INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®

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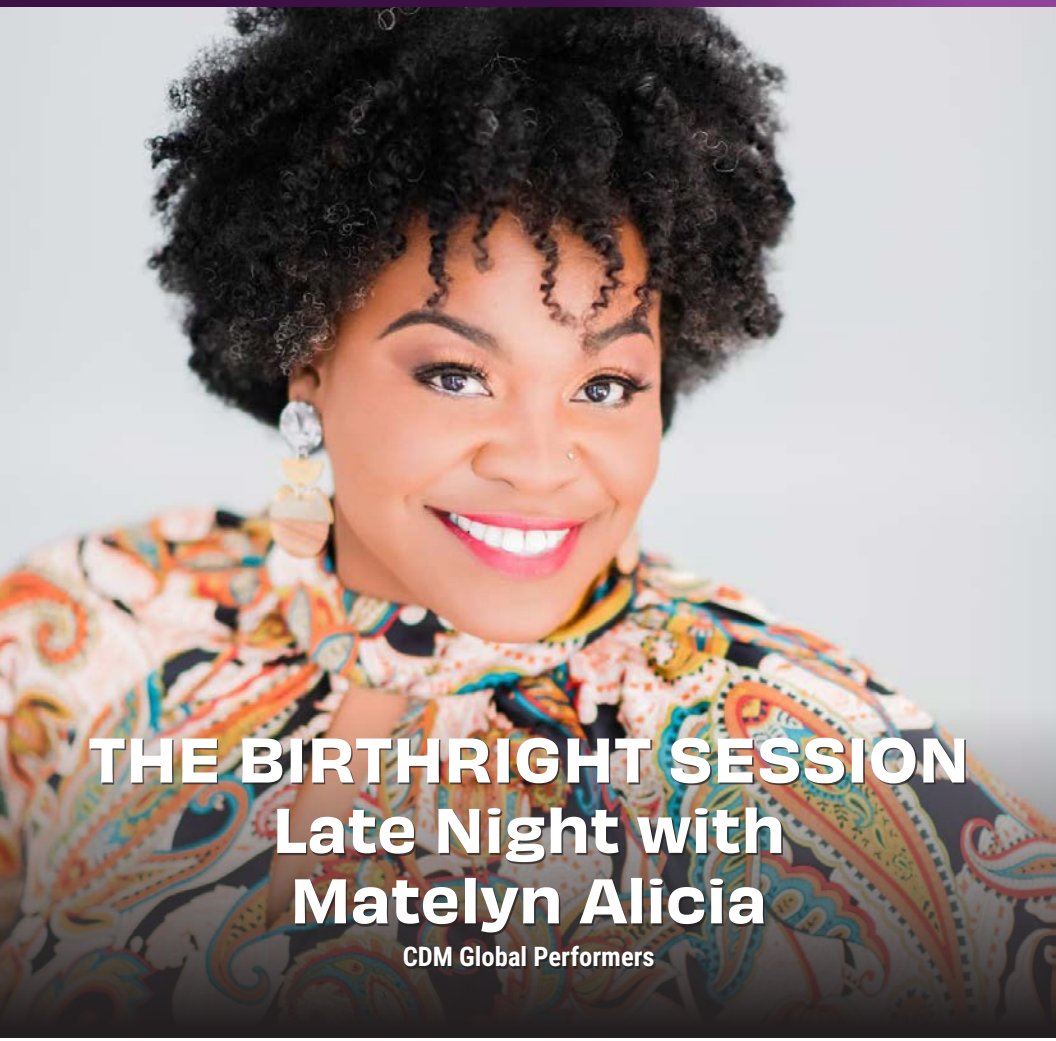

THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION
Late Night with Matelyn Alicia

CDM Global Performers

Tuesday, July 28, 10:30pm
Wednesday, July 29, 10:30pm
Thursday, July 30, 10:30pm
Friday, July 31, 10:30pm

The Benton Convention Center
Gwendolyn Williams Theatre

PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA • HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD ANATOMY OF AN OPERA: NIA IMANI FRANKLIN • STEAL AWAY HOME OUR STORIES...WE ARE, BECAUSE WE WERE • REIMAGINED VOLUME III: YOUNG THANG • PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON • RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE • SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL • MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE • NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM • MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY • JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD • ANATOMY OF AN OPERA: NIA IMANI FRANKLIN • STEAL AWAY HOME • OUR STORIES...WE ARE, BECAUSE WE WERE • REIMAGINED VOLUME III: YOUNG THANG PHENOMENAL WOMAN, MAYA ANGELOU: A FIRESIDE CHAT • THE BIRTHRIGHT SESSION-LATE NIGHT WITH MATELYN ALICIA • HOLY GROUND • JITNEY • TOPDOG/UNDERDOG • BLOOMING IN DRY SEASON RUNNING FOR MY LIFE • IN THE BLACK • BERTA, BERTA • ART OF WISE SEARCHING FOR WILLIE LYNCH • PURLIE VICTORIOUS • FENCES • BEING BLACK ON BROADWAY • THE LEGEND OF BUSTER NEAL MICHAEL COLYAR'S LATE NIGHT COMEDY • THE TRIAL OF ONE SHORT-SIGHTED BLACK WOMAN VS. MAMMY LOUISE AND SAFREETA MAE • A FIDDLER'S TALE • TERRY STEELE SINGS LUTHER VANDROSS • STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NATIONAL YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE • MIDNIGHT POETRY JAM MARVIN: THE MARVIN GAYE REVUE • CROSS THAT RIVER • EVERYBODY JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE • SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD • THE GREAT LOVER • THE BLUEST EYE • THEIR EYES

INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®

A NC Black Rep Experience

Winston-Salem | The City of Winston-Salem salutes the 2026 International Black Theatre Festival.

The Birthright Session

Written by Matelyn Alicia

CDM Global Performers (*U.S. & France*)

CDM Global Performers is a French & U.S. government-recognized non-profit art organization, producing live performance experiences for global audiences. As a dynamic creative collective, the organization serves as a vital platform for international artists, showcasing a rich tapestry of diverse artistic expressions that cross cultural and geographic boundaries.

The mission is a steadfast focus on art that heals. By championing original work that fosters emotional resonance, cultural preservation, and spiritual renewal, the organization produces transformative stories capable of uniting communities worldwide. Through international collaborations and strategic festival partnerships, CDM Global Performers ensures that impactful, restorative art reaches the global stage. The organization is deeply honored to present *The Birthright SESSION* for this presentation at the 2026 International Black Theatre Festival.

TECH CREW

Director ..... Debra Walton
Technical Direction ..... IBTF
Costume Design ..... Franshawn Bascomb
Light Design ..... IBTF
Set Design ..... IBTF
Sound Design ..... IBTF
Prop Design ..... IBTF
Light Design Assistant ..... IBTF

CAST

Soloist ..... Matelyn Alicia
Pianist/MD ..... Turner Battle
Bassist ..... Paul Foster
Drummer ..... Kassem Williams

WHO'S WHO

Matelyn Alicia (Herself) *Creator, Writer, and Performer*
AUDELCO Award winner, Matelyn Alicia is an acclaimed vocalist, multi-disciplinary artist, and emerging playwright dedicated to exploring the intersection of Black sonic lineages and theatrical storytelling. Making a highly anticipated return to the 2026 International Black Theatre Festival, Matelyn serves as the sole performer and visionary creator behind *The Birthright SESSION: Late Night With Matelyn Alicia*, marking her official debut production as a playwright.

A proud native of Akron, Ohio, Matelyn spent more than twenty vibrant years living and creating in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It was within this rich community that her artistic identity broadened from the deeply rooted traditions of the African American church to the Southern avant-garde jazz movement. No stranger to the festival's legendary "Holy Ground," she has proudly performed in celebrated mainstage productions of the National Black Theatre Festival in years past, including Mabel Robinson's "Mahalia: Queen of Gospel" and Regina Taylor's "CROWNS" - cementing her bond with this beautiful community of artists and theater lovers.

A natural born and self-taught vocal performer she has spent nearly two decades commanding stages across regional theaters, jazz clubs, and concert halls internationally. Her signature performance style seamlessly blends the emotional depth of traditional gospel, the complex improvisational freedom of theatrical jazz, and the vulnerable immediacy of contemporary performance art.

As a writer, *The Birthright SESSION* represents the culmination of a three-year creative development process, born from her desire to honor the unseen spiritual inheritances passed down through generations of Black women.

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WHO'S WHO

Matelyn extends her endless gratitude to this magnificent cast and crew for their collaborative brilliance, and to the North Carolina Black Repertory Company for championing new, boundary-pushing Black art. She also thanks her family, mentors, and ancestors, whose voices echo through every note sung tonight. This performance is dedicated to every individual striving to claim their own birthright of freedom, joy, and self-authorship.

Follow her journey on social media @MatelynAlicia and visit www.matelynalicia.com.

Turner Battle (Pianist & Music Director) Turner Battle plays jazz with surprises. He's a composer, arranger, keyboardist, and an award-winning producer. He co-produced projects presented on MTV and HBO and composed and arranged original music for Cricket Phones, Volvo, Wachovia, RJR Nabisco, and Brenner Children's Hospital. He performed with Tom Browne, Barbara Weathers, Kirk Whalum, Melba Moore, The Shirelles, Marvelettes, Clark Terry, Eve Cornelius, Norman Connors, The Platters, Archie Bell, Charlie Thomas' Drifters, Dennis Edwards Temptations Review, Ronnie Laws and more. He has opened for such acts as Stanley Clarke, Ramsey Lewis, The Yellowjackets, Queen Latifah, Phyllis Hyman, Bobby Womack, Dennis Edwards, and Stanley Jordan.

Paul Foster (Bassist)
Paul Foster earned his degree in music from North Carolina A&T University where he was also the arranger for its world-renowned marching band. As a professional musician and bandleader, Paul has performed at major colleges and universities, country clubs, hotels and nightclubs from San Juan to San Francisco, from Montreal Canada to Cologne Germany. His bands have opened for the Supremes, Tina Turner and many more. Paul has accompa-

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nied major performers such as Frank Foster, Jimmy Heath, Shirley Caesar, Charlie Byrd, Roy Clark, Lou Donaldson, Jamaica Funk Tom Browne, Bobby Irvin, the Drifters, The Tyme, USAir Jazz Orchestra, Crosby Clambake Orchestra, and a host of others. Paul has accompanied many actors at the International Black Theater Festival, touring shows, collegiate and dinner theater productions.

Kassem Williams (Drummer)
Kassem Williams was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At the very young age of 8 Kassem started learning how to read music. By the age of 12 Kassem knew for sure that drumming was his life. Taking two types of lessons every summer for 5 years really increased his reading, and musical ability. By the age of 13 Kassem and his father moved to Charlotte North Carolina. Still going after his dreams of being one of the best musicians of all time he quickly joined a middle school with a marching band. After a year of on the line marching at Coulood Middle School. He auditioned and got accepted to the Performing arts school called north West in Charlotte North Carolina. It was there he spent countless hours practicing performing, and reading. After about 2 years Kassem Williams and his jazz band at the time where invited to perform for the very famous Maya Angelou. As he progressed He formed and noticed his love for the art of Jazz. He now studies under Thomas Taylor at The university of North Carolina in Greensboro. Playing along side some of the world greats such as, Steve Haines, Chad Eby, and Brandon Lee. For Kassem being in College has its great benefits, as such as meeting and playing with some of the world's best Jazz artist and musicians. He has learned from Lewis Nash, Jerome Jennings, Jason Marsalis, Mr. Ocie Davis, Ed Reed, Tim Scott Jr, and many others. He is now the drummer for the UNCG Jazz Ensemble 1 jazz band, along with being the leader of his personal band (Melodies Curse).

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WHO'S WHO

Debra Walton (Director) Debra Walton is an accomplished actress, director, and producer whose work spans Broadway, national tours, regional theatre and television. She made her Broadway directorial debut as Associate Director of Thoughts of a Colored Man, and as former Associate Artistic Director of The York Theatre Company, she launched the Micki Grant Artist in Residency program in 2025, creating a lasting platform for emerging artists of color to develop new work. She is currently collaborating with playwright and performer Keenan Scott II on his one-man show The Genius of Being Stupid, a new work currently seeking a theatrical home, and is working with the Micki Grant Estate on developing a revival of Micki Grant's Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope.

Honing her skills on Broadway, national tours, and in regional theatre, Debra has played a wide variety of roles as a performer, including Anita in West Side Story, Bessie in Awake and Sing!, the title character in Clyde's, Ain't Misbehavin; alongside Roz Ryan and Armelia McQueen, and the acclaimed solo show Mr. Joy, to her Drama Desk-nominated performance in Cookin; At The Cookery, The Life And Times of Alberta Hunter to name a few.

As Founder and CEO of Little and Loud Productions, Debra Walton continues to move seamlessly between performer, director, and producer — amplifying authentic voices, championing stories that matter, and helping to build the stages of tomorrow.

Forsyth.cc

International Black Theater Festival

Join Forsyth County in rolling out the purple carpet for the 2026 International Black Theater Festival.

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INTERNATIONAL BLACK THEATRE FESTIVAL®
A NC Black Rep Experience

2026 Forsyth County Commissioners

Denise Price, Deputy County Manager
Shontell Robinson, County Manager
Kyle Haney, Deputy County Manager

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Within thirty seconds of meeting Matelyn Alicia, I knew.

There are rare moments in this life when someone walks into a room and the air shifts, when you feel, before a single word is spoken, that you are in the presence of something luminous. Matelyn is a beacon of love, light, and fire. She doesn't just carry a story; she *radiates* it.

When I heard her sing for the first time, I witnessed what it truly means to be anointed. It wasn't something I simply heard. I felt it in my bones, in the stillness that falls over a room when something holy is happening. Her voice is a living testimony, and it demanded a stage worthy of it.

"The Birthright Session is the story she was always meant to tell and now is the moment she chose to tell it."

This show is rooted in Matelyn's truest stories, the beautiful, painful, transformative journey of metamorphosis told through the sacred languages of gospel and blues. Two forms born from struggle and transcendence. Two forms that have always known how to hold both sorrow and joy in the same breath.

But this evening is also an invitation to you.

We all carry stories within us, stories of who we were, who we lost, and who we are still becoming. The question this show dares to ask is: do you have the courage to step into your God-given birthright? To be truly loved. To be truly seen. To let your story be heard and celebrated?

Matelyn answers that question every time she opens her mouth.

Tonight, let her light show you the way.

With love, light and fire,
Debra Walton

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Winston-Salem proudly congratulates the International Black Theatre Festival on another successful year and welcomes visitors to a community shaped by artistry and expression. Our vibrant community of local artists, historic landmarks, and creative energy awaits your discovery. Welcome to the City of Arts and Innovation—we are honored to be your stage.
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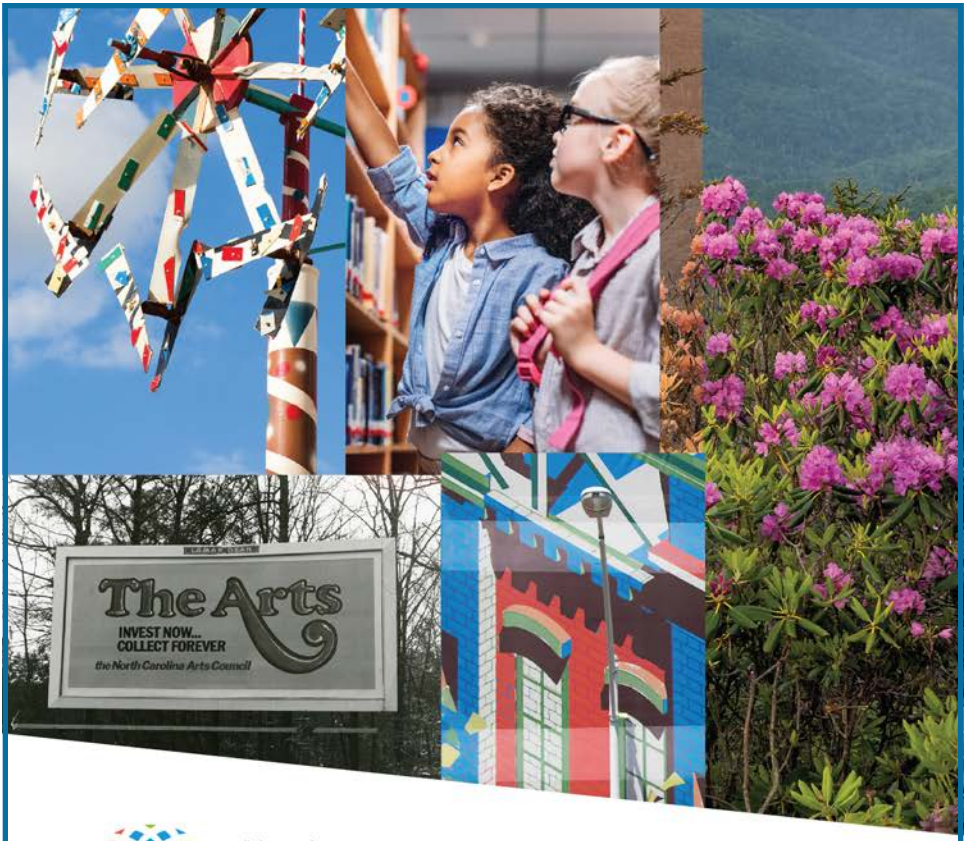

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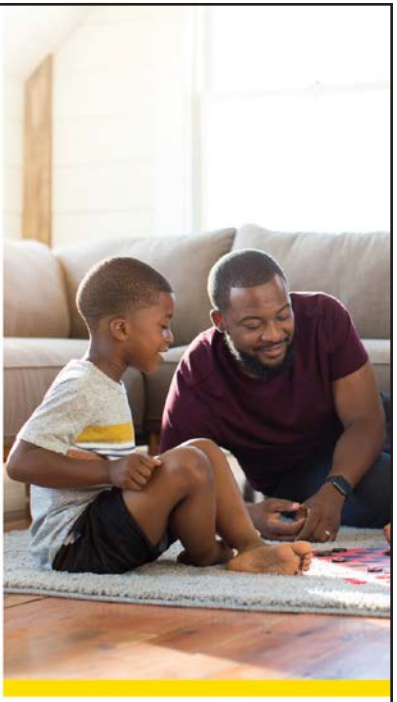

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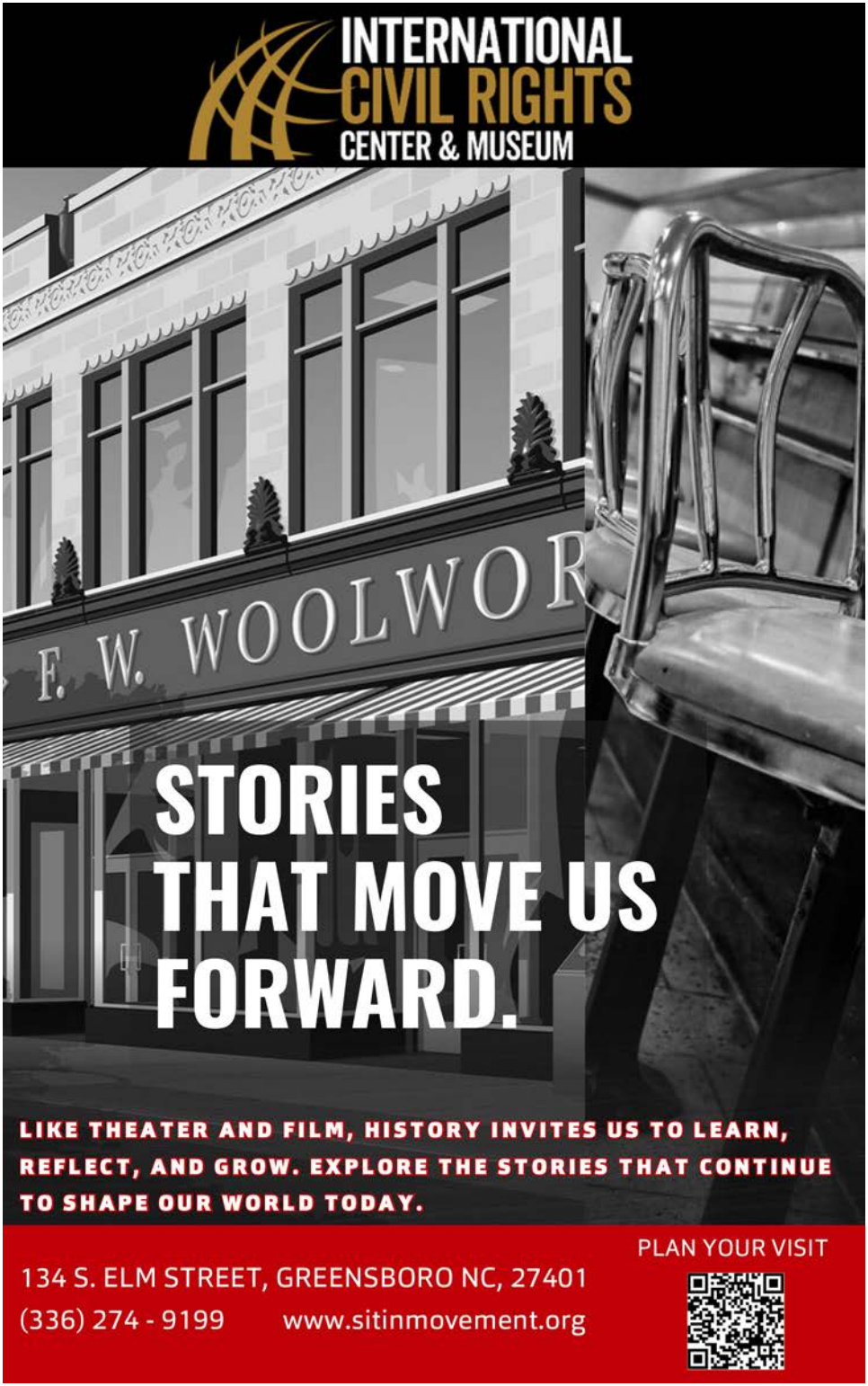
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Nico Amortegui, *Be a Wildflower*, 2025. © 2025 Nico Amortegui. Courtesy of the artist.

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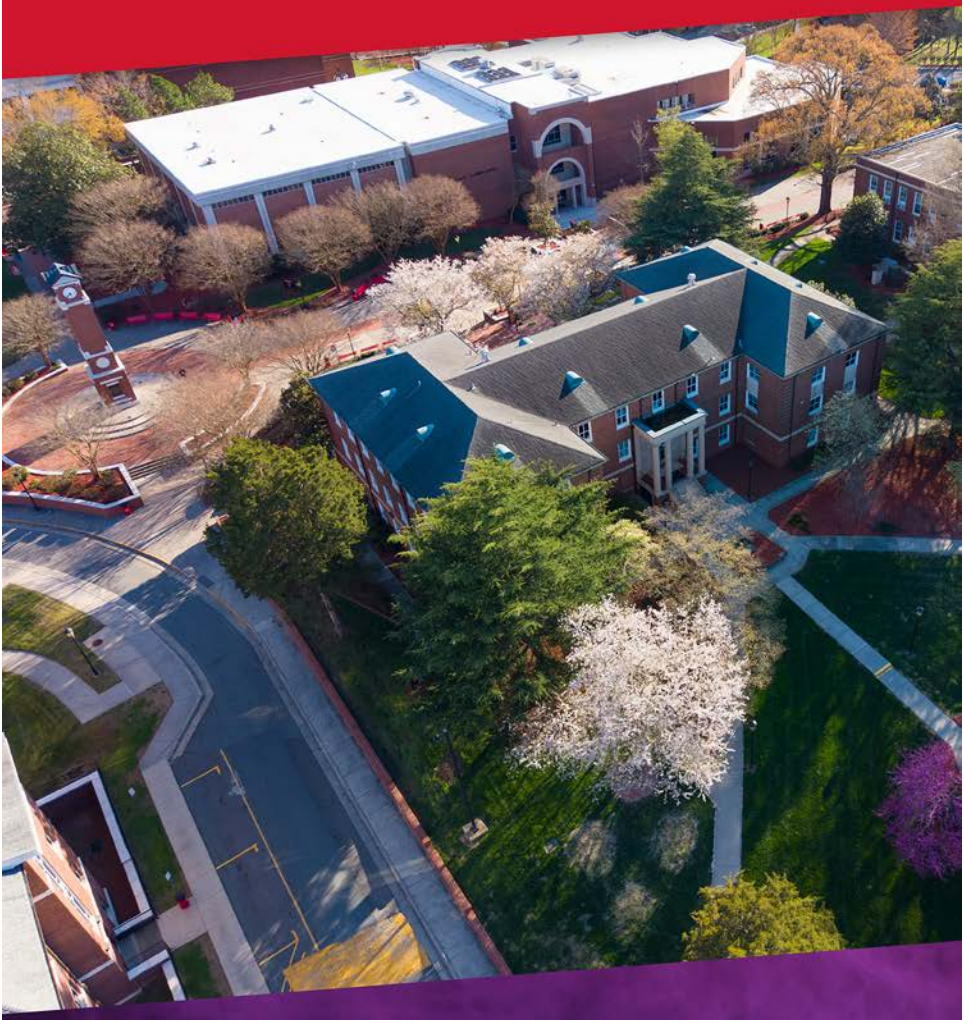

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901 Waterworks Road, Winston-Salem, NC 2710
mywinstonlakeymca.org • 336 724 9205
the YMCA
Our Mission: "Helping all people reach their God-given potential in spirit, mind and body."