

Sports & Entertainment

Mississippi honors Artistic Excellence with five 2027 Governor's Arts Awards recipients ... from sports-Ent. 6

Tougaloo College, training with renowned figures such as Gus Giordano and Joel Hall. He became a Principal Dancer and Assistant Director with the Joel Hall Dancers, touring nationally and internationally, and later gained experience with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center and many others. For 30 years, the Joel Hall Dancers were his home. Pendarvis has choreographed, taught, and led programs in Chicago, Los Angeles, and his home state of Mississippi, including serving as Artistic Director of Joel Hall II and Resident Choreographer for Montage Theatre of Dance. In 2021, he launched Duwane Pendarvis & Company Dance Theatre.

Square Books – Arts in Community Oxford, MS

Founded in 1979 by **Richard and Lisa Howorth**, Square Books is a general bookstore located on the historic town square in Oxford, Mississippi, home of William Faulkner and the University of Mississippi. With four stores and over 10,000 square feet on the square, all readers will find something to their liking. Square Books hosts over 150 author events per year and has many signed and collectible books, a very strong literary fiction section, and Southern fiction and history. The second floor of Square Books has a coffee bar so browsers can enjoy a cup and, when the weather is fair, relax on the balcony overlooking the courthouse.

Wright Thompson – Excellence in Literature Clarksdale, MS

Wright Thompson is a senior writer for ESPN. His work has been anthologized in Best American Sports Writing more than anyone in history. He is the author of three bestsellers: “The Cost of These Dreams,” “Pappyland,” and “The Barn,” which

was named Time Magazine’s non-fiction book of the year. He has won the Dan Jenkins Medal for Excellence in Sports Writing and the Ernie Pyle Award for international reporting (he’s been in war zones in Iraq and Ukraine). He has won two Emmy Awards for reporting, including one from Kyiv during the war. He is the executive producer and creator of “TrueSouth” on the SEC Network, the Emmy Award winning series that celebrates the South. His hero is Willie Morris. He is also a fifth-generation farmer in Bolivar County and a proud Mississippi resident. When asked why he lives here, when he works remotely, he often quotes Eudora Welty: “Because it’s home.”

MAC seeks sponsorship support annually to produce the Governor’s Arts Awards. If you are interested in sponsoring the awards this year to help honor these exceptional recipients, please contact communications@arts.ms.gov or visit arts.ms.gov/gaa.

Award recipients are nominated by members of the public and selected by a committee of community arts leaders and industry peers. Recipients are not required to be Mississippi residents but must have significant ties to the state through some years of residency. Nominations for the 2028 Governor’s Arts Awards will open in April 2027.

The Mississippi Arts Commission (MAC) is a state agency serving more than two million people through grants and special initiatives that enhance communities, assist artists and arts organizations, promote arts education and celebrate Mississippi’s cultural heritage. MAC is funded by the Mississippi Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts, and other private sources. For more information, visit www.arts.ms.gov.

Melody Place record label announces Digital Team: Kacey Flory joins as Head of Digital, and Kayla Smith as Digital Marketing Coordinator



Melody Place adds digital team members Kacey Flory as Head of Digital Marketing, and Kayla Smith as Digital Marketing Coordinator. (Photos/Courtesy: Melody Place)

NASHVILLE, Tenn. , September 22, 2026 – Nashville-based independent record label Melody Place continues to grow, adding two new hires to build out its digital team. **Kacey Flory** joins as Head of Digital Marketing and **Kayla Smith** as Digital Marketing Coordinator.

With nearly a decade of experience, Flory spent more than seven years at Crowd Surf, rising from Digital Marketing Assistant to Director of Marketing & Management. Her client work spans major-label rosters, including Interscope Records, MCA, and BBR Music Group, as well as artist management across a wide range of genres. Her experience includes driving digital campaigns for global pop hitmakers, emerging country acts, and iconic performers such as Camila Cabello, New Kids on the Block, Joshua Henry, and comedians At-

suko Okatsuka and Jim Gaffigan. A proud member of the Academy of Country Music Class of 2025, she now leads digital marketing and social promotion across the company's growing roster of artists and entertainment ventures.

Smith's path into the industry began four years ago, shadowing industry professionals and volunteering at shows to gain hands-on experience in touring merchandise management. For three years, Kayla worked full-time as an elementary school teacher while building her music career, spending nights, weekends, and summers working shows and gaining industry experience while earning her master's degree in marketing and analytics. This past summer, she worked as a digital intern at The Core Entertainment before joining Melody Place as Digital Marketing Coordinator.

“Kacey is such a pro, with vast knowledge and incredible instincts for how artists across a multitude of genres can connect with audiences. Kayla is incredibly bright, eager, and creative, and with Kacey leading the team, they make a dream digital duo. The unique perspective each of them brings to their work will continue to propel Melody Place to new heights. We’re so pleased to have them both on board,” said Sandy McGraw, President and GM.

Flory and Smith joined the boutique label and music publishing company featuring frontline artists Sara Evans, Katharine McPhee, Broadway-starlet Jasmine Amy Rogers, Braden Hull, Pia Toscano, and Jackie Evancho. The label co-produced the hit Broadway musical, BOOP!, alongside 16-time GRAMMY Award winner David Foster and

released its Original Cast Recording. They also just released an 18-track duets tribute album, Dan Seals & Friends: The Last Duet, in partnership with the Dan Seals Estate. Melody Place continues to break the mold and solidify its reputation in Nashville, with much more music on the way.

About Melody Place
Melody Place is a boutique Nashville based record label and music publishing company founded in 2018 by Chairman Leigh Shockey. Known for its curated roster and artist first philosophy, Melody Place has quickly become one of the music industry's most distinctive independent labels. Led by President/General Manager Sanborn McGraw and industry veteran Chief Operating Officer Tony Gottlieb, the label is expanding its footprint across multiple genres and developing artists with long term global appeal. The current roster includes award winning country star Sara Evans, Tony-nominated Broadway breakout Jasmine Amy Rogers, acclaimed vocalists Katharine McPhee, Pia Toscano, and Jackie Evancho, and rising Country artist Braden Hull. Melody Place also represents the estate of “England” Dan Seals. Beyond recorded music, Melody Place co-produced the Broadway hit Boop! The Musical, in a strategic partnership with legendary musician David Foster. The production earned three Tony nominations, three Outer Critics Circle Awards, and received 11 Drama Desk Award nominations. Boop! The Musical has begun touring internationally and kicks off in the US this Fall, further showcasing the company’s creative reach. With features and recognition from Billboard, Broadway World, Country Now, GRAMMY.com, MusicRow, People, The New York Times, Variety, and more, Melody Place continues to solidify its reputation as one of Nashville’s most forward thinking independent labels. Visit MelodyPlace.com for more information.

Hattiloo Theatre to host Bridging Worlds: An International Black Theatre Festival: Norway, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras get residency

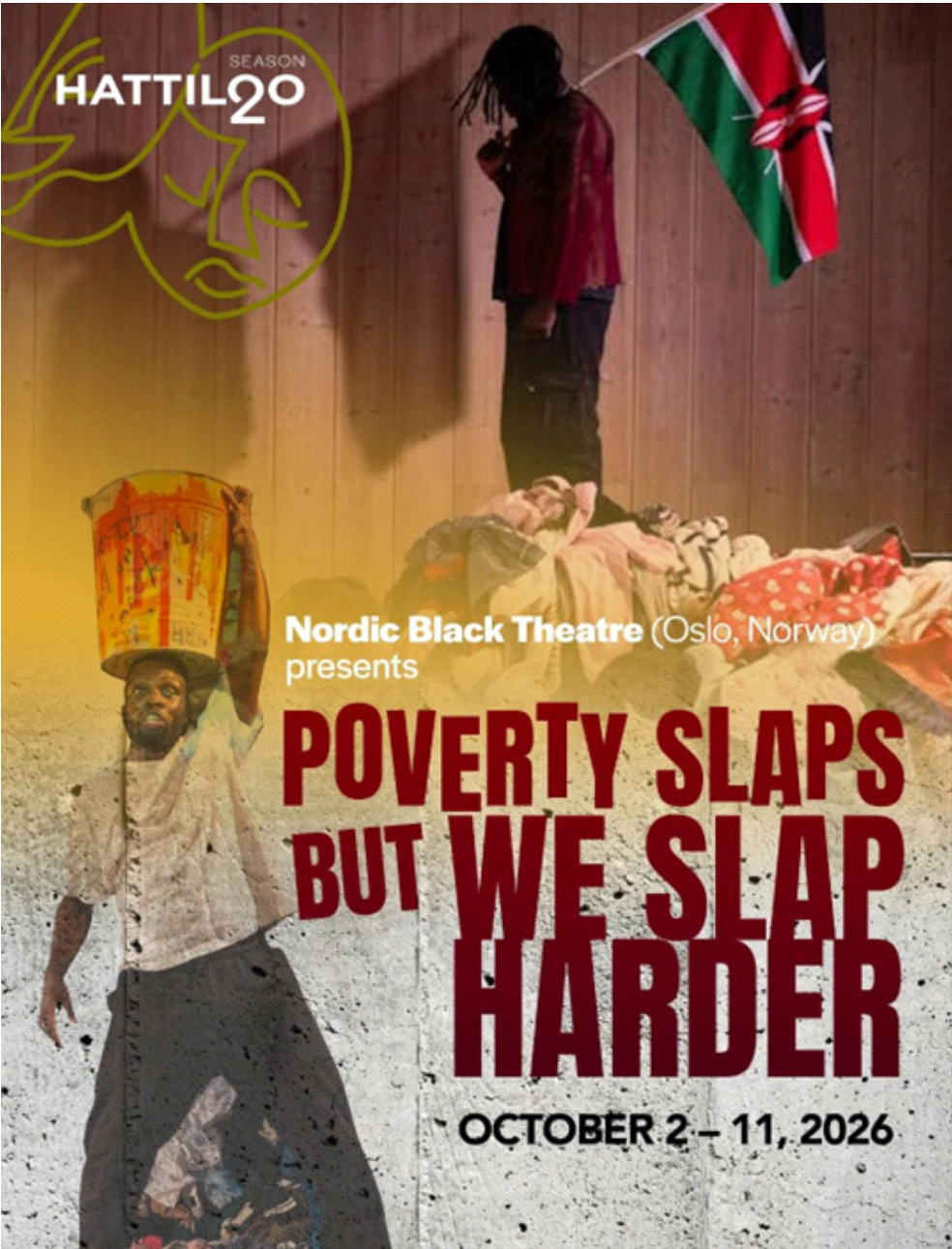
The festival will host Black theatres from Norway, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras for a two-week residency starting October 2nd

MEMPHIS, TN – September 21, 2026 – **Hattiloo Theatre**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Black performing arts theatre, will present Bridging Worlds, its first international Black theatre festival, as part of a two-week production residency at Hattiloo Theatre.

The festival will feature collaborations with the **Nordic Black Theatre** of Oslo, Norway, and **Blue Bistro Theatre**, representing the Dominican Republic and Honduras.

Beginning October 2, Nordic Black Theatre will present **Poverty Slaps But We Slap Harder**. Blue Bistro Theatre will present **Dominicana: Moments of Myth, Memory, and Music and Roots of Sea and Land**.

Hattiloo Theatre’s Founder and CEO Ekundayo Bandele shares his purpose for Bridging Worlds: International Theatre Festival, stating: “We want our audiences to experience Black theatre from other parts of the world and see both what we share and what makes each culture distinct. Bringing



“We want our audiences to experience Black theatre from other parts of the world and see both what we share and what makes each culture distinct. Bringing these companies to Hattiloo lets Memphis audiences connect with the African Diaspora through the stories we tell onstage.”

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Bridging Worlds: An International Black Theatre Initiative launches Hattiloo’s Pan-African collaborations, marking the start of its next twenty years of leadership in uniting Black theatre across the globe.

This groundbreaking festival brings acclaimed Black theatre companies to Memphis for exclusive two-week residencies: the Nordic Black Theatre and the Blue Bistro Theatre (Dominican Republic & Honduras).

To purchase tickets, patrons should visit www.hattiloo.org or call the box office at (901) 525-0009. Hattiloo invites everyone

to attend Bridging Worlds: An International Black Theatre.

About Hattiloo Theatre:

Founded in 2006 by Ekundayo Bandele and named in honor of his two daughters – Hatshepsut (Hatti) Bandele and Oluremi (Loo) Bandele. Hattiloo Theatre is the largest Black theatre in the Mid-South and one of four free-standing Black theatres in the country. The performing arts theatre produces shows and programs that depict Black life and give audiences an authentic cultural experience.

Visit www.hattiloo.org to learn more about Hattiloo Theatre!

Watch for The Mid-South Tribune Mid-Terms Special Edition