



# STAGES

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ENGLERT THEATRE

Spring 2020



**YEARS**  
OF

**MISSION  
CREEK  
FESTIVAL**

# MISSION CREEK FESTIVAL

APRIL  
2  
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2  
0

MUSIC LITERATURE COMMUNITY

1 WEDNESDAY

SAMANTHA IRBY-BLACK BELT EAGLE SCOUT  
CAROLINE ROSE-IRREVERSIBLE ENTANGLEMENTS

2 THURSDAY

PARQUET COURTS-JENNY OFFILL-THE NECKS  
TROPICAL FUCK STORM-LONNIE HOLLEY  
NADAH EL SHAZLY (ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE)

3 FRIDAY

(SANDY)ALEX G-MDOU MOCTAR-ANDER MONSON  
SOUND FOR ANDY WARHOL'S KISS FEAT: KIM GORDON STEVE GUNN  
JOHN TRUCINSKI BILL NACE  
KING MONDAY-SHABAKA+THE ANCESTORS-T KIRA MADDEN

4 SATURDAY

LUCY DACUS-MAL BLUM-HANIF ABDURRAQIB  
TOMMY PICO-KRISTEN RADTKE-ADIA VICTORIA  
HELEN PHILLIPS-FENNESZ-GARTH GREENWELL

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# THE ENGLERT THEATRE

IT ALL HAPPENS HERE.

## ARTISTS IN A SHARED SPACE

HOW MISSION CREEK FESTIVAL HELPED SKYLAR ALEXANDER MOORE GO FROM STUDENT TO PUBLISHED AUTHOR

PG 8 - 9

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## ACTIVE AUDIENCES V: A TALE OF TWO VENUES

IN THE FIFTH INSTALLMENT OF THE SERIES, DANIEL BOSCALJON EXPLORES HOW YOU CAN MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR EXPERIENCE IN ANY VENUE

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## STAFF PICKS FOR MISSION CREEK FESTIVAL 2020

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LEARN ABOUT THE MISSION CREEK FESTIVAL 2020 ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE, AND MEET THE ARTIST NADAH EL-SHAZLY AND LEARN MORE ABOUT THE POSITION

PG 30

MISSION CREEK LIT FEATURE	ENGLERT PARTNERSHIPS	EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING	FRIENDS OF THE ENGLERT	ENGLERT VOLUNTEERS	AUDIENCE GUIDELINES
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## Andre Perry Talks 15 Years of Mission Creek Festival

ELLY HOFMAIER

### How did Mission Creek come to fruition in Iowa City?

So, Mission Creek originally began in the SF Bay area, it was the project of an arts worker named Jeff Ray, and it was the MCMAF (Mission Creek Music and Arts Festival) in the Bay Area, and he started many years ago. When I was living in California, I became friends with Jeff and ended up collaborating with him on the festival out there. When I moved to Iowa City he recommended the possibility of starting something similar, like a partner festival that could exist in this market, and I ended up working with a guy named Tanner Illingworth, we were both students at Iowa at that time and we came together and decided to put together the original

version of Mission Creek Festival in Iowa City as a music and literature event and we did the first festival in the spring of 2006. From there it just grew organically into the event that it is today.

### What is your favorite memory from Mission Creek?

(Laughing) That's a ridiculous question! There are lots of great memories. I think the first amazing memory I had of MCF was the first year. It was an idea where we had no idea if it was going to work... I don't think we cared from a financial perspective if it was going to work, but as an arts and culture and community event we really cared. During that first year this band called Tapes 'n Tapes played at the

Mill on the Friday of the festival and it was an absolutely oversold and huge show. We hadn't seen that kind of energy at a show before where people felt excited that this band was coming to their town and engaging with their community and which some bands, some of them were local and some where not, were just creating this unpredictable, fun show environment where students and people who just lived here could all interact and engage at one time. I think that was for us, either on the surface or beneath the surface, kind of a sign that this particular kind of activity would be welcomed in this town.

### What is the impact on the larger community?

I think the impact on the community comes in a lot of different shapes and forms. One of the most common is just talking to people who feel like their existence, their state of mind is seen simply by this festival existing and that a certain type of approach to culture is represented by the festival which is to be curious, to be independent, to take chances on things, to honor those people who are being independent before us. I think all of those things are celebrated by Mission Creek and when people talk about it, that's why they're so happy it exists, that's the signal to us that it's working.

I think one of the best compliments that we get, which is a frequent comment, is from people who are just like 'Hey, I don't know any of these bands or any of these writers that are on the lineup and I'm super excited to find out about them at the festival' Just that people are willing to be curious is cool.

### While mainstream festivals across the country continue to receive criticism for a lack of diversity amongst their lineups, MCF has upheld a standard of artist diversity for many years now. Where does this commitment stem from?

I think our commitment to diversity stems from a lot of things. One, as a curatorial team has changed and evolved over the years, I think on some level that's just the values of the team, so naturally on some level it's going to be a pretty diverse festival in terms of the perspectives of the different artists that are

being represented. On another level a few years ago, I think we also realized that we need to be super intentional about it and not just leave it to the whim of us organically coming to those conclusions just to ensure that there was a great gender balance on stage and that we were representing a lot of different cultures, from an ethnicity standpoint from a racial standpoint, just from different voices being heard and seen on stages and in bookstores. So I think we combined our natural values and then also put them in writing so that guide would be there just for us, so we'd remember how and why we're doing things as well as for future curators and producers to know.

### **What has the multi-venue format of Mission Creek meant for the overall development of the festival?**

The multi-venue format has meant different things over the life and many chapters of mission creek. It first originated in that form because that's how it existed in San Francisco and that seemed like a natural fit for what existed here. The first year of the festival our main venues were the Yacht Club, Gabes, and the Mill. It was like, hey all these clubs are very close to each other and you can walk between them so why wouldn't we do that. Then we continued to grow. I think at our peak venue years or peak attendance years we were at Hancher which is obviously much bigger than even the Englert, Now I think the venues we've chosen, in particular the programming at the Englert, Gabes, Yacht Club, The Mill, Prairie Lights Bookstore, Big Grove and a number of other venues... I think to us now it's all about intimacy. The festival market has grown and changed in many ways since 2006, that when we look at what's in Iowa City, what Iowa City is, where Iowa City is, we're like, you know what? We're not gonna build this massive festival by the numbers but we can build a highly curated, super intimate experience festival, so that whether you're a super nerd on all the writers and artists or you're just taking a chance on it, you can walk into the room and have your

life changed because you're so close to other people and so close to the artists on stage. I think we're now really happy that the Englert is the biggest room, because the Englert is really intimate when you think about all the other sorts of venues that exist in the world, so we like having it be these really warm experiences.

### **Are artists attending other artists events often?**

When we get artists to stay for a couple of days they tend to relax and dig into other things that are being offered. When we get artists to really chill out they're all in. That is something we're trying to explore a little bit more. Now we have artists that are playing two days, so they have multiple engagements with the festival. This year we have some artists that are doing both the lit and the music side of things, like Adia's doing that, Tasha's doing that.. That kind of engagement gets them here and keeps them here.

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## **THIS FESTIVAL ACTUALLY EXISTS BECAUSE OF THE UNDERCURRENT OF LITERARY CULTURE, OF CURIOSITY, OF MUSIC, AND JUST ART AND LOVE FOR CULTURE THAT EXISTS HERE.**

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We have some artists who are curious about other stuff. Lucy Daucus was freaking out about Garth Greenwell's new book and then she realized that Garth is at Mission Creek. We were like 'we can introduce you' and Garth is stoked... it's like all these connections are happening and it's small enough that you can actually see the other stuff you're interested in.

### **How does the focus on literature, which is different from a typical music festival, enhance the festival and regular programming at the Englert.**

I think literature is an important part of this community and the Iowa City vibe. From the beginning of the festival that was something that we honored... Like Austin, Texas has always been a film town,

in addition to being a music town. Iowa City has always been a book town. Initially we just did literature as a way to honor Iowa City. There are a lot of writers here and there are a lot of writers who come through here and there are a lot of writers who are happy to come here. Now as the festival is older we are thinking about two things, one is how do we use Mission Creek to create community for writers? It's a sometimes very lonely activity and sometimes it's really hard to have your network of writer friends, so how can we create community for writers and people involved in writing as well as an outlet for the readers of independent literature? And increasingly as we look towards the next 15 years I think we want to be able to support writers from all different sorts of backgrounds in Iowa City. There's lots of support for the MFA community of writers, how do we bring undergraduate writers deeper into the fold? Writers at large who didn't attend Iowa? People

who are older now and they're thinking they want to be more engaged with writing? How do we bring high school students more into it? How do we actually create some energy to the IC based writing community both in the MFA culture and also beyond it.

### **It's been described that MCF is a festival that, "does not happen despite where it lives but because of where it lives."**

I think we're trying to combat the idea that it's ridiculous that a festival is taking place in Iowa City because it's not Chicago or Kansas City or Minneapolis. This festival actually exists because of the undercurrent of literary culture, of curiosity, of music, and just art and love for culture that exists here. We didn't have to graft a festival onto Iowa City, it was easy to build it on things that already existed. That doesn't mean it wasn't a lot of work, in that we are great at bringing everyone in through the doors, but the foundation is there. It's on us to keep building upon that. ■



# THE ENGLERT THEATRE

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In 2019, we partnered with several venues to program events outside of our historic theater, including an outdoor show with Lake Street Dive at Big Grove Brewery & Taproom.

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[englert.org/events](http://englert.org/events)

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## Artists in a Shared Space: Finding Opportunity at Mission Creek

DANIEL BOSCALJON

Most people have had moments with art that remain truly inspirational—hearing a song that gives birth to a story within you, or seeing a movie that makes music, as your hands move across your keyboard or guitar. The Mission Creek Festival is a feast for those in the ICR hungry for aesthetic nourishment. Its consistent mix of veteran and emerging artists presenting innovative musical and literary work provides a trove of inspirational opportunities. The intersection of these elements, combined with a continued emphasis on community engagement, makes a Mission Creek Festival more of a multilevel aesthetic environment for everyone than the parade of popular performers that is typical of many music festivals.

Importantly, however, Mission Creek goes beyond offering access to artists that audiences can appreciate. As the festival has matured, it has done so with an eye toward creating more ways for local artists to showcase their work. Sometimes this means a student reads as part of Lit Walk, or a local band hits the stage at Big Grove. Participating in the festival—volunteering, attending, or presenting—opens opportunities to witness (or even interact with) personal heroes. Sometimes, such moments make the difference between treating a dream as a “someday” and realizing that you are living your dream, now.

This has been exceptionally true for Skylar Alexander. Due to her willingness to engage, Alexander has seen her relationship with the Mission Creek Festival continue to

evolve. She has participated as a student, a resident, a volunteer, a designer, a performer, an audience member, and (finally) an author. Most of this evolution has occurred because of the unique format of the Mission Creek Festival, where she hopes to showcase her forthcoming *Searching for Petco* (Forklift, 2020) in the future.

Alexander stayed in the Iowa City area after receiving her BA degrees in English and Entrepreneurial Management from Iowa in 2015, finding work as a graphic designer, paraeducator at Horace Mann, and Assistant Director of the Young Emerging Writers Program (coordinated by the Midwest Writing Center). She credits this program as generating her interest in poetry, rather than prose, when coordinator Ryan Collins introduced her



to contemporary poetry. Alexander recalls, “I got taken with a poet named Matt Hart, tried writing poems like him... He was my poetry hero. I came to see him read a million times. ...I met him at one point and embarrassed myself, telling him how many poems I’d written like his. ...He was gracious about it.”

Because she volunteered at the Literary Magazine and Small Press Book Fair (Saturday, April 4 at the Mill) due to her connections with the MWC and with Earthwords, the UI’s undergraduate literary magazine, Alexander was able to meet Hart in person. Because Hart is also co-editor for the press Forklift, Ohio, he often attends Mission Creek. During MCF 2015, he and his team ended up needing housing at the last minute—and Alexander, offering her house, got to meet him and his team again “in a less cringeworthy way.”

In 2018, Alexander’s involvement with the festival deepened as she was selected by Jenny Colville of Prompt Press to read at the Lit Walk. At this point, Alexander had successfully made the transition from volunteer and audience member to performer. “It was a really big deal, especially at the time. A lot of my friends had read, but I was pretty young. So, to be offered that was really flattering! I’d just published a poem in Prompt Press, and it was amazing to be able to be in front of that many people. It was great to be reading, at such a busy venue—at Dublin Underground. It was so crowded—the stairs had people sitting on them. I was excited because they made the video where they had the retrospective, and there’s a second of me reading on it.”

What made the event particularly thrilling for Alexander was the fact that Prompt’s co-host for the reading was Forklift, Ohio. Matt Hart was present, and “...it was the first time he heard me read since I was a teenager. It was very validating as a writer.” At the end, an impressed Hart offered Alexander a book deal.

This led to a two-year process in which Alexander offered a thick manuscript which was pared down into two book-

length possibilities—one of which is Searching for Petco, now entering its final process before publication. Although she’s hopeful that the 2020 Lit Fair will feature her book in print—not just her design—she emphasized that it will be available for preorder. The joy is still clear in her voice as she remembers: “Nobody ever gets a book deal in an underground bar—it’s part of what makes this place special!”

Some of the best moments of a Mission Creek Festival occur in random moments—with a number of well-known figures attending the festival for their own enjoyment, it is not unusual to find yourself face to face with someone you’ve admired when you least expect it. Alexander found this out when meeting another hero—Saul Williams—a few times during Mission Creek 2016.

“I not only saw him perform, but he was wandering the lit fair and I sold him a book that I’d designed... He then remembered me after the Q and A at Prairie Lights and talked to me about the design of his books.”

This kind of multi-layered discussion and interaction—poetry and design, music and literature—are part of what make MCF a fertile space for rich conversations. This is amply demonstrated by Alexander’s top literary pick for MCF 2020—Hanif Abdurraqib in conversation with Adia Victoria. Abdurraqib is an essayist and music critic, while Victoria is an accomplished musician who writes poetry. Put together, this April 4th event is almost certain to inspire.

Art is at its best when it is at its most interactive. The best performances—those described as having the most, or the best energy—occur when performers and audiences are really attentive to each other.

This is part of the reason why live theater captures a magic that eludes cinema (despite 3D effects), and why hearing a poet read her words makes the poem come to life in an unimaginably different way. The enriched, multi-medium atmosphere of a Mission Creek Festival continues to encourage exploration that ignores traditional boundaries that divide the arts. At a certain

point, after all, it doesn’t matter if poetry is read, spoken, or sung so long as the words themselves reveal truth or beauty.

As the Mission Creek Festival has continued to expand, it has done so in ways that blur or even erase lines that have traditionally separated artists from audiences. Although not everyone will likely have Alexander’s experience, her story attests to the value of simply showing up. There’s something that happens between the ICE CREAM (Saturday, April 4 at Masonic Lodge) eclectic media/zine fair that invites the community to create, the underground showcase of Daylight DIY (Saturday, April 4 at Trumpet Blossom Café), the annual literary magazine and small press book fair, and the intimate whispers or shouts of artists reading during a Lit Walk that invite opportunities and possibilities that exceed what each moment might advertise.

This enhanced reality is what community and art do, at their best. That’s also what Mission Creek does—and does better each year. ■

## CATCH THE EVENTS:

### Literary Magazine and Small Press Book Fair

Saturday, April 4 / 11 a.m.  
The Mill

### I.C.E. C.R.E.A.M. ZINE FAIR

Saturday, April 4 / 11 a.m.  
The Iowa City Masonic Lodge

### Daylight DIY

Saturday, April 4 / 1 p.m.  
Trumpet Blossom Cafe

### Hanif Abdurraqib in conversation with Adia Victoria

Saturday, April 4 / 4 p.m.  
TBA

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As a non-profit venue, ticket sales cover only a portion of our operating costs. The Friends of The Englert program is our way to say “thank you” by providing special benefits to donors. With our recently redesigned program, the enhanced benefits make it even easier to enjoy a show at The Englert.

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YOTOPIA FOR TWO	▶	▶	▶	▶	▶	▶	
STAGES RECOGNITION <i>the official Englert magazine</i>			▶	▶	▶	▶	
\$25 ENGLERT EATERY <i>good for a show-night dinner</i>				▶	▶	▶	
WITCHING HOUR 2020 FESTIVAL PASS				▶	▶	▶	
MISSION CREEK 2020 FESTIVAL PASS					▶	▶	
ANNUAL APPRECIATION DINNER						▶	

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## Staff Spotlight: Caleb Rainey

DANIEL BOSCALJON

*As part of our Staff Spotlight series, we humbly help you get to know the faces and names you may have encountered at the Englert (maybe even tonight!). In this volume, we're spotlighting House Manager Caleb Rainey and his involvement in the larger Iowa City arts community as a spoken-word artist, writer, producer, and leader of IC Speaks.*

**You came to Iowa as an undergraduate who identified as an artist and as a writer. What are some of the most important skills that you developed by choosing to make your home in a place where writing is valued?**

Listening. Being open. The act of connecting. Those are the things I've learned the most in Iowa, in Iowa City—

connecting to the arts, and learning. It was learning how to be open to artists, learn from other art forms, and how to talk about art in a way that's accessible.

**Was that more during your time as a student, or your time since graduation?**

The University and Iowa City go together—both of them taught me [those skills], both in the classroom and out. Working with Akwi [Nji] and other artists in the area let me learn how to connect with community artists as well as student artists.

**As part of your creating an artistic identity, you decided to adopt the stage name, "The Negro Artist," acquired from a Langston Hughes essay discussing the**

**importance of claiming racial identity as an important ingredient to the artistic process. How has claiming this name and identity changed your approach to what it means for you to write?**

It has allowed me to feel comfortable saying whatever I feel is my truth. The hardest thing oftentimes for people to connect with me on is race. To adopt a name where that is on the table, where who I am and what I look like is acknowledged, makes it easier. It's liberating and freeing—you know who I am. The characteristic that's hardest is out of the way, so I can share the rest of my truth. It gives me the freedom to say "they know that—I can focus on the rest."

**You've developed an incredible reputation in Iowa City as someone who creates opportunities for others, whether through Black Art; Real Stories—the literary magazine you began as an undergraduate—or your work at The Hook spin off Drop The Mic. Can you talk a bit about your understanding of the relationship of community to the artist?**

I think the best artists are the artists who are connected to the community, and by listening to artists in the community you learn more about your art form, your preferences, and you learn what your community needs to hear. You don't need to write for others, but it is important to hear what they're talking about. I know that I'm limited in my views, there are experiences I can't have, so it is important to have other artists who can speak to those experiences and add their depth to a topic that the community cares about.

**Can you tell me about IC Speaks?**

I started a new program called "IC Speaks" which is partnered with the Englert and IYWP (Iowa Youth Writing Program), in which I teach a workshop at four different High Schools at the district—and they meet together once a month at the Englert. In November, the Englert hosted a showcase that followed a full day conference. We had workshops in the morning, panels in the afternoon where they heard other artists, and then we closed

with the program of young writers. The Englert is hosting a showcase in April for all the students to perform in.

#### **How did that evolve?**

The IWYP did a spoken word club at West High for the past two years. I got involved because one of the directors of IWYP had seen me perform and asked me to help. I became the leader of the club, and then I pitched the idea to expand it and allow it to become a standalone project. It is its own entity, now includes three other schools, and it does this thing. My goal was to create a community—they're now bold enough to branch out to community events and open mics—and I realized that this may be true of the other High Schools. ... get to know other writers, know that you're not alone. When you perform, you share yourself. It's vulnerable. The more people who are there, the more powerful it is and the more self-assured. We're at City, West, Tate, and Liberty.

**You've published as an author and performed as a spoken word artist—and while these are in some ways related in terms of a love of language, they also draw on a very different skill set. Can you describe why each medium has been important for you, and how you see their similarities and differences as informing your understanding of art?**

On the stage, as a performer, the skill set is an art of ownership, to speak what it is that I believe. That means really figuring out my own story and how to tell that. On the page, the reader has more time to decipher what it is that you're sharing—you don't have to be as clear. You focus less on storytelling and more on detailed word choice, the relationship of how words look on a page. One of the largest differences between stage and page is that the page lets me cut words and move them so the words appear differently. On the stage, my voice does that—different lows, emotions, pace. On the page, detailed accuracy is what is most important. To go between both is a really cool thing.

**Say more about going between both—what has occupying that space between**

**them allowed you to learn?**

I think that it helps me understand that—to respect all mediums more. I can tell the same story, or the same essence of a story, but on the stage and page they look different. That helps me respect different medium. Even if I'm more of a spoken word fan, I can read a poem and respect it. If I love reading page poetry, but a rapper comes out with spoken word and music behind it then I can see how the medium lets that person tap into something they couldn't otherwise.

**Has your practice at moving between them helped you to understand other art forms as well?**

I've found myself having more and more appreciation for the visual arts also, which I can't do. I'm just not good at it. As I've grown to love different mediums and appreciate them, I can look at visual art and, even if I don't know the techniques used, I can open my heart to understanding the medium a bit better.

**Talk about your role as House Manager at the Englert: what is it that you do, and what have you found most exciting about it?**

So: as a house manager, my job is to make sure the event runs smoothly from start to finish. That means welcoming the band and tour managers, getting them through sound check, taking care of them—including food, tea, and whatever else is needed. I also make sure ushers, security, concessions are set up. I also need to interact with patrons, making sure they have a good time and get what they need. Also, wrap up: make sure everyone gets paid, loaded out, and then lock up.

The most exciting thing: the energy of running an event. I've produced smaller things in the community, but a larger scale event—750 people in the audience—requires a different set of skills, or more of the ones I have—is exciting. To juggle all the pieces and make sure I have everything flowing correctly is the most exciting thing.

**How has adopting this role as House**

**Manager expanded your understanding of the role of the arts (beyond writing) in Iowa City as a whole? What new opportunities and discoveries have you made?**

What [this job has] taught me is how hungry we are for art, how [art] is essential to Iowa City, how much we appreciate the energy when people come to a show at the Englert—music, or comedy—far outside of poetry. But people are so ready, willing, and open to the arts. We have regulars, people who come to every other show because they need it. I didn't know that before working at the Englert. Now, I know how many people appreciate and really need the arts.

I've gotten the opportunity to talk to artists and learn what it means to be on tour. It's also allowed me to talk to people who might appreciate the arts but not come to a spoken word event, and realize we have things in common and want to collaborate on projects. You get in a bubble and don't always realize you're there. That happens to me and to others who come to the Englert. It's cool to talk to them at intermission or before the show starts. People are excited, but don't always know all the things that are there. It connects more circles of artists.

**How do you see the Englert's investment in Building the Greatest Small City for the Arts in America coordinating with your personal drive to expand opportunities for local creatives and artists and help them to find platforms for expression?**

I think the Englert is dedicating itself to really uplifting the arts in a lot of different genres, different methods. That coincides with me because I want to make sure that artists are seen, heard, listened to, and appreciated. They're fully dedicating themselves: they're a venue, they're adding educational programming. They're leveraging it to make it more for the community as a whole. That's exactly what I want to do: to be an artist, as I progress, to make opportunities for others to learn and connect. ■



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# LOOK FOR THE ENGLERT'S 2019 TOYOTA SIENNA VAN AROUND TOWN!

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# Active Audiences V: A Tale of Two Venues

DANIEL BOSCALJON

*In each volume of Stages, staff writer and critic Daniel Boscaljon shares insights and tips from his seat.*

**Each year, the Mission Creek Festival** releases its schedule with a different blend of musical performers, literary favorites, and community events. As the festival continues to refine its innovative offerings, one constant is that it offers far more content than a festival goer can consume. This poses a particular dilemma for passholders and active audience members. If you are faced with two must-see performances happening simultaneously in different venues, it can be challenging to appreciate and engage with everything that is available.

This struggle is intensified due to the overarching excitement of The Festival!, which spills into the streets and businesses of downtown Iowa City. The drive to adhere to a predetermined plan versus the

desire to go with the flow pulls festival goers in two directions as they navigate a festival scene. The tension created is reminiscent of Frost's dilemma in "The Road Not Taken": to be "Sorry I could not travel both / And be one traveler." Choices must be made.

Knowing that life never offers guarantees, the presence of options—especially many good options—sometimes raises the fear of missing out. This can be offset by making a plan and considering; the artist, the venue, the atmosphere, and friends. Working these options in advance and feeling content with how you choose will allow you to fully inhabit the space you are in, so that you can soak up whatever beauty happens.

I experimented with intentionally approaching a similar dilemma in September of 2019, a night when the Englert presented Joseph at the Englert,

and Emily Wolfe at the Mill. I was no huge fan of either but had heard good things about both. Including Deep Sea Diver, opening for Joseph, the night featured five formidable female vocalists and instrumentalists. I reflected briefly on how organizations like Girls Rock Iowa City will do nothing but encourage and empower talented women (like these, but also Soccer Mommy the night before, or Liz Moen on that Saturday) who can see what art is possible at hands like theirs.

I chose not to listen to any of the bands before the shows that night, preferring that the night remain a surprise. So few true surprises exist for us when technology's encyclopedia of everything is so quickly accessed. The Englert's role as curator is skilled enough that I've learned that its productions are worthwhile. I've always found that when I attend performances with artists that I don't know--or representing genres that are foreign to



me--I end up finding, at the very least, an appreciation for what about an artist or style resonates with fans. Because it becomes so easy to confuse enjoyment with gratification, I am grateful when enabled to consider what makes performances worthwhile from perspectives I do not share.

The Englert show started earlier, and so I came for the opener, the excellent Deep Sea Diver, and sat toward the back on the far stage left side. I like these seats anyway, because the floor slopes upward and allows me a clear line of sight (without my blocking anyone else's view). The theater was not filled with people, but it was filled with life. After the opener, I ventured to the Mill to see Good Morning Midnight in a room occupied by a handful of disinterested others. I love this venue, especially its provision of tasty food (and pitchers of water) during shows; however, in this case, the loud irrelevance of a few disinterested patrons made it hard to focus on the stage. They made the room feel empty. I stayed for a few songs, then returned to the Englert to catch the beginning of Joseph.

Joseph's stage was spartan, featuring three microphones up front, with three sisters who share duties in a charming, supportive, affirming way. By the fourth poppy folk songs, the crowd asked to stand. The band agreed. The shift was palpable. The ability to move—even constrained in the narrow aisle—increases engagement (people are more into the music) as well as distraction (you end up watching people dance). Overall, the show featured was empowering and encouraging, initiated by the band's supportive demeanor to the crowd, city, and opener. The group is talented but not in ways that transport me.

I returned to the Mill, where Emily Wolfe was already onstage. The loud, reverberating notes announced this fact from the sidewalk beside the building, before I entered. Although the room held the same number of people, it nonetheless was full. Wolfe's three-piece band was appropriately, not abusively, loud. I found my usual booth, in the corner, and realized that the band demanded my full attention


to the extent that anyone else would have disappeared. They played the kind of blues that you hope hits the radio when driving on 80 at 3 a.m.--their glorious, powerful sound seemed capable of expanding even the expansive vastness of ground and stars. It was thrilling: I was glad to return.

The final line of Frost's poem shows how the road "not taken" is often a story constructed after the fact, something that offers consolation in the absence of satisfaction. He writes "That has made all the difference," exposing as self-deception, rather than empowerment, the arbitrary validation of something that seemed equal. What does make all the difference is the spirit in which you approach a performance. Even though a festival offers more opportunities, the basic choice to be present (or not) always remains. Being present at a space with a willingness to experience art requires being open to the invitations of the crowd that create excitement around you that you can appropriate until it gives you new ears to appreciate a sound that you would otherwise ignore. Being present allows you to ignore an empty room and simply hear the vast potential embodied in three talented musicians. Being present can even reveal the amount of music made between venues—people busking for change playing guitar, a person at the piano plinking out Chopsticks, music pounding out from the Union. Magic swirls around, beauty is always within our grasp—the key to being an active audience to it comes through paying attention.

Focusing on the choice of how, not what, you attend ensures that you will be available to witness what is arguably the best part of live performances: the unknown. Live performance reminds us that sometimes things go better than expected, that the temporary marriage of audience and performer and venue lead to something far greater than the sum of the various parts. Attending a performance in order to engage with the unknown and unknowable, rather than simply witnessing the expected through the phone you film it through, invites you to truly share in its magic.

Ultimately, the best way to find the road not taken is by venturing into these kinds of unknown spaces. In these cases, preserving the unknown means simply living into it and encountering it openly, rather than trying to archive it or explain it to those nearby. Just live it. And, as you practice how to be present at the show you've chosen without worrying about what else is going on, especially during Mission Creek Festival, keep some of the following considerations in mind:

- **What are elements of this show in this venue that are unique to this circumstance?**
- **What are people in the audience focused on? What are they overlooking?**
- **What aspects of the crowd, or the performance, invite you to become more immersed in this environment? What factors push you away, or make you restless?**
- **What parts of the performance seem most powerful, or at least potentially compelling? Is it possible to focus on this in a way that overpowers distractions?**
- **How does it feel to focus on one part of the room and really pay attention to it?**
- **As you become more deeply engaged with the performance, can you start to anticipate how the performance will affect the crowd? ■**





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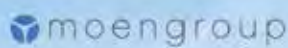
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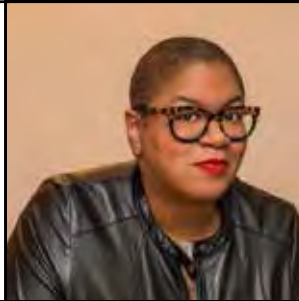
Hanif Abdurraqib



Hadiza.



Samantha Irby



Tasha



Claire Barrett  
Marketing Coordinator

**MUSIC:** Lonnie Holley. After watching 'The Man is the Music' to learn more about him, I know Lonnie Holley's performance will be something truly special. With every show being fully improvised, he seems to bring healing and joy all at once and I can't wait to be there for those moments.

**LIT:** Tommy Pico. I laughed hard and ugly cried reading Pico's Feed, and I can't wait to hear his work in person.

Elly Hofmaier  
Marketing Engagement Coordinator

**MUSIC:** I have a friend in Kansas City who sends some epic snail mail; in one letter he disclosed a handmade bookmark, a pressed flower, and a Bandcamp download code for Mal Blum's Pity Boy. If those vibes don't get you excited as hell about an artist idk what will.

**LIT:** Can Kim Gordon count as an author? Because Kim Gordon.

Brian Johannesen  
Programming Director - Music

**MUSIC:** The Hooten Hallers are one of the best live bands I've seen. They have a deep, raw energy that sinks into bones and literally pulls a smile across your face. Their ability to create ebbs and flows and a fresh sound within a familiar genre makes you think they may have invented it.

**LIT:** Hanif Abdurraqib + Adia Victoria. This is a perfect storm for me: One of the best writers on music alive reading alongside one of the best performers. These two get deep on their own, analyzing music and life at lengths most never consider, and I can't wait to see where they go in discussion from there.

Savannah Lane  
Programming/Production Assistant

**MUSIC:** Caroline Rose. Her music is just good quirky fun, and I've never seen her live so it will be a new experience.

**LIT:** Samantha Irby. I was gifted her essay collection for Christmas and I tore through it in two days in my post holidays hibernation. It made me audibly laugh so much that my mom asked me multiple times what I was reading.

Kelso Messerschmitt  
Graphic Designer

**MUSIC:** Daylight DIY @ Trumpet Blossom has me particularly excited this year. alongside renaming and relocating the event, playing it are some of the most accepting and loving individuals around. come for the vegan food and stay for the punk shit. or vice versa - whatever it'll be a banger!!

**LIT:** Tasha is an artist you have to see two days in a row if you get the chance. Friday she will read at the Lit Walk: Writers of Color Reading Series and Saturday she opens for Lucy Dacus!

Nolan Petersen  
Development Associate

**MUSIC:** I'm really looking forward to Hadiza., as I have missed a few opportunities to see her performing during her years in the Iowa City music scene, and the focus of her music and artistic expression is one which I don't see myself in, and that is exactly why I see her presence as so cool and so important.

**LIT:** I love the literary element to this festival, and the broader Arts opportunities, so the Zine + Book Fair is absolutely something I am going to make time to visit.

Katie Roche  
Development Director

**MUSIC:** I hope that Sun Ra fans and the people that came out for Kamasi Washington in 2018 have the Shabaka and the Ancestors show on their radar. I don't know if this show will turn into a scene with people on their feet, feeling the music, but that is my hope.

**LIT:** I love the Lit Walk on Friday night. Some years I hunker down in one spot, absorbing whatever has been programmed in that space. This year I want to catch the readings from Prompt Press, Iowa Writers' House, and the Writers of Color Series, so I'll be planning my travels from venue to venue.

Sarah Shonrock  
Operations Director

**MUSIC:** I am looking forward to seeing Adia Victoria. I can't wait to hear her strength and her voice live!

**LIT:** Get out to the Ice Cream Zine Fair - there is literally something for everyone there. Support local artists and pick up something to treasure!

Connor Wade  
Development Associate

**MUSIC:** Black Belt Eagle Scout - I'm really looking forward to Black Belt Eagle Scout at The Mill. I recommend checking out their debut, Mother of My Children (released in 2018). Black Belt Eagle Scout continues to create wonderful dreamy songs with poignant lyrics.

**LIT:** One of the best parts of Mission Creek is the Lit Walk on Friday. I'm looking forward to checking out the work of Danielle Krull, a 2020 Iowa Writers' House Bicultural Fellow. Danielle works as a writer telling the stories of immigrant and refugee communities.

Chris Wiersema  
Programming Director - Music

**MUSIC:** Nadah El Shazly. (MCF 2020 Artist in Residence) Experiencing the performance by Cairo, Egypt-born Nadah El Shazly is to be suspended in the threads of the old and the new, of the intersections of jazz, electronic, and vocal music, and of narratives of trans-national identities, all expertly woven by a patient and expert composer/vocalist. El Shazly braid samples of early 20th century mawwals intertwining with her own rich and mournful vocal intonations while sparse, thumping beats form pillars to her quick and vibrant keyboard melodies, all of it knotting together to form a tapestry that makes the heart race in equal measure to its ache.

**LIT:** LIT WALK: Writers' House + Nomadic In the past, the Lit Walk was best when I never knew who or what I was going to hear or hear about next. This year though, I'm thrilled by the prospects of the three Iowa Writers' House Bicultural Writing Fellows reading from works relating to Syria, Sudan, and the experience of adoptee's being raised in the rurals of Iowa. I hope to have my conceptions of what constitutes "near" and "far" challenged by these neighbors.

Rachel Yoder  
Programming Director - Literature

**MUSIC:** I'm excited to see Adia Victoria who was one of Barack Obama's favorite artists of 2019. Her bluesy style will be incredible to hear and see up close at the Mill.

**LIT:** I've been laughing along with Samantha Irby for years while reading her work, and I can't wait to laugh some more at her opening reading on Wednesday.



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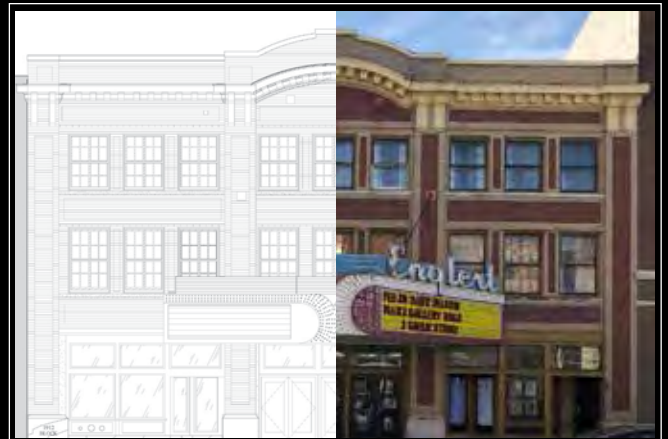
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For decades, epidemiologists lined up behind the "social control hypothesis." If no one is around to issue judgmental glances when we eat junk food at midnight or tisk at the days we spend in bed, of course we'll be more unhealthy.

Of course we'll die sooner.

#### Mission Creek Lit Feature:

A page from Kristen Radtke's forthcoming book *Seek You: Essays on American Loneliness* (Pantheon, July 2021). Kristen will be presenting a first look of her new book at Mission Creek Festival."

# Student Partnerships

*“Offering opportunities for students to deeply engage in the work we do is essential to fulfilling our vision of building the greatest small city for the arts. The Englert team is made up of passionate people who appreciate the value in nurturing the dreams of young people who are drawn toward non-profit work, performance art, or community engagement. Providing a space for students to professionally develop their skills benefits everyone. Students may fall in love with Iowa City and decide to stay here where they can continue to contribute to our arts scene, or they may get inspired to move somewhere else which helps extend the knowledge that talented, hard-working people come out of Iowa City.” – Jessica Egli, Events Director*

The mission of The Englert Theatre is to inspire and activate positive community growth through the arts. With these new partnerships, we are taking more steps toward fulfilling that mission. Each of these partnerships allow space for individuals to grow and learn, and serve as an opportunity for them to converse and deeply engage with the arts. The partnerships greatly support the Englert in our many efforts: to preserve the history – from 1912 through today – of our organization, to remain fierce and constant stewards to our donors, and to foster new work of artists in our community. We look forward to working alongside Darius, Keerthana, and Ryan, and continuing to inspire and grow our community.



## KEERTHANA KRISHNAKUMAR DEVELOPMENT INTERN:

The Englert Development Data Intern works alongside our development team to help the organization learn about our patrons and donors. This helps us to ensure that we're meeting the needs of the community by communicating the right message at the right time to the right people.

**“My internship at The Englert Theatre gives me the opportunity to apply the concepts that I'm learning in my Business Analytics program at the University of Iowa to help boost the local arts community here in Iowa City. As a dancer and musician, I find it incredibly meaningful to contribute my new skills with data to projects at the theatre that is relevant to my own interests and future career goals.” – Keerthana Krishnakumar**

**“Keerthana has been a wonderful addition to our team. Her approach to data has been so helpful to the health of our program as we continue to grow as an organization. We also enjoy working with such a professional and kind human!” – Connor Wade, Development Associate**



**RYAN KANGAIL**  
**ARCHIVIST:**

Through a partnership with the University of Iowa Graduate College, the Englert Archivist will be working on cataloguing and identifying historical documents and resources that the organization has accumulated over our 100+ years. Ryan Kangail joined the Englert team in January 2020 as the first Englert Archivist.

"As both a Library and Information Science graduate student with the University of Iowa and a visual artist, the opportunity to apply my archival studies in support of the arts is a dream. Exhuming and organizing its history will compose a more cohesive and resonant story of The Englert Theatre. A story that reveals the immense value of arts and cultural centers and acknowledges the tremendous efforts of the theatre's initial visionaries and the many impassioned individuals that have worked to restore and preserve it." - Ryan Kangail

"Ryan is going to be such a great addition to our team. We have a wealth of historical artifacts and Ryan's attention to detail will not only help us to give context to what we have, but also help us develop systems to help us far into the future." - John Schickedanz, Marketing Director



**DARIUS STEWART**  
**NONFICTION FELLOW:**

The Englert Nonfiction Fellowship was created to support one writer studying in the University of Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program by providing working space close to the theater and allowing access to the arts. Stewart will receive complimentary tickets to all Englert events as well as an open seat at MERGE co-working space in downtown Iowa City. At the conclusion of the fellowship, we will feature a piece of work created by Stewart in our playbill magazine, Stages. He will also present a public reading and talk this spring (details to come) to discuss his experience.

"I extend my many thanks to Andre Perry and his colleagues on the Englert Committee for selecting me for the Englert Nonfiction Fellowship. In addition to forging a relationship with the Englert staff, I aim to take full advantage of this opportunity to become more engaged in the Iowa City arts community. I can't say enough how truly honored I am for this recognition." - Darius Stewart

"We are honored to continue this collaboration with the University of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program to support a student writer and encourage their engagement with the arts culture at-large in Iowa City," - Andre Perry, Executive Director ■

# ENGLERT WAVELENGTH

### ENGLERT WAVELENGTH: DEEPER LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

In 2018, the Englert Theatre launched Englert Wavelength, an educational programming branch of the organization that is dedicated to creating opportunities for youth and adults to experience deeper learning through the arts. Still a growing series, in 2019 we launched a professional development workshop called Navigating Your Narrative, continued to grow our youth acting camp, Acting Out!, and partnered with IYWP to support the creation of IC Speaks, a spoken-word outreach program.



#### NAVIGATING YOUR NARRATIVE:

Discovering your value in the corporate world isn't an easy task. To help members of our community navigate their workplace environment, Englert Events Director Jessica Egli developed this iteration of Navigating Your Narrative, which aimed to help participants answer the following questions: What is our company story? Why is our history important to my work? How do I incorporate myself into the story as an individual? How can I use this story to more deeply engage with our clients, partners, and community? To help, local artists and businesspeople Caleb Rainey, Vero Rose Smith, Kate Moreland, and Kristy Hartsgrove Mooers all led a portion of the workshop. Stay tuned for more information on this program in 2020.



#### ACTING OUT:

Englert events director and University of Iowa Theatre Arts Department alumna Jessica Egli developed Acting Out! Acting Camp in 2018. The course in acting focused on voice work, communication, character development, and writing skills with 4th - 6th grade students and worked toward the performance of a monologue written by the camp goers. Now, in 2020 after another successful year with 4th - 6th students, Acting Out is expanding into three weeks of camps with an additional week for middle school students focused on movement and scene work, and a week for high school students aiming to develop the skills required for emotional recall and preparation, active use of imagination, and self-discovery. To learn more and register your student, go to [englert.org/events](http://englert.org/events).



#### IC SPEAKS PARTNERSHIP

IC Speaks is a spoken word and poetry organization created and led by Caleb Rainey [read about Caleb on page xx]. IC Speaks supports a community of young writers & performers in Iowa City with weekly writing workshops, monthly performance workshops, & larger performance opportunities. The program is supported by Iowa Youth Writing Project and Englert Wavelength. The Englert provides venue space for the group to meet, workshop, and perform, as well as general production support.

If you enjoyed learning about our educational programming, stay tuned for more about how the Englert engages with students — as patrons, employees, interns, and more — in future issues of Stages. ■

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## MCF Artist-in-Residence: Nadah El Shazly

CLAIRE BARRETT

*The Mission Creek Festival Artist Residency was launched in 2012, aiming to provide an opportunity for an emerging musician to develop and record new material without the burden of studio cost, and leave with work completely owned by them. Since 2012, artists have spent the festival week at Flat Black Studios, a repurposed barn studio located in scenic Lone Tree, Iowa (just south of Iowa City). There, resident artists are invited to record new material with Luke Tweedy, owner and engineer, in a rare opportunity for artists to focus on making new work, or getting existing work recorded. Artists retain complete creative control and full ownership of all recordings that come out of the week retreat, and any release recognizes Mission Creek Festival and Flat Black Studios.*

**This year's Mission Creek Festival Artist-in-Residence** is Nadah El-Shazly:

A singer and composer living and working in Cairo, Nadah El Shazly released her critically acclaimed debut album *Ahwar* in Nov 2017 via Nawa Recordings. Nadah El Shazly fiercely rejects what she calls "musical political correctness," or the constant need to self-police and color within prescribed lines. It's an edict the Egyptian-born El Shazly has been ignoring for years, her confidence growing alongside her stature within Cairo's burgeoning experimental scene. Before drifting toward glowing electronic and improvisational experiments, she sang in a local punk band whose specialty was covering the Misfits; following that, she took a job crooning jazz covers in the lobby of an area

hotel. After two years of constant live workshoping, El Shazly finally found the core of her sound by incorporating elements of all three. The result was 2017's *Ahwar*, which *The Quietus* calls "a perfect amalgamation of traditional Egyptian song with experimental takes on performance and instrumentation."

In Arabic, *Ahwar* means "marshlands." Indeed, the record is an atmospheric maze of twists and turns that exists as a kind of sonic transition zone, a fuzzy fusion of North African melody and shapeshifting electronica with no clear border or blueprint. A staggering 22 musicians join her on *Ahwar*, including Godspeed You! Black Emperor, double-bassist Thierry Amar, and multi-instrumentalist Devin Brahja Waldman. On opening track "Afqid Adh-Dhakira," El Shazly takes a sample of a tune by a 19th-century Egyptian artist and distorts it, bending the sound to build mysterious drones. Like some uneasy sailor, she guides all directional shifts with her mournful voice, channeling traditional Egyptian vocal techniques through a modern prism.

In addition to the weeklong retreat, the artist-in-residence performs during the festival itself, taking one of the stages in the heart of downtown Iowa City. You can find El Shazly playing live at The Mill on April 2, ahead of Australia's cult band The Necks. Individual tickets and passes are on sale now. For more information on Nadah El-Shazly, the Mission Creek Artist-in-Residence, or festival performances, go to [missioncreekfestival.com](http://missioncreekfestival.com). ■

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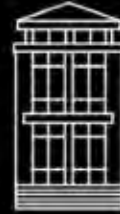
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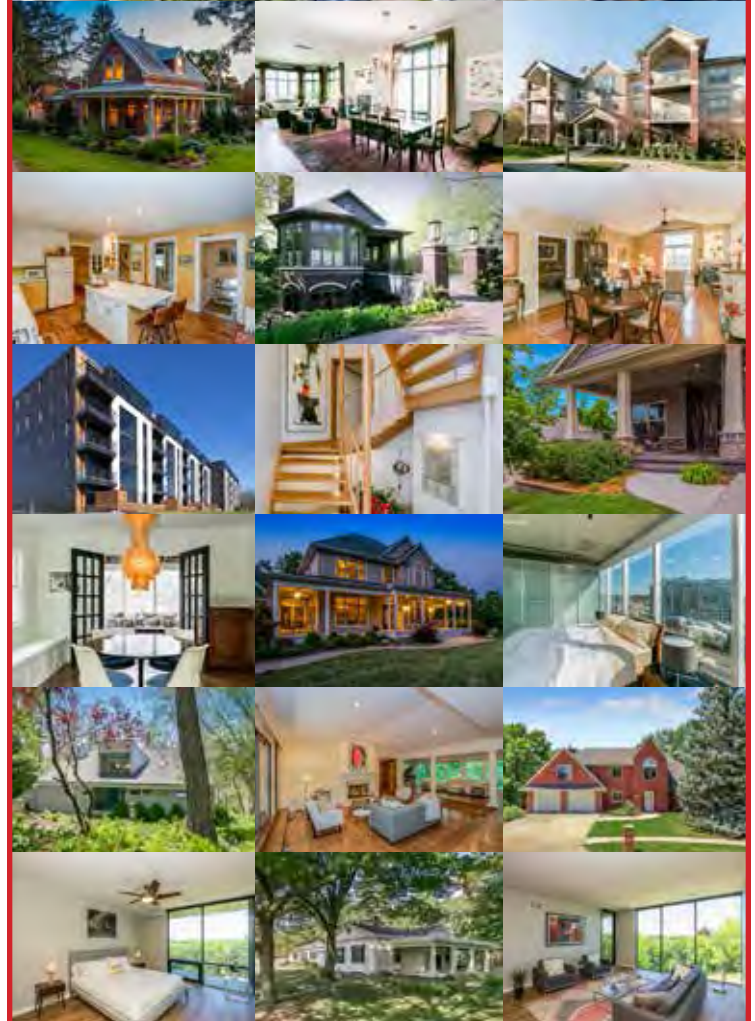
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The face of The Englert circa 1912

## The History of the Englert

**ON SEPTEMBER 26, 1912**, husband and wife William & Etta Englert launched an institution when they opened The Englert Theatre in downtown Iowa City, replacing what had once been a livery stable. They built the theater to rival the finest stage and movie houses throughout the Midwest and to establish a vibrant community gathering space for local and regional citizens.

Vaudeville acts from across the world performed on the stage and films - still an emerging art form at that time - were shown on the theater's state-of-the-art projection equipment. These exciting events welcomed community members into the Englert's 1,071 seats. Above the theatrics in the main hall, William and Etta resided on the theater's second floor and provided housing for traveling artists on the third.

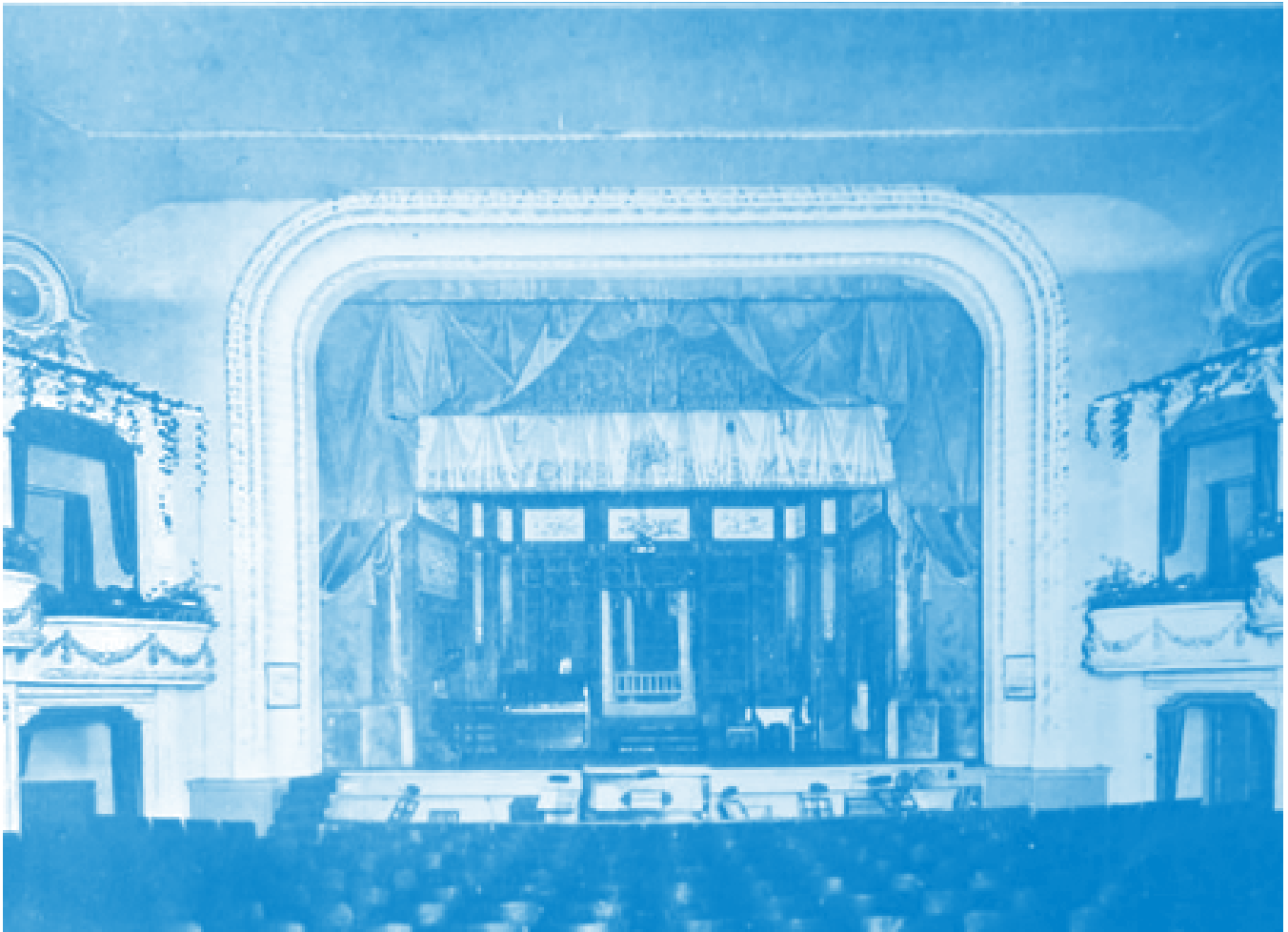
In 1920, William Englert passed away at 46 years old. Following his death, business partners A.H. Blank (from Des Moines) and Nate Chapman purchased the business in 1921. Chapman, who had been based in Des Moines, had moved to Iowa City just a year earlier when he and Blank purchased the storied Garden Theater cinema, which would later become The Varsity and then The Astro. The Blank and the Chapman families, through a line of committed descendants, would go on to steward the Englert's existence for the remainder of the century.

After Nate Chapman died in 1925, his wife Dora continued to own and operate the theater alongside A.H. Blank. Dora's brother, Al Davis, also assisted with managing the facility. On February 13, 1926, a fire nearly destroyed the Englert. Firemen fought to save the building as

the blaze tore through the roof. Dora Chapman was there - as was Etta Englert - and she would later recount the scene to her grandchildren - Nathan, Katherine, and Barbara Chapman.

Despite \$125,000 worth of damage to a property that had cost only \$60,000 to build 14 years before, the theater's benefactors restored the building with an eye to the ornate aesthetic tendencies of the 1920s. In particular, significant investment from A.H. Blank made this rebirth possible. From the ashes, the Englert returned to the Iowa City community.

In time, the venue became a full-time movie house. In the 1980s the singular theater space was subdivided into two small-screen spaces. Likewise the interior had been updated with gypsum board, paneling, carpeting, and acoustic



The original interior of The Englert Theatre circa 1917

ceilings. The owners during this period were Ansel and Marvin Chapman (sons of Dora) and Mike Blank (son of A.H. Blank) of Central States Theater Corporation.

As the end of the century approached, Mike Blank, in his 90s, sought to sell the business while he was still alive. He conferred with his partners, the Chapmans (whose various family members had migrated away from the core of Iowa City), about selling the Englert. Seeking to honor Mike's wishes, the Chapmans agreed. In 1999, after nearly 80 years of caring for the building, they closed and sold the Englert.

A bar owner initially purchased the theater and planned to turn it into a club. However, a group of local citizens envisioned an opportunity to renovate and restore the theater to its original purpose: a performing arts and community

gathering space for the people of Iowa City. This group of inspired locals persuaded the City of Iowa City to purchase the theater and hold it in trust until funds could be raised for a newly formed nonprofit entity to purchase and renovate the space.

Over the next five years, this group worked diligently to rebuild the Englert as a premier arts venue and a hub in the Iowa City cultural scene. In part – under the banner of “Save the Englert” – the group secured funds to restore the Englert to its 1920's glory. The names of contributors are memorialized throughout the building: a capital campaign wall in the lobby, plaques around the theater, and on the backs of seats in the main hall.

On December 4, 2004, the Englert returned to the community with its first live performance in over 40 years. Since that time, the Englert has become

a leader in the Midwestern arts scene through its ongoing programming, partnerships with the community and the University of Iowa, its production of two innovative festivals - Mission Creek and Witching Hour, its commissions work with local and international artists, its commitment to the preservation of history, and celebration of the evolving cultural diversity of the Iowa City area. ■

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# Audience Guidelines

In the age of lightning-fast entertainment that allows movies, music, and more to be downloaded in an instant to a smartphone, consumers may not be aware of how their technology and behavior can affect the concert-going experience for fellow audience members and for the performers themselves. The following guidelines need to be respected in order for all patrons and artists to have an enjoyable and safe experience. Please be courteous to those around you.

**If you need assistance during the show, please go to your nearest volunteer usher.** If additional assistance is needed, the usher will find the appropriate person to help you further.

**Please arrive on time.** We know parking downtown can be a hassle and our will-call lines can be long. Please allow extra time for travel, parking, and finding your seats. If you arrive late, we may ask you to wait until an appropriate break in the show to get you to your seats.

**Do not have conversations, even whispering, during the concert or event.** This will distract performers as well as fellow audience members. If your child becomes restless, frightened, or loud, please take him or her to the lobby.

**Silence all cell phones, pagers, watches, and other devices.** Don't text, tweet, blog, or surf the web. The glow from your device is distracting. You are here to enjoy the show, so please give the show your attention!

**Keep feet, bags, and children out of the aisles.** Blocking the aisles is against the fire code.

**Pay attention to venue rules and posted notices.** Many shows do not allow photography or recording. Flash photography is never allowed. If we ask you to stop, please do so.

**Pay attention to the vibe of the show.** If the crowd gets up and starts dancing, join them. Please don't try to do a one-person show for your own entertainment. We will ask you to sit down.

**Respect the supporting act:** You never know where they are going in the future. If you really dislike the music, take a walk or check out our current gallery exhibit on the second floor. Please be polite.

**Patrons are never allowed on stage.** Not before the show, during the show, or after the show.

**Grounds for removal:** If our staff finds you are not adhering to the above guidelines, we will give one verbal warning requesting that you change your behavior. If you continue to disregard the guidelines, we will request that you leave the premises. Being removed from more than one event will result in being banned from Englert-presented events for at least one calendar year. ■

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