A black and white portrait of Paul Goodnight, a man with a mustache and dreadlocks, resting his head on his hand. The image is the background for the magazine cover.

SoulVision®

M A G A Z I N E

THE GENIUS OF PAUL GOODNIGHT
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February 2020

EDITORS NOTE

BK Fulton



Photos by Queon “Q” Martin

| “If you have a vision in your heart, . . . act on it.”

If you have something to say, . . . say it. If you have a song within you, . . . sing it. If you have a book in you, . . . write it. If you have a vision in your heart, . . . act on it. The world is a place where our efforts make our dreams come true. The artists and leaders we profile in our February issue are making the world better by doing what they were born to do. They have figured out a way to get out of their own way and to just do it. I hope you enjoy reading about their journey and learning from their examples. The cover feature on Paul Goodnight is nothing short of amazing. He lays out his metamorphosis into an internationally known and respected powerhouse of creative expression. His art moves all who see it. The story of Kitt Shapiro (daughter of the late great Eartha Kitt) is a reminder that “the fruit don’t fall far from the tree.” Plunky brings the funk and Maggie Small reminds us that there is power in grace. The storied ballerina is still doing what she loves. That’s the lesson right . . . do what you love. All of these pioneers and innovators remind us of what is possible and that love is the secret ingredient. I love that you have chosen to read SoulVision Magazine. I love that each day is a new opportunity to be better. I love that you get a new look when you have SoulVision.

| “The world is a place where our efforts make our dreams come true.”

CELEBRITY

The Genius of Paul Goodnight



Paul Goodnight, black art royalty. Photo by Mitch Weiss.

| “Great art moves you.”

Paul Goodnight has dedicated his life to creating art that uplifts and empowers his community. He has seen the destruction of war firsthand and is doing the work to make a peaceful world a tangible reality. Goodnight’s art is beautiful and can be emotionally overwhelming. His subjects sometimes provoke images of the famous (Jack Johnson) and others are common folk who could be a close family member or a neighbor. His paintings can express happiness and freedom, but his shading and color choices can make one sympathize with the struggle and pain of

The Genius of Paul Goodnight (continued)

being marginalized in this world. For many, Goodnight's paintings are cathartic. Sometimes in order to find happiness, you have to overcome tragedy. For a man who has seen tragedy, Goodnight continues to be a positive light for young artists and is forever evolving his craft. He sat down with us to talk about what being a community artist means to him, his creative process, and the projects he's currently working on to make our neighborhoods a much more loving and welcoming place.

“Through art, I can hopefully express myself, along with other artists to talk about what needs fixing in our communities.”

Where are you from and what was it like growing up there?

I'm actually from three different places. I was born in Chicago and we were moved to Connecticut and then to Boston and then back to Connecticut. I ended up back in Boston and I have been here for the last 40 plus years, so I suppose I'm a Bostonian.

I grew up a foster child. There were eight of us kids in the family. We were always active and always getting in trouble. We enjoyed each other's company and we maintained a close relationship because we were all foster children – the same. That is one of the things that I admire the most of our foster parents, because we had someone who cared enough to take in eight misfits and blend them together as a family. We came to understand the gift that we had been given. It gave me purpose.

Were there any blood relations?

There was a blood sister and brother, Gloria and George. Gloria died recently, but we were all like brothers and sisters; all eight of us.

Who or what was your biggest inspiration growing up?

My grandfather was my biggest inspiration. Everyone knew that he didn't lie. To this day, I don't know anyone who never told at least one lie. He was the only person who said what he meant and meant what he said. And he taught me the truth of *clarity*. As a child, I didn't understand it at the time, but I fully accepted it. I realized how important he was as a role model. He was that person that was willing to take on eight children and made sure there was a constant sense of peace and a place in his house for all of us. Now that's God.



Music Thunder by Paul Goodnight

What was the most important lesson you learned in the early phases of your career?

I think the most important lessons were the lessons that muralist John Biggers gave me. We met in Africa and he was a pure, true mentor. Although he lived in Texas and he came to Boston for a visit or show, we always kept in close contact. During one particular show of his, I badgered him to see my work. I said, “John, I want you to come over to my place to see my work.” And he said, “yes, yes, sure Paul, I will.” Clearly unsatisfied with that answer, I took to repeating my request and asked again, “John, I want you to come by and check out my new work.” Again, not the reply I was looking for, “Soon Paul,

The Genius of Paul Goodnight (continued)

soon.” Now I’m trying to get a specific day from this man, “Well, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday? Exasperated at me riding this man, he turned to me and said, “Paul, let me ask you this question: Are you committed or are you involved?” I told him that I was committed because of all of the things that I learned from him. *Who do we do it for? Why do we do it? What’s our inspiration? Why is this our expression?* He said, “OK, son. That is all I needed to know. You see, it’s like a ham and egg sandwich. I acted like I understood what he was saying for a couple of minutes, although I had no idea what he was talking about. I admitted that I didn’t know what the heck he was talking about. He then gave me a lesson I will never forget. He explained, “You see son, in the ham and egg sandwich, the chicken who laid the egg is involved, but the pig who gave his life (the ham) for the sandwich, now he was committed. Always be the pig, son and I will see your work and so will everyone else.” True to his word, he came over to my studio soon thereafter and I remember telling him, “Damn, John, that was the first time I was ever called a pig and enjoyed it!”

That’s the kind of mentorship that I had. I had a great mentor. I had great teachers, great advocates, and a loving family. And now I have great art colleagues. I think that is the best part of my journey.

At what point in your career did you begin to feel you had made it?

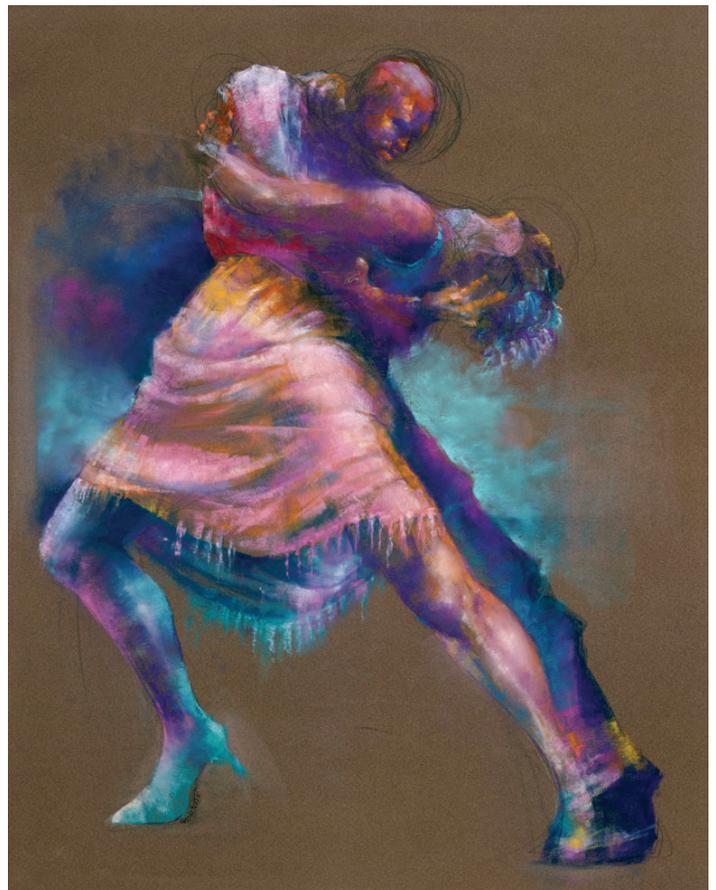
Although I’ve shown internationally, been the Olympic artist for both Atlanta and Beijing, I’ll never feel like I’ve made it and that’s a great place to be. I think anytime you think you’ve made it, you deprive yourself the room to go even farther. If that stops you, it means you aren’t curious enough about the gifts that you’ve been given; that you have honed. There is always more to learn. I’m in school right now, learning and honing my skills around sculpture. No, I never thought about making or not making it. I think about growing and evolving. I let the business people do the business—Karl McLaurin does a great job for me—and I let that “do what it does” This way, I stay grounded.

Would you consider any of your work so far to be your greatest achievement?

No, I like what people like and I’m blessed that a lot of folks really dig my work. You see, your best teacher is your last painting or drawing. So I keep learning. My best is still within me because I feel there is still more to come. But you know, the business of art is a whole different animal. And I think that is why I have Karl and a bunch of other people who understand that the business of art is completely different than creating and teaching art.

Can you give us an overview of your creative process?

There are three things I want to see in a piece. Since I work in a medium that is devoid of true movement, it has to first move me. If it does, then I proceed and hopefully, it will move you as an audience. Second, it has to challenge you. It can challenge you from a lot of different



Salsified by Paul Goodnight

The Genius of Paul Goodnight (continued)

vantage points. It can be political. It can be racial. It can be in the technique itself. It can be very religious and that sometimes can be very, very challenging. Third, it should entertain you in some ways.

I think if you have those three ingredients, along with the skill set that you've learned, applying what you know, and having the patience to stop and start, to draw over and over again, then you're pretty much in business because the rest is all creativity.

**You have been labeled a “community artist.”
What does that label mean to you?**

It means that I cannot afford to paint pretty pictures all of the time. My reality and my people's reality is that we live in a community that has a lot of problems. Through art, I can hopefully express myself, along with other artists to talk about what needs fixing in our communities. And that just isn't in my neighborhood, but neighborhoods around the world.

In the 1990s, you started Color Circle Art to help young artists develop their artistic and business skills. Can you tell us why this initiative was so important for you to start?

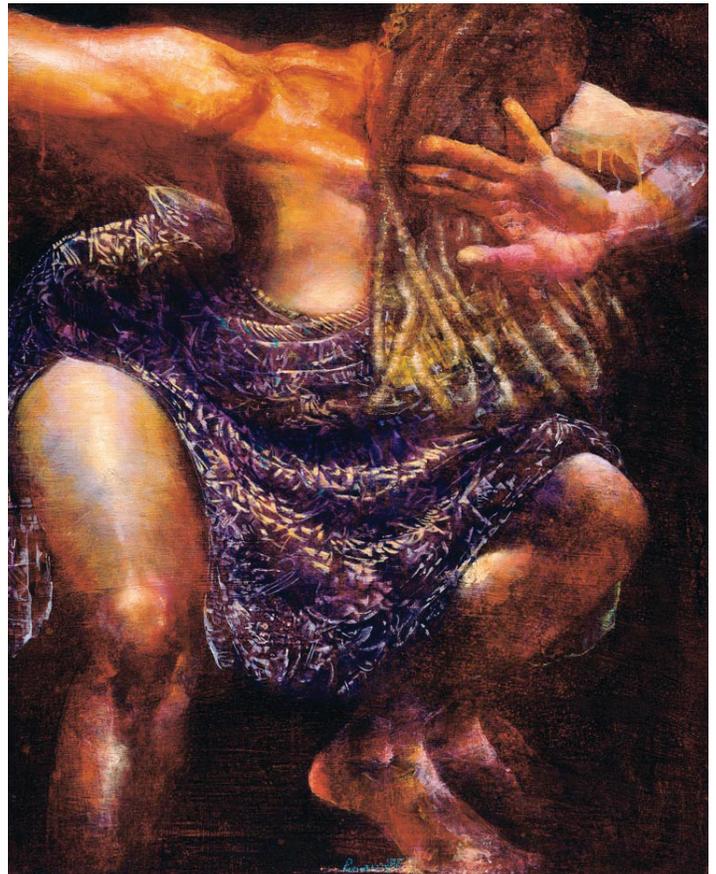
When I got started, I didn't know much about the business of art. Most artists don't know much about the business of art and the business is something that we should be familiar with but not always do. But once you know what another person is doing, you basically have some say in where you want to go. I was lucky enough to find some people who were really in the business, Elba Vargas, was a hard-working, beautiful woman who was really intelligent and a great marketer. She told me not to do the business but to know the business. She wanted me to know the business so when we sat down and talked about the business (contracts, commissions, etc.) that I had an idea of what was going on. Always remember that you are still working to get better as an artist. The art is and has to be your focus. At the same time, knowing the business and working with business professionals is important. Just

remember to not impede your growth as an artist from getting caught up in making deals. It is the art that inspires.

What advice would you give to young artists who want to get their art noticed?

Make sure you have a strong enough skill set that you can build on because the art craft is about evolution. You just can't be a one-hit-wonder and then be angry at the world for the rest of your life. If you are always curious, you will always grow.

Also, it is important to start to brand yourself in a way that people are interested in seeing the work you do. If it's consistent and you work hard at your craft, you will taste success. Then you will start to recognize the separation between the business of art, the education of art, and the artists themselves. And then, hopefully, the world will take note.



Road to Rhythm by Paul Goodnight

The Genius of Paul Goodnight (continued)

I've been saying this a lot lately: Your JOB is what you're PAID for, but your CALLING is what you're MADE for.

How do you relax when you are not working?

I swim. I'm curious, so I also like to read books. I tell you what people don't feel comfortable talking about but I do, is *intimacy*. Intimacy has a real calming effect and you can take that any way you want to. It can be physical intimacy. It can be mental. It can be a spiritual intimacy.

Bishop Barbara L. King out of Georgia gave me a prayer book (*Daily Thoughts from the Hill*) that I read every day and it sort of sets the tone of where I'm supposed to be and how I shouldn't let what bothers me just linger. I pray with that prayer book every morning and it makes all the sense in the world.



Back Stair Steps Duet by Paul Goodnight

What's up next? What projects are you currently working on?

I am working on a Frederick Douglass sculpture. That's why I am back in school and learning how to sculpt. This is just another evolutionary period in my life. We are doing the Frederick Douglass sculpture right here on Frederick Douglass Square in Boston. It is time to salute him here. I wish he were here to see it.

As I mentioned earlier, I hope a new series that I'm working on will have a ripple effect. We are doing a collection of pieces called *The K.K.K. Series* and I make no apologies for that name because I think what we are doing is right. K.K.K. stands for "Kids Killing Kids." There is an epidemic in all of our cities and small towns. Young men and women are destroying their future and our own communities. We have to stop the epidemic of violence because if we don't, then what good are the gifts we are given. We have to deal with the problems in our neighborhoods.

We have seven different artists working on this project and we just need funding to keep it going. We are going to auction the paintings off and the money we make from the auction will be given to the organizations that are keeping kids off the streets. That is our goal and we want to do it in every city with different artists.

Each participating artist has to paint two pieces: one that addresses the problem and one that chronicles the solution. Every one of these artists working with me has to search within their soul. Whether depicting how our culture is being taken away or how we've been bamboozled or learned to hate each other. Art can help us to remedy these issues with a visual medium. *What have we learned? Who are we learning from? Who are our role models? What have our contributions been before we got here and why has that not been publicized? We come from people who are strong and productive and helped build this community and this world.*

The Genius of Paul Goodnight (continued)

“If you are always curious, you will always grow.”

There is one artist named L-Merchie Frazier who is creating a curriculum for the schools. We are finding people who want to contribute because they know that youth violence is a problem in their neighborhoods as well.

I've seen too much destruction. I've been to Vietnam and Nicaragua and Mozambique. Imagine seeing those wars; going to Sierra Leone and helping the amputees there . . . my God. You realize no matter how many weapons you have, you are not going to solve the problem. Weapons and wars are not the solution for humanity. They are part of the problem. Loving yourself first, then others around you seems like the right path to me!

Kitt Shapiro Carries on Eartha Kitt's Legacy



Photo by Debra Somerville Photography

| “Celebrate the legacy of those who loved you.”

After her mother lost her battle to colon cancer in 2008, Kitt Shapiro knew she had to carry on her mother's legacy. After all, her mother is one of the most fascinating women in pop culture—the elegant and alluring Eartha Kitt. Shapiro decided to create a lifestyle brand, titled *Simply Eartha*. This brand would be a direct homage to her mother.

Born in Los Angeles, Shapiro has lived abroad but considered the East Coast to be her home for over 40 years. *Simply Eartha* gives fans a look into Eartha's personality and life. From merchandise and memorabilia, jewelry, and home accessories, her memory will always be with us. Shapiro also runs a lifestyle blog on her website. The blog allows her to share her inspirations and provides a place for guest contributors to write engaging editorials surrounding Eartha's

Kitt Shapiro Carries on Eartha Kitt's Legacy (continued)



Photo courtesy of Kitt Shapiro. Kitt Shapiro with her mother, Eartha Kitt.



Photo courtesy of Kitt Shapiro. Kitt Shapiro with her mother, Eartha Kitt.

perspective and career. Whether there is an article about Eartha's love for feline print or a humorous piece about how much the extravagant gifts she wants in the classic hit "Santa Baby" would cost in today's dollars, every post is authentic and true to Eartha.

Now at a later stage in her life – her fantastic 50s – Shapiro continues to pursue her passions. She recently purchased her favorite local business in Westport, Connecticut called WEST, a curated fashion boutique. "It's my belief that small local businesses need to be kept alive as they are part of the tapestry that weaves the community together," she explains. "It's my view that clothes are the skin we

"I'm working on bringing the story of my Mom's incredible life to the screen in the near future."

choose to show the world. Owning a fine clothing boutique helps empower women to express themselves and feel confident in their chosen skin."

Shapiro would like to bring her mother's story to the big screen. "I'm working on bringing the story of my Mom's incredible life to the screen in the near future and continuing to keep her legacy alive through social media," Shapiro says. Growing up, Shapiro and her mother were inseparable.

As a teenager, there were times when Shapiro felt like her mother held her a little too close, but when she got older, she began to see that closeness as love, protection, and devotion. Shapiro carries her mother's love for her in her heart. There will only be one Eartha Kitt and Shapiro is the best person to cherish and continue to tell her story to everyone, from generation to generation in every country and continent.

To learn more about Kitt Shapiro and Simply Eartha, visit simplyeartha.com and follow Simply Eartha on Facebook [@simplyeartha](https://www.facebook.com/simplyeartha), Instagram [@simplyeartha](https://www.instagram.com/simplyeartha).

THEATER

Meet Sidney Outlaw, the Man With the Powerful Voice



Sidney Outlaw photographed by Daniel Welch

| “Always think of ways to create opportunities for yourself.”

Sidney Outlaw’s baritone voice has captured the attention of the *New York Times* and opera audiences nationwide. He’s a Juilliard graduate, from Brevard, North Carolina, but moved to New York City to pursue his dream of being an opera singer. As an opera singer, Sidney says, you have to take care of your body and soul. “If you do not take care of your body, you make it hard on yourself to sing,” he explains. “It’s a labor of love that you must keep studying and investing in.” In such a competitive industry, one must stand out amongst their peers in order to get work. Sidney explains the key to finding work is consistency and a love for the study of the art form. When these two actions meet, the opportunities start to roll in. “You sometimes wake up to surprise emails from your management team with wonderful news and opportunities,” he says.

Meet Sidney Outlaw, the Man With the Powerful Voice (continued)



Sidney Outlaw as “Billy Budd – First Mate” at San Francisco Opera. Photo credit: Corey Weaver

Sidney stresses that in order to come out on top in the arts, you must have an entrepreneurial spirit. “There is not enough room at the ‘main table,’ so you have to go out and build your own,” he explains. “You have to be willing to step out on faith and do the work—it doesn’t happen overnight.” He is working on performing Franz Schubert’s moody and somber *Die Winterreise* (The Winter Journey) with his mentor, pianist Warren Jones. Sidney will be sure to bring a unique and versatile perspective to the piece: singing opera, performing orchestral concert work, and

In the first half of 2020, Sidney can be seen on stage in multiple productions. On February 7 and 9, he will reprise the role of Tommy McIntyre in *Fellow Travelers* with the Madison Opera. In March, he will debut in Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis* with the Colorado Symphony and Gustav Mahler’s *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer) with the Toledo Symphony. Finally, in April he will reprise the role of Dizzy Gillespie in *Yardbird* with the New Orleans Opera. When Sidney isn’t busy wowing audiences nationwide, he is a professor at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College in New York City. It is an understatement to say that Sidney’s calendar is full, but his passion for theater and opera motivates him to keep going.



Photo credit: David “Wavey” Anderson

“There is not enough room at the ‘main table,’ so you have to go out and build your own.”

SoulVision Magazine Presents: Sidney Outlaw
View video [here](#).

To learn more about Sidney Outlaw and his performances, you can visit his website sidneyoutlaw.com and Facebook [@BaritoneSidneyOutlaw](#), Instagram [@thesidneyoutlaw](#), and Twitter [@SidneyOutlaw](#).

BUSINESS

Chef J. Ponder: Culinary Hero



Photos courtesy of Chef J. Ponder

| “Use your knowledge and expertise to help those who need it the most.”

When he was coming up, Chef Jacoby J. Ponder watched his strong, independent grandmother maintain and sustain a small farm in rural Monroe, Georgia. He watched her plant and harvest fresh vegetables—sweet potatoes, collard greens, and cabbages. He saw how she would wash off the red Georgia clay and use these vegetables to create something hearty for supper. “I unknowingly became her apprentice,” he says. “My craft is literally rooted with three main ingredients: love, passion, and flavor.”

Chef J. Ponder: Culinary Hero (continued)



Chef J. Ponder w/ members of his Chefprenuer Academy.

Ponder has made dishes for President George H.W. Bush, Vivica A. Fox, and others. He has also appeared on the Food Network's *Chopped* and *Cutthroat Kitchen*. In 2012, he was a finalist on *Chopped*. In 2014, he won *Cutthroat Kitchen* twice. Ponder served ten years in the U.S. Navy as a personal and private chef. Many years after his military service, he continues to use his gifts to help veterans and those on active duty. "My educational venture, Chefprenuer Academy, is a transitional training course that benefits both veterans and those on active duty," he explains. "I teach and train personal development techniques as well as business savvy techniques on how to become an owner and not just a cook."

Ponder is now working on his culinary series — Food for the Rich — where he highlights the delicious cuisine he cooks for some of his high-profile clients in their beautiful homes. He also has a brunch series called *EAT.SIP.SOCIAL* which includes the "Chef's Table." "It's neat and new. Think concepts surrounding whimsical culinary favorites with coaching and very cool urban vibes," he says. You can see the Chef's video series on the brand-new streaming service, SoulVision.TV, which will launch this Valentine's Day, February 14.



Chef J. Ponder w/ members of his Chefprenuer Academy.

Ponder is looking forward to seeing where his gifts and passion take him. "I plan to continue to press the culinary envelope and figure out some way to show the world who I am as a true culinarian," he says. He wants to join the Soulidify Family very soon. "I hope it will come to fruition." Chef Ponder will continue to use his culinary and communication skills to help people eat and live right.

"My craft is literally rooted with three main ingredients: love, passion, and flavor."

Chef J. Ponder's *EAT.SIP.SOCIAL* will be featured on SoulVision.TV. [View video here.](#)

To learn more about Chef J. Ponder, you can visit his website chefjacobyponder.com and follow him on Facebook [@ChefJacobyponder](#) and Instagram [@chefjponder](#).

THEATER

Maggie Small's Second Act



Maggie Small with Artists of the Richmond Ballet in *The Nutcracker* by Stoner Winslett. Photo by Sarah Ferguson.

| “Strive to be the best.”

Maggie Small started ballet at three years old and began training in the School of Richmond Ballet in 1990 when she was just five years old. She dedicated over 16 years of her life to the Richmond Ballet, becoming one of the nation’s celebrated dancers until she retired. She is only 34. She has performed in her hometown of Richmond, Virginia, as well as on stages in New York City, London, and China. She enjoys working with world-renowned choreographers to create impressive “performing works.” Since retiring, Maggie has not stayed put. She has continued to “honor and uphold the legacy of ballet” by sharing her knowledge and expertise with a new generation of dancers.

Since her retirement, Maggie has been able to give her energy and time to helping other artists and visionaries become confident in their artistry. “Upon retiring, I wanted to be sure to give back to the young dancers who felt a connection to me from the stage,” she explains. “So I developed a Master Class series that I take to over ten different studios in Virginia.” These classes focus on the mind just as much as the body.

Maggie Small's Second Act (continued)



Maggie Small and Thomas Ragland in *The Nutcracker* by Stoner Winslett. Photo by Sarah Ferguson.

Maggie says she wants her dancers to focus their minds to think more positively and picture what success looks like. “I am fostering mentoring relationships with the students through talkbacks and an email correspondence program,” she notes. Along with her Master Class, Maggie is also collaborating with and encouraging local painters and photographers to “incorporate the beauty of one art into another.

“Upon retiring, I wanted to be sure to give back to the young dancers who felt a connection to me from the stage.”

In October, she mentored with MOB Ballet, an organization that “preserves, presents and promotes the contributions, and stories of black artists in the field of ballet.” While working with students at the inaugural MOB Ballet Symposium, Maggie saw an opportunity to teach these students about the trials they might potentially face in their careers. “Addressing topics that are typically discovered through life experience before having to confront them head-on will equip students to prepare to dive into the world of ballet with much more ease,” she says.

Maggie’s journey, as she puts it, was different than many other dancers’. She was welcomed and felt included. She was given the privilege to focus on pushing herself to be the very best and simply pursue her love for dance. “This allowed me to achieve continued joy and success from the start of my training and throughout my professional years,” she says. She wants her students to feel the same. “Through my master class series, mentoring, and continued work with MOB Ballet, more and more students will not only realize the dream that I was able to live but also find themselves contributing to creating positive environments,” she says.

“Whether empowering and educating tomorrow’s dancers or collaborating with other artists for vision projects, I am determined to continue pursuing my passion.”

Even though she is no longer an active ballerina for the Richmond Ballet, she still works with the company as a Grant Specialist. “In this position I now contribute to sustaining the institution, serving something greater than my own personal interests—the art,” she says. She’s open to the possibility of creating new opportunities. Since she’s left ballet, she is still “rediscovering how to live (her) passion.” She is appreciative of her journey so far. “Many people do not have the opportunity to do what they love until later in life. However, dancers pursue their passion in a finite career early on,” she says. “Whether empowering and educating tomorrow’s dancers or collaborating with other artists for vision projects, I am determined to continue pursuing my passion.”

MOVE TOGETHER ... Thank you Maggie Small by Martin Montgomery. [View video here.](#)

To learn more about Maggie Small, follow her on Instagram [@smallmaggies](#).

CHEF'S CORNER

Pan-Seared Cod Lemon with Micro Basil Dressing



Chef J. Ponder. Photo credit: prince_akeem/Instagram



Photo credit, shutterstock.com/g/hlphoto

“Delicious white fish with an added kick is a healthy choice for an evening meal.”

To learn more about Chef J. Ponder, you can visit his website chefjacobyponder.com and follow him on Facebook @[ChefJacobyPonder](https://www.facebook.com/ChefJacobyPonder) and Instagram @[chefjponder](https://www.instagram.com/chefjponder).

Course: Dinner
Cuisine: American
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cooking Time: 30 minutes
Total time: 45 minutes
Serving Size: 6 oz. (1 person)

Ingredients

Pan-Seared Cod (any white fish)

- 1 5-6 oz. cod filet (or sea bass)
- 1 tsp. kosher or sea salt
- 1 tsp. fresh cracked pepper
- a pinch of paprika
- 1/4 cup olive oil

Micro Basil Dressing

- 2 lemons (reserve zest from lemons)
- 1/3 cup lemon juice
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 tbsp. of honey
- 2 cloves finely minced garlic
- 1/3 cup of chiffonade whole basil leaves (1 container of micro basil)

Preparation

Pan-Seared Cod (any white fish)

1. Sprinkle both sides of fish with salt, pepper, paprika.
2. Heat the skillet and add about 1/2 of the olive oil to ensure the pan is hot.
3. Pat fish dry to remove all excess moisture.
4. Add fish to hot pan on skin side.
5. Sear both sides until golden brown about 30 sec. each side, finishing in a 300° oven for about 6-8 mins (don't overcook).
6. Take out of the oven and immediately spoon with lemon drizzle over the fish.
7. Serve on a bed of arugula and spinach.

Micro Basil Dressing

1. Whisk 1/3 cup lemon juice with honey and garlic. Slowly drizzle in olive oil until emulsified.
2. Toss in micro basil.
3. Spoon onto fish (reserve some for finished dish).

COMMUNITY

The Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences Choir Addresses the Nation



*The Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences Choir perform at PCMA Convening Leaders 2020 in San Francisco.
Photos by Every Angle Photography.*

| “Tomorrow is promised because we intend to build it.”

Each month we highlight a community program that aligns with the values of SoulVision Magazine. We believe engaging with one’s community is critical to fostering positive change in the world.

It was a chance happening: a Detroit children’s choir putting their own spin on the classic Funkadelic song, “One Nation Under A Groove.” As performing artist and Detroit advocate Mike Ellison told us, Detroit is not being brought back, but instead, the city is in the midst of a continuation of the legacy that Detroit natives, musicians, creatives, and business people had already begun. “So high, you can’t get over it,” the children sing as they lift up their arms. It’s a call to action for unity and people around the country have noticed. As of this writing, the viral video has over a million views on YouTube and is continuing to climb. Not only does the video highlight the beauty of Detroit, but bridges the gaps between the old and young, races, ethnicities, and classes. It perfectly captures what we can do as a nation when we realize we are all interconnected and should work together.

The Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences Choir Addresses the Nation (continued)



King Bethel, lead male vocalist on “One Nation Under A Groove” (Detroit’s Tribute to The Funk). Photo by Every Angle Photography.

The One Nation project all started when Bill Bowen, principal of Octane Design, was approached by Larry Alexander, the president and CEO of the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau (DMCVB), to create their annual end-of-year holiday video. He wanted a concept that involved the Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences Choir (DAAS). Bill agreed and started discussing ideas for the video with his collaborator and friend Mike Ellison. They both knew that they didn’t want to just make another “holiday” video. “It had to be something that brings people together. It has to talk about an optimistic, bright future. With the state of the country and how things are, we felt like people needed an uplifting message,” Bill Bowen explains. Mike Ellison knew the perfect song to pick for the children to perform: Funkadelic’s “One Nation Under A Groove.” They went back to the Bureau and presented the idea. The Bureau was enthusiastic about the vision. Bill and Mike immediately got to work. As executive producer, director, and editor of the music video, Bill started to work out concepts for the video. As the video and song’s co-producer, Mike penned the spoken word piece that the lead male vocalist, King Bethel, would rap in the video. He also enlisted LaShawn D. Gary, a Detroit native and talented jazz musician, to work as Mike’s co-producer and co-arranger as well as playing the keys and key bass. What they ended up with was something that they will cherish for the rest of their lives. “Our initial approach was not to

try to remake a classic. Our production ended up having its own character and evolved into something special,” LaShawn says.

“I believe the song and video will cast a very positive light on the direction Detroit is moving in,” King Bethel says.

Detroit-based musicians and creatives were more than willing to get involved. Choreographer Dr. Ras Mikey C became the director of choreography. Chi-Amen-Ra and Efe Bes played percussion. Amp Fiddler (who mentored the late great J. Dilla and was a member of the Parliament-Funkadelics) brought some added texture with his synthesizer. Duminie DePorres (who also played alongside George Clinton) played guitar, and Eric “Rain Man” Gaston worked out a nice continuous groove on the drums. The biggest moment for everyone was when Ann Delisi, a host at the public radio Detroit station WDET, got in contact with Larry Fratangelo and he came into the studio to add some extra percussion to the track. Larry Fratangelo toured with the Funkadelics and performed percussion work on their original track. “Having actual members of the Parliament-Funkadelics to participate in the project gave even more credibility to what we were doing,” LaShawn says.



The Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences Choir perform at PCMA Convening Leaders 2020 in San Francisco. Photos by Every Angle Photography.

The Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences Choir Addresses the Nation (continued)

Mike Ellison acknowledges the vital role music publishing company Bridgeport Music played in “One Nation Under A Groove” being an essential part of the project. “Music industry veteran, Scott Guy, played a key role in working with Bridgeport Music to obtain permission to cover the song,” Mike explains. “Bridgeport was incredibly responsive and supportive of the project. As a matter of record, without Scott and Bridgeport the entire project would not have gotten off the ground.”

“I want the video to have an impact so great that we encourage the world to keep going, keep striving, and keep moving in a positive direction,” Anaiya says.

Angela Kee, the choir director of DAAS has been working with students in the Detroit area for 19 years. Kee is more than just a teacher, she is a mentor and role model for the students. “This particular group of kids is very talented and very special, but part of the reason they are so talented and special is because of Ms. Kee’s guidance and tutelage,” Mike Ellison says of Angela’s positive influence on her students. Angela says that some of her students have gone through hardships and she has to be strong for her students when they come to her for guidance. Just before shooting the video, one student had lost their stepfather to gun violence, another student had a gun pulled on their mother, and another student was going through a custody battle. “They are some of the most resilient people on Earth. You would never know all that they are going through. They are in the video smiling, dancing, singing and having fun. This is their outlet,” Angela explains. “As the days unfold, we make broken streets whole,” when the children sing.

Bill Bowen and his crew captured the feel and energy of Detroit as well as its importance to our nation’s history and culture with his cinematography. One of the more powerful shots in the music video is when the choir



Angela Kee, choir director. Photo by Every Angle Photography.

students are in Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation, singing and clapping on the very bus that Rosa Parks was arrested in for refusing to give up her seat. Lead female vocalist Anaiya Hall is sitting in the very seat in which Rosa Parks sat. As the kids sing about unity and a better, brighter future, the world gets to see the beauty, richness, and diversity of Detroit. According to the U.S. Census, there are over 126 languages spoken in the Detroit Metro area. “[Bill] noted that Detroit is still 80% percent African-American. You have an all-black kids choir. And you have a song made by an all-black band who broke barriers in the 70s and did things completely against the grain. Bill honored that,” Mike explains. “He showed Detroit for what it is. And you see the inclusiveness in Detroit, of all our shades, all our cultures, all our languages, and it’s not an either-or thing. It is an and.”

Lead male vocalist King Bethel looks at the historical context of the original song and its timely message. “The song was meant to bring everyone together in a time where the country was healing (the ending of the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, etc.). To be a part of its remaking during the time my city is making a fantastic comeback is very special to me,” he says. As far as the song’s impact on my city, I believe the song and video will cast a very positive light on the direction Detroit is moving in.”

The Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences Choir Addresses the Nation (continued)



Anaiya Hall, lead female vocalist. Photo by Every Angle Photography.

When asked what she hopes the impact of the video will have on her city, Anaiya Hall hopes the video will put Detroit in a more positive light and inspire the world to be a much kinder and welcoming place. “The poverty and violence in the city show people the negative side of things, but the video shows otherwise. It allows people to see we are still talented, powerful, and that we can succeed as ONE NATION,” Anaiya says. “This video means a lot to me and I’m happy to be a part of such a great cause. I want the video to have an impact so great that we encourage the world to keep going, keep striving, and keep moving in a positive direction.”

“Tomorrow is promised because we intend to build it,” King Bethel raps. A new generation is willing to work towards a better future for us all. Change is imminent.

To learn more about The Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences Choir, you can visit their website daasdistrict.org. To learn more about what Detroit has to offer, visit VisitDetroit.com. Check out the One Nation Under A Groove video (Detroit Academy style) [here](#).

LIVING LEGENDS

James “Plunky” Branch



Photos by Patrick Mamou

| “Strive to be the best.”

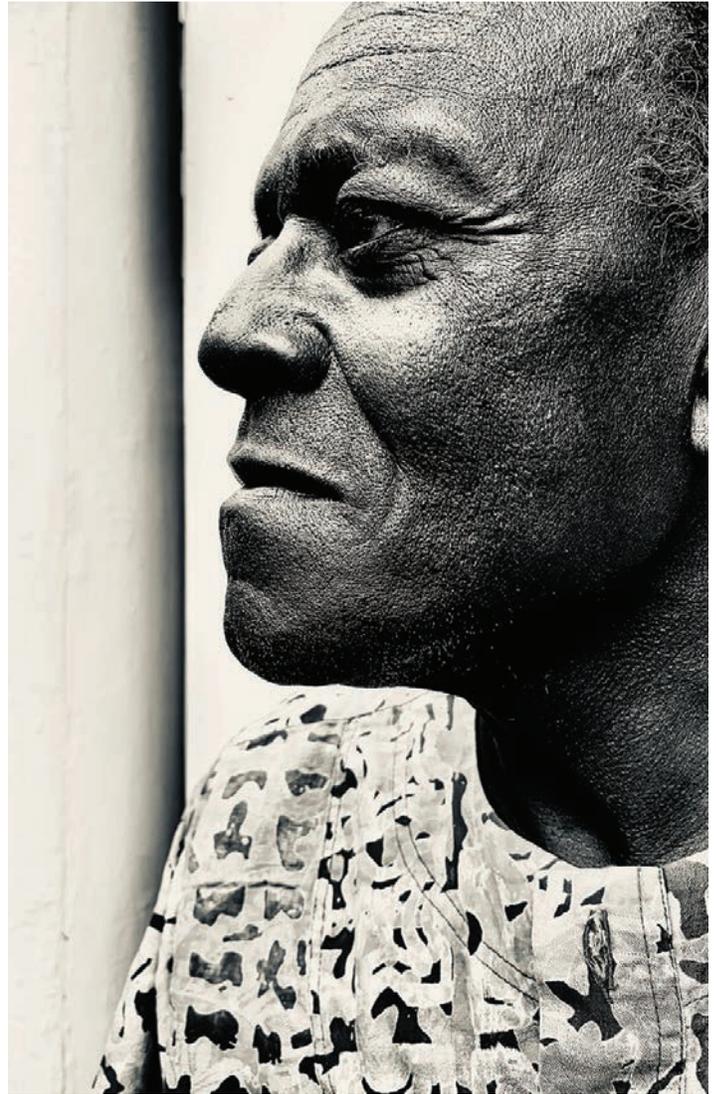
Music critics have hailed saxophonist James “Plunky” Branch as an essential part of the “vanguard of Afro-centric jazz, funk, house music, and go-go.” Over the span of 40+ years he has independently maintained a successful career of creating music with over 25 albums. His group Plunky & Oneness has performed alongside some of the biggest names in black music, including Patti LaBelle, Ray Charles, Frankie Beverly & Maze and Chuck Brown along with notable musicians ranging from Pharoah Sanders, Ornette Coleman and Gil Scott Heron. His international fan base has given him the opportunity to perform in front of audiences all over Europe and Africa with enthusiasts for his music from the US to Japan.

James “Plunky” Branch (continued)

Plunky’s music has stood the test of time and has earned him the status of living music legend. Plunky is a two-time recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Fellowships. As a Virginia native, Plunky is an avid supporter of the arts, as well as an educator and lecturer—performing and presenting at numerous public schools and universities. He’s taught African-American music at Virginia Commonwealth University and directed the Virginia Union University Jazz Ensemble.

As the co-founder of Black Fire Records and CEO of NAME Brand Records, his immense catalog has been sampled by hip-hop luminaries including J Cole, KRS One, Big Pun and J Dilla and featured by The Roots band live on The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon.

In 2016, he released his memoir, *Plunky: Juju Jazz Funk & Oneness* that tells the story of his life in his own words. In August 2019, Plunky & Oneness released *Afrolectic*, a “sonic offering of Afro inspired music made to move the body and soul.” According to a press release, the album is a positive experience that celebrates the diversity of black culture, paying tribute to Fela Kuti, Miles Davis, and Earth, Wind & Fire. Plunky’s career inspires us to keep pushing forward, reminding us to acknowledge and embrace our roots. His music has inspired many around the world to keep on dancing and to spread love wherever they go.



“Black music, our music, has always been about telling our story and inspiring us to keep on keeping on. Our beats, words, and melodies can produce instantaneous pleasure and a profound vision of future possibilities. While the business of music has become a very complex enterprise, for me, it’s still about presenting rhythms, energy, improvisations, and songs in service to our community. Our music fuels our mythology and magic, and it impacts the whole world.”

– James “Plunky” Branch