THAT EACH ROW ACROSS, EACH COLUMN DOWN AND EACH SMALL 9-BOX SQUARE CONTAINS ALL OF THE NUMBERS ONE TO NINE.

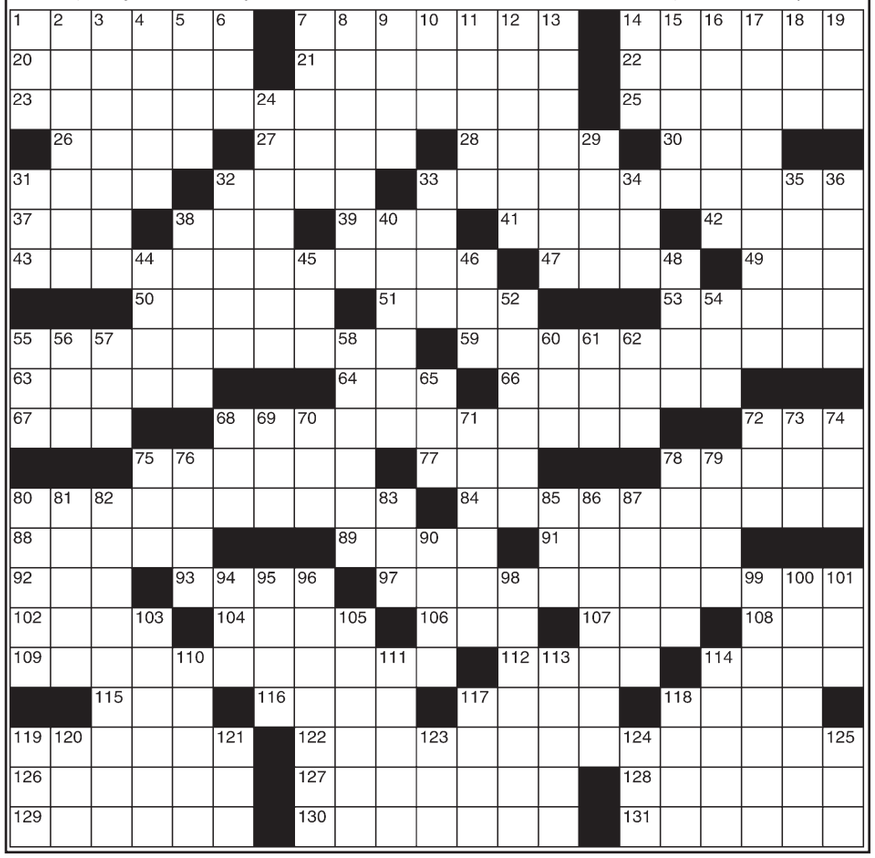


CROSSWORD
FUN 'N' GAMES

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ACROSS
1 Lack of vitality
7 Neighbor of Florida
14 Garlicky sauces
20 In a rational manner
21 Unexpired driver's license, e.g.
22 Well-spoken
23 Whole bunch of baby felines?
25 Regions, weatherwise
26 Some reddish deer
27 Sex educator Shere
28 Jokester Jay
30 Viscous stuff
31 DVD- — (data holders)
32 Make angry
33 Dogs that hunt egrets?
37 Fade away
38 B.A., e.g.
39 Corp. exec in charge of ads and branding
41 Locale
42 "Oh, gotcha"
43 Snacks that help physicists build atomic bombs?
47 Campus digs
49 Text-scanning device: Abbr.
50 French for "the king"
51 Head up
53 1890s veep Stevenson
55 Back of an overseas ship?
59 Entrepreneur Bezos who cooks sheep delicacies?
63 Tan-colored
64 "Ich bin — Berliner"
66 Actors Momoa and Statham
67 Frigid
68 Ladies who use Speed Stick?
72 — Newton
75 Shared a living space
77 Water, in Lille
78 2008 documentary about the national debt
80 Cover girl from a city in central Georgia?
84 Fire breather's parachute descent?
88 Flabbergast
89 Paddy food
91 — Park (Edison's home)
92 Machinery wheel
93 Unwell
97 Package shipped to singer Dolly?
102 From the top
104 En — (in full court)
106 Free TV spot, in brief
107 "I taut I — a puddy tat!"
108 Med. group
109 Serenity in a rabbit colony?
112 Woodsy den
114 U-boats, e.g.
115 Feel unwell
116 Andean land
117 French essayist Simone
118 Singer Horne
119 Nag
122 Answer from poet Countee?
126 Greek goddess of wisdom
127 Phoenician goddess of fertility
128 "Could be"
129 Deny
130 Own
131 Atlantic City hotel/casino

DOWN
1 Request
2 Capital of Kenya
3 Buries
4 Doles (out)
5 Specks in la mer
6 "Anthem" author Rand
7 Benefit
8 Med. test worker
9 Balm additive
10 Playbill info
11 Befuddle
12 Some track runners
13 Lymphoid throat mass
14 Ravens' gp.
15 "Send me"
16 "Yes, yes!," in France
17 Food flatfish
18 Suffix with Benedict
19 Roads: Abbr.
24 Bun worn at the back of the neck
29 Savvy about
31 Fight arbiter
32 Co. shuffling
33 Expectation
34 That girl
35 Unstimulating java
36 Letter stroke
38 Protest at which people lie down
40 "Uncle" of old TV
44 Whole lot
45 U.S. spy gp.
46 "Uncle" of the U.S.
48 Singer Aimee
52 "Of the day," on menus
54 VIPs at raves
55 DOJ agency
56 Tolkien fiend
57 Crooner Orbison
58 Often-dinged car feature
60 — -o'-shanter
61 Mao — -tung
62 Ending for ball or bass
65 DE-to-VT dir.
68 Dad's mate
69 Angsty genre
70 Flanders of "The Simpsons"
71 Fishing boots
72 Animal's coat
73 The same: Prefix
74 Hiatus
75 Cartoonist Chast
76 Wallet bills
78 Spouse's father, e.g.
79 Bad smell
80 Kind of parrot
81 Refrigerator brand
82 Reluctant to be filmed
83 Glass edge
85 Latin "I love"
86 Non-Jewish
87 Comparable (with)
90 Robin's wear
94 "Son of," in Arabic
95 Al who drew Li'l Abner
96 Patella
98 Natural gifts
99 England-to-France connector
100 Envoy's residence
101 — Angeles
103 Authors
105 David of "NYPD Blue"
110 Justice Kagan
111 Niche sects
113 Buenos —
114 Capital of South Korea
117 Existed
118 Meg Mallon's gp.
119 Wok, e.g.
120 Greek vowel
121 Light beam
123 Notes before tis
124 Sis, e.g.
125 Swirly letter



AERIN IT OUT

A BRAND SPANKIN' NEW BEGINNING

Spanky's Hangout opens on a storied corner of Central Avenue

BY AERIN SPRUILL

After being a skeptic-turned-lush for dive bars around Charlotte, it's rare I have had one of those "on a first date, kinda nervous" moments walking into one for the first time.

Yet, somehow, I found myself adjusting my leggings and butt cheeks to get spanked at Spanky's Hangout on Central Avenue in Plaza Midwood.

For years, I watched the parking lot wedged between Skylark Social Club and Midwood Country Club fluctuate between completely full and barely there, depending on the era, the virus and the vibe.

I witnessed regulars hovering in that in-between space like divorced parents choosing custody, squinting toward whichever one felt less like betrayal.

There was a hierarchy: a comfort and a backup plan.

I could visibly see the question marks swirling as Skylark familiars lingered about, curious if "it was open" as they settled into the sobering reality that there was only one other option as they turned toward the entrance of MCC, knowing it wasn't the worst decision, while fully acknowledging that at least it wasn't the end of the night.

I remembered the feeling as I watched with what was a half smile in the moment, recalling how on my first visit to MCC on a day-drinking tour of the neighborhood my crew got turned away because we were too early … then we looked toward Skylark as a potential last resort and in the end were welcome with open arms.

Months later, well after Skylark shut down and the Spanky's signage took over, IG posts flooded the soon-to-be "spank-your-liver" hangout's account promising an opening.

The boo and I observed in anticipation, wondering if this was simply a rebranding, a "land grab" or a promising new watering hole that felt just as at home as the living room next door.

And here we were, a month-ish into Spanky's residency, millennial judgey, as if we had any right to poke our noses into the glory hole that had popped in next door to Midwood.

Kudos to boo ordering a "respected" dive bar staple, while I was requesting a "Pinot Grigio or Sauv Blanc." *insert eye roll to myself* Our total tab was ~$14.50, based on memory, but don't fact-check me on that!

In true dive fashion, the bartender had no Fs to give. Respect. Also, just coming off a dive tour in NYC where "white wine" was an unspoken given versus a Southern anti-gospel, I'd expect nothing less.

The smell of fresh paint still lingered in the air, helping anyone forget about the bar that took up space inside the same four walls prior. The debauchery that spilled from one bar into Central Ave. or the long-standing bar next door.

The 24-bun party pack of "pre-dog-stuffed" glizzies everyone's grubby hands reached into after day drinking or the live music that was missed from corners of Amos' Southend and Double Door. All of it felt acknowledged but not embalmed.

The interior still speaks to everything that was, while also screaming "polished without being pretentious." From the updated, Nokia-style "snake game" bar complete with epoxied retro collective stickers to the photo booth, pinball and foosball table, Spanky's begged me to ask all the questions.

But after following their IG, and then being served by the tall, tattooed bartender, I knew this was a new kid on the block I'd ask nothing from.

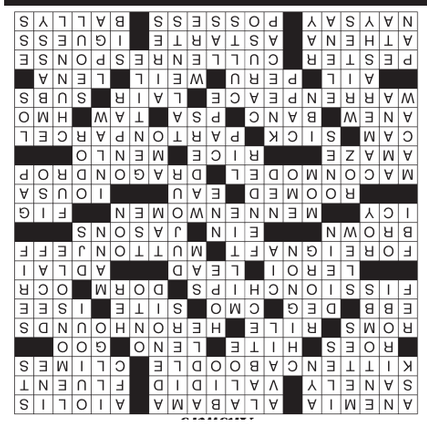
The chaos of Canva-adjacent posts with no context were mirrored inside the curious hub of solid-lit bar for the fairly blind, thick-glasses wearer that is Spanky's. It asks the average Joe to define it without the question, which I fully co-sign.

My takeaway: it's not your stereotypical cursed corner. The 'hood survives an era, thank God It ain't doing what the rest of Charlotte is doing, and I'll take another spanking.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

PUZZLE ANSWERS

8	2	9	3	4	5	6	7	1
1	5	6	2	9	7	4	3	8
3	7	4	6	8	1	2	5	9
2	9	5	8	1	3	7	4	6
7	4	8	5	6	9	1	2	3
6	1	3	7	2	4	8	9	5
5	3	1	4	7	8	9	6	2
4	8	2	9	3	6	5	1	7
9	6	7	8	5	2	3	1	4

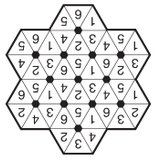


Trivia Answers

1. Maine.
2. George Washington.
3. Lord Maximus
4. Virginia Woolf.
5. Heck.
6. Florence Nightingale.
7. Malaysia
8. The gallbladder.
9. "I think, therefore I am."
10. Eleven (11).

CryptoQuote answer

The time to relax is when you don't have time for it.
— Sydney Harris



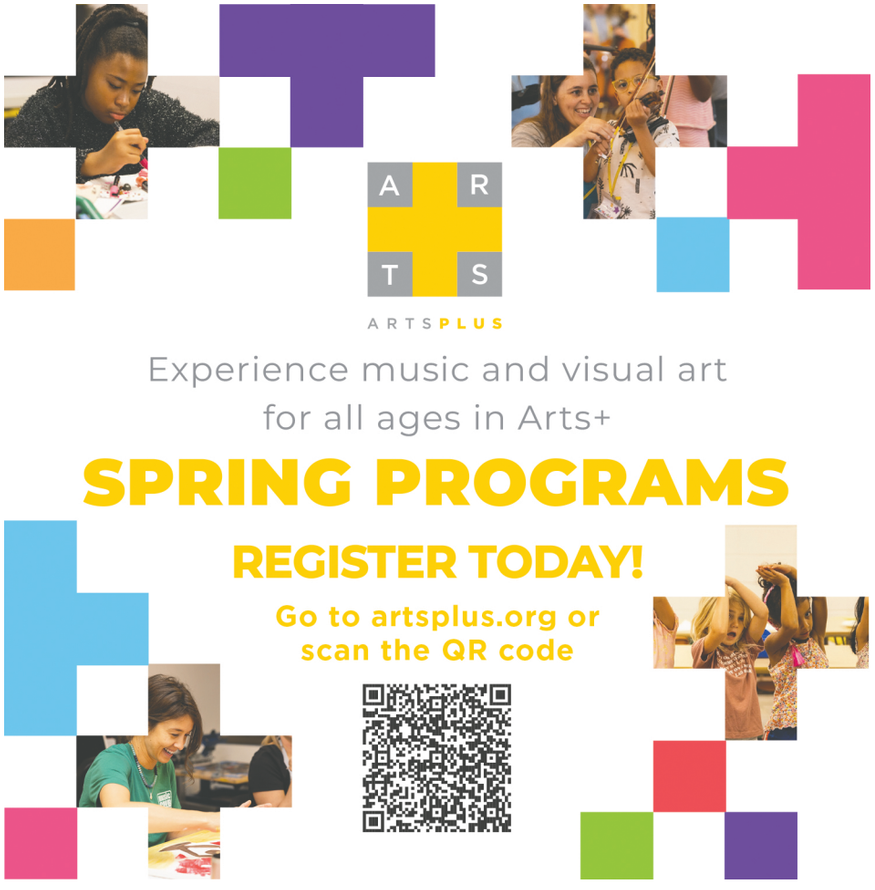
CryptoQuip answer

Florida resort town in which everybody loves singing sacred hymns of praise: Psalm Beach.

1	+	5	+	4	= 10			
+		+		+				
7	+	9	÷	8	= 2			
+		÷		+				
6	-	3	-	2	= 1			
=		=		=				
14		17		6				

Even Exchange answers

1. Square, Square
2. Chili, Chili
3. Margin, Marvin
4. Paddle, Saddle
5. Angel, Anger
6. White, Whine
7. Realty, Really
8. Skull, Skill
9. Thing, Think
10. Poster, Porter



SAVAGE LOVE

OUT WITH IT

Spill the tea, the beans and whatever else is bothering you

BY DAN SAVAGE

I have a complicated question. I'm a woman in my 30s who has been married for a few years to my husband. We are very much in love and have a wonderful relationship. We met when I was in college and worked at the same place together. Eventually, we became friends. We maintained a long-distance connection after I moved away, we fell in love, and then the rest is history. But during the time that we were friends, I had a mildly physical, mostly emotional affair with our boss, who was much older than us and married at the time. The boss and I never had sex. We only made out a few times and exchanged dirty messages. This didn't last very long. By the time my husband and I were actually dating, my affair with my boss had been over for years, so there was never any overlap between them or any infidelity on my part.

My husband knows that I had an emotional affair with an older man during that time period, but I never told him who the older man was. I didn't tell him because I felt shame about it. I also didn't know how to tell him, even though he is a really rational, emotionally intelligent man. I am still worried that telling him would hurt our relationship or that he would think less of me due to the age gap between our former boss and me. But recently, my husband has expressed an interest in reaching out to our old boss. He is proud we are married, and he wanted to let this boss know because he thinks that the boss will find our story heartwarming. I don't think the boss would say anything about our affair to my husband, and I honestly think my husband is correct in how he thinks the boss will receive the news of us being married. I actually do think it would warm his heart.

Should I tell my husband about this affair before he reaches out? Or should I let him email the boss without telling him? Is this something I should have told my husband years ago, or is it okay for me to have kept this to myself? It feels icky to let my husband reach out to our old boss and share life updates without him having this information. But I am also concerned that telling him could ruin our amazing relationship.

Brooding Over Serious Secret

Tell your husband who the old man was.

In general, a spouse is not entitled to your complete sexual and romantic history. A married person, like any other kind of person, is entitled to some privacy and a zone of erotic autonomy. Omitting arguably irrelevant details about your past — because the detail isn't important or makes you look bad or makes you feel bad — is allowed. So, yeah: It's okay to keep some things to yourself. For instance, if you fucked your best friend's boyfriend in high school and she found out and it was a whole thing and she's not your best friend anymore and you moved away after high school (ahem), you don't necessarily have to share that information with some guy you met and married a decade and change later.

But personally, BOSS, I wouldn't want to be with a guy I couldn't share that story with. I wouldn't want to be with a guy I couldn't laugh with about what a piece of shit I was in high school. Don't we all want our spouses to love us for the fallible human beings we are? And don't we all deserve spouses who are smart enough to appreciate that our pasts — including the mistakes we made — helped to shape us into the people they met and fell in love with years later?

All that said, BOSS, this — who the old man was — isn't exactly an irrelevant detail. Your husband knows you had a brief thing with an older man, but you never told him who that old man was. (Stop calling it an affair! It was never consummated!) So, if your husband was going to judge you for messing around with an older man, he would've judged you on that score already. The potential problem here is the old man knows who your husband is … but your husband doesn't know who the old man was … and if your husband finds out on his own, BOSS, he could feel humiliated (your former boss knew and he didn't) or he could feel hurt that you didn't trust him enough to tell him yourself and tell him sooner.

While you believe your former boss would never say anything — and maybe he wouldn't — people change as they age. So, while it's possible the old guy you made out with in college wouldn't have said anything, you can't be 100% sure the man he is now wouldn't blurt that out. So, you need to get out in front of this thing: "Hey, honey. before you reach out to our old boss, there's something I should've told you a long time ago. Before we dated, I fucked around with an older man — that part you knew — but I never told you who that old man was. Yeah … it was our boss. It ended years before you and I got together and I never told you because I was embarrassed and it was awkward. But I don't want you to be blindsided if you reach out and he says something, so I'm telling you now. And, again, I'm sorry I didn't tell you years ago."

P.S. Reaching out to your old boss yourself — and first — and asking him not to say anything, as your husband doesn't know, is also an option. But if your husband finds out you were running interference behind his back, you'll have three things to worry about: two ancient wrongs (fucking around with your boss, not telling your husband about it) and a more recent wrong (an attempted cover-up).

I have been in a long-term relationship with a man for over 10 years. I'm a bisexual woman in my late 40s. I love my partner, but for the past several years I have seriously thought about leaving the relationship. I feel stuck. We have had a lot of conflict in the relationship and have tried couples counseling. Although things feel slightly more peaceful, the spark feels gone and I can't regain my desire for him. Because I don't want to be intimate with him, I feel guilty a lot of the time. I have talked to him about opening the relationship so I can explore my sexuality but he is not on board. I feel afraid of throwing away our years together, being alone and starting over. I have seen a therapist the last year to try and decide, but I'm no closer to knowing what to do. Any advice to help me get unstuck?

Can't Help Myself

You could let your partner make this decision for you — or you could let him make it for himself, CHM, and by extension make this it for you.

But to make a fully informed decision about whether he wants to stay with you, CHM, your partner needs all the information you have, and it doesn't sound — reading between the lines here — like he does. So, you need to tell him you love him but you're no longer sexually attracted to him and couples counseling and individual therapy didn't change that. If you went into couples counseling with the expressed intent of working on repairing your sex life, he may think you're still open to working on it or that there's some "regain" fix you haven't stumbled over yet. But you're not working on it, CHM, and there isn't a fix. If you ever have sex again, it's not going to be with him; if he ever has sex again, it's not going to be with you. He needs to know that. And since you wanna have sex again at some point and so (presumably) does he, CHM, the only outstanding question is whether you'll still be together when you start fucking other people.

There are lots of people out there in sexless companionate relationships and marriages, CHM, but companionate relationships only work — they're only loving and low-conflict and fulfilling — when they're what both partners want. And since it doesn't sound like an open but sexless primary relationship is something your partner wants, he will most likely make the decision you're afraid to make when he ends it.

I'm in a marriage that's been unhappy for about a decade. Lots of fighting and periods of serious loneliness. We are non-monogamous. Five years ago, I was at a conference and met a radiantly handsome man and we hit it off. He was, and still is, in a monogamous marriage. One evening we were in my room and I pressured him to go to bed with me. I saw that he wanted to and I convinced him to set aside his commitment to his husband. I saw that he was conflicted, and I didn't care. We didn't kiss, we didn't take our underwear off, we just spooned, my arms around him. I got what I wanted, but he was clearly very uncomfortable. After about 30 minutes he went back to his room. I feel enormous guilt. No, we didn't have sex, nor did I force myself on him physically, and he's an adult. But I did manipulate him into breaking a vow — even the cuddling was a transgression. So, while what I did might not have been criminal, it felt deeply unethical. I want to apologize. I have his contact information, and we have mutual acquaintances, though I haven't seen him since. I worry about sending a card that his husband might ask about. I worry about sending an email and having him share it with others. Which is to say, I want to apologize but I don't want anyone else to know what I did because I'm ashamed of it. What would you do?

Feelings Of Guilt

You have tenuous connections to this man — you have mutual acquaintances and you presumably work in the same field (hence being thrown together at a conference) — which means circumstances will most likely put you in the same place at the same time again. If and when that happens, you can apologize to him in person. If the wait is making you crazy, you could engineer a circumstance that puts you in the same place again, e.g. you could attend a conference you know he's going to attend or you could go to a mutual's holiday party. If and when you do see him again — whether it happens organically (which would be preferable) or not (which could result in you having something else to apologize for) — don't ask him to speak to you in private. Just pull him aside when other people are around but out of earshot and tell him you feel bad about your behavior the last time you saw each other. As the offense was low-key, you can keep your apology low-key: "I feel bad about how I behaved last time we saw each other. I should've been more respectful of your relationship and I put you in an awkward position. I'm glad nothing happened that night — or nothing else happened that night — but I behaved selfishly and wanted to apologize."

P.S. There's a non-zero chance his relationship is open now and if you nail that apology, FOG, you might finally get that dick.

P.P.S. Disregard that last P.S., as it was inappropriate and unhelpful. You can't make a meaningful apology if you have an ulterior motive.

P.P.P.S. Still.

P.P.P.P.S. I'm going to assume there's some good reason why you haven't put an end to your awful-but-open marriage. If there isn't, please put yourself out of its misery.

Got problems? Yes, you do! Email your question for the column to mailbox@savage.love; or record your question for the Savage Lovecast at savage.love/askdan; podcasts, columns and more at Savage.Love.


BEHIND EVERY POWERFUL WOMAN ARE MORE POWERFUL WOMEN.
"SUFFS EMPOWERS, MOVES AND ENTERTAINS."
Chicago Tribune
PHOTOS BY JENNY ANDERSON
THE TONY AWARD®-WINNING MUSICAL
SUFFS
THE MUSICAL
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