

THE ATLANTA VOICE



IN THIS ISSUE
**The Sound
of Music**

PAGE 8

AROUND TOWN

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South Downtown Soul



Poetry on Peter Street, which took place at Peter Street Station on Monday, Mar. 11, has helped bring live music and spoken word to a growing South Downtown neighborhood that is quickly becoming a go-to entertainment destination. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

Metro



ONLINE
Fulton County District Attorney
Fani Willis sets sights on
re-election despite challenges

POETRY ON PETER IS LEADING THE CHARGE FOR THE Cultural Renaissance

BY LAURA NWOGU

Miyana Sarver always knew Poetry on Peter (POP) would be special. However, the poet and driving force behind POP didn't predict it would blossom into the community it has become today.

Red and blue lights blend into a purple hue, illuminating a picturesque stage reminiscent of an intimate jazz club or a scene plucked out of the pages of one of the many books adorning the stage of Peter's Street Station's Poetry on Peter (POP). The lone mic at center stage is always warm, either by the hands of a lively host or one of the poets who scrounge up the courage to share their words at the free weekly event that has become a safe space for Atlanta's Black creatives.

"At first, I didn't even realize what was happening," Sarver said. "It makes me feel blessed. And it also makes me feel like, 'huh, I wonder what God saw in me to be given such a task.'"

Originally from Louisville, Kentucky, Sarver got acclimated with Atlanta's arts scene by performing at poetry events around the city. In 2020, she made a pivotal decision to leave the music industry after the realization that it wasn't serving her and that her true passion lay in poetry and event curating rather than songwriting.

After Sarver came across a post on the Peter's Street Station Instagram in June 2021 asking for new curated events, she knew it was a sign. A month later, POP was born. Almost three years later, the weekly Monday event hosts a vibrant atmosphere that has garnered a loyal crowd of Black musicians, small-business owners, and, most notably, poets.

"It's turned from a passion to a duty. At first, it was just a place to save myself, but once I got myself on good ground, it became my duty to do what I did for myself to do for others."

Guests swayed to the live music by the talented in-house band Vibe Ktrl. Bartenders sling drinks as guests crowd the bar to grab a cocktail or write their name down on the 14-slot list for the chance to perform on stage. The couches, tables, and chairs that litter the intimate room are never empty or without conversation. Guests can often be found exploring the backroom art gallery plastered



Red and blue lights blend into a purple hue, illuminating a picturesque stage reminiscent of an intimate jazz club. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

with Black art — that's the ambiance that POP invokes every Monday.

We are Family

There are three rules formulated by Sarver when first-time guests or regulars settle in their seats and gather around the stage as showtime starts: give poets good energy, talk to each other, and have a good time.

POP is adamant about creating an inclusive and safe space that serves as an outlet for Black creatives. Whether it's a poetic piece that draws from elements of spoken word or lends itself more to the cadence of rap, the crowd responds through bobbed heads, shouts of praise or affirmation, and that scrunch of the face that signals that the words have hit home for its audience.

"The crowd is so receptive," said Demauge



From start to finish, the show at Poetry at Peter seamlessly brings people together in a cocoon of live music, poetry, food, drinks, and good vibes. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

See **CULTURE** on page 5

SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

Ready Aim Fire



BY JAMES A. WASHINGTON
The Atlanta Voice

ask you just how hard is it to be a card-carrying Christian these days? I mean we've got card carrying Democrats and Republicans. You can get a membership card for every organization from the NAACP to the ACLU. The more I study the more I'm moved to realize that being a professed, in the spirit card-carrying man or woman of faith, is tantamount to putting a bullseye on your back and inviting a artillery barrage on your location. Scripture tells us that accepting Jesus Christ as a way of life was no easy task for early practitioners of faith. Being criticized, thrown to the lions for fun and games, beheaded or ostracized were all very real possibilities for those who believed and then lived according to the Word of God. Is today so different? Once you take up the standard of revolutionary thinking, once you commit your life to Christ, once you decide to live humbly in mercy and love and forgiveness isn't it interesting the kind of attention you attract. "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion look-

Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." 1 Peter 5:8-9

ing for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." 1 Peter 5:8-9

Looking around the world today, it is ludicrous not to recognize that religious persecution is still the number one cause of war and man's inhumanity to man. CNN will attest to the fact that people all over the planet are being systematically annihilated. We sometimes take for granted the religious freedom we have in this country and I believe it has lulled us into a sense of being a Christian is somehow easy. Well it's not and it never has been. It's empowering. It's enlightening.

It's eternal but it is not easy. The

good news is we are not alone and never have been. Living for God is probably the quintessential reality of human existence. Its reward is an inner understanding of the working of the universe that affords us to take physical life for granted in favor of life everlasting. Many of us believe in life after physical death. Christians have some insight into what to expect. Life as we know it is imperfect and cruel. Eternal life as we have come to believe is just the opposite. Rationalizing the difference is where faith resides. Is it any wonder then that belief in a deity that invites humility, demands love and recognizes mercy is cause for ruthless and radical reaction among those who would live otherwise? Is

it any wonder that love for Christ Jesus invites the wrath of Lucifer in all of his forms? That target, that bullseye on your back should indeed be worn like a red badge of courage, because courage is what it's going to take to withstand first the ridicule of the world and next the scorn of those who would tempt you with the weakness of your passions. And lastly, courage is the prerequisite for the certain death that will befall us all. If life after death is a fact that most of us agree upon, then I believe it stands to reason that that badge Christians wear is most certainly a ticket into a kingdom blood bought and faith preserved for believers; the same believers who are shunned and persecuted and murdered today and yesterday in the name of God.

I continue to be moved by the acts of faith in the Bible where a simple profession that Christ is the true Son of God invited certain and immediate death. Let me at least paint that target on my back and tell the world; come on with it. May God bless and keep you always.

CULTURE

Continued from page 2

Williams, a poet who has been performing at POP since its inception. "I really think that if you have a piece that connects and really hits home for us, we will champion you."

Championing each other and showing support is the theme of Monday nights at POP. Different Black businesses are showcased every week, from product owners to those who own food businesses, emphasizing the community that Sarver and her team have built.

"I'm very grateful and honored to work with other Black creatives and support each other in that way. It feels freeing. It feels empowering," said JAHnye Ashanti, a licensed esthetician and owner of Ashanti Skin, a wellness and beauty business that offered massages while poets performed.

From start to finish, the show seamlessly brings people together in a cocoon of live music, poetry, food, drinks, and good vibes, but a lot goes into crafting the event behind the scenes. Sarver revealed that Monday's show is just 10 percent of the work they do, and after just a day's rest, her team of 10 people are back to work. It's a fully operating business and engine that works together through social media, networking, grant applications, and attending other art events while also tending to their own creative crafts.

And Sarver said it wouldn't work so seamlessly if the team behind the event hadn't be-



There are three rules formulated by Poetry on Peter founder Miyana Sarver when first-time guests or regulars settle in their seats and gather around the stage as showtime starts: give poets good energy, talk to each other, and have a good time. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

come family. Many of the key players of POP are long-time friends or family of Sarver, and you can clearly see the teamwork in the hours before the show starts. Before doors open at 8:30 p.m., you can likely catch Vibe Ktrl serenading the room with an impromptu jam session that speaks to their synergy. Where one goes, the other soon follows, cre-

ating an atmosphere that carries the team as they work diligently to organize what guests see every Monday.

Cultural Renaissance on Peters Street

The Mondays at Peters Street Station have become an important part of the art renaissance in the Castleberry Hill neighborhood.

Peter's Street has transformed into a hub of creative expression. Once a red-light district, the street now boasts art galleries, restaurants and bars that have revitalized the neighborhood's nightlife. Peter's Street Station is the heart of this cultural renaissance, a culture house and event space founded by Miya Bailey. It serves as a safe space for creative incubation in the local art community, with Poetry on Peter leading the charge as it creates a reputation for itself within the local community.

"I think that we pour a lot of our heart and spirit into it. They just called us and asked us if Poetry on Peter could be a part of the Atlanta marketing run for labels: if you come to Atlanta, you have to step on that stage. Almost like an Apollo," Sarver said.

"Poetry on Peter is the heartbeat of Peter Street for sure. I don't think anybody in that building would say otherwise. I think we have a hard engine in this cultural renaissance happening in Atlanta, especially with Peter Street."

In February, POP held one of its biggest events yet featuring Foggieraw, a Maryland-based rapper from Ghana. As POP's three-year anniversary in July draws near and Sarver reflects on the continued success of the event, which has been an integral part of keeping Atlanta's poetry scene alive, Sarver is proud of what the event has become to its neighborhoods and the community.

"It's bigger than us.... It feels good. It makes me feel proud. So often, I'll drop a tear about it."

Entertainment



ONLINE
Atlanta United soundly
beats Orlando City 2-0

Atlanta took center stage at SXSW 2024

BY JULIA BEVERLY

Two back-to-back premieres this week during Texas' popular music and film festival SXSW shine the spotlight on popular black culture in the 1990s in Atlanta.

The first installment of a three-part docuseries, *Magic City: An American Fantasy*, drew Atlanta royalty like T.I. and 2 Chainz to the screening. Recent Grammy Award winner Killer Mike, who professes to have partied with politicians and preachers alike at the popular Atlanta strip club Magic City, wonders aloud if this "saints and sinners" dynamic brings necessary balance to the city. Executive producers Drake and Jermaine Dupri are also among the celebrities featured in the series. Drake issues a challenge to boxer Floyd Mayweather, while Shaquille O'Neal recalls signing his groundbreaking 1996 NBA contract for \$120 million at Magic City because the party was so live he could not be persuaded to leave the venue.

In a Q&A after the screening, filmmakers Cole Brown and director Charles Todd said they intend the series to be a celebration – of the athleticism of the dancers, of the entrepreneurial prowess of *Magic City*'s charismatic founder, Michael "Magic" Barney – rather than a stereotypical sex work documentary.

The result, at least in the first installment, is an almost unnervingly cheery look at the strip club underworld. While there is nudity, the framing is not overly sexual or explicit. Former dancer

and *Magic City* legend Gigi Maguire said after the premiere that she had agreed to participate in a tasteful topless scene because she believed in the filmmakers' artistic vision.

Still, absent is any real introspection or insight into the decisions that have led these women into this line of work, and the piece seems to gloss over any hint at a dark side of the sex trade. The tale of two strippers found dead in a vehicle, for example, is presented briefly with little context or explanation and doesn't seem to phase their colleagues.

Magic City: An American Fantasy is still on the hunt for a distributor, and while it will surely find one – sex always sells, especially with Drake's name attached – it could benefit from a bit more balance in subsequent installments.

The upcoming *Freaknik* documentary, which airs on Hulu on March 21, is a bit more honest in its documentation of both the highs and lows of the raucous street party.

Freaknik: The Wildest Party Never Told was organized in part by executive producer Luther "Uncle Luke" Campbell, who can credibly lay claim to bringing the "Freak" to



Photos by Julia
Beverly/The
Atlanta Voice



Photos by Julia Beverly/The Atlanta Voice

Freaknik. The engaging documentary traces *Freaknik*'s journey from a cultural entry point for black college students to the chaos and debauchery of the mid-90s, which led to a city planning commission recommending it be eliminated entirely. Killer Mike and author Marc Lamont Hill, among others, offer academic and sociopolitical insights throughout the film.

Luke's selection of Atlanta-based rapper 21 Savage as a co-executive producer might seem puzzling since the rapper was an infant

living in the United Kingdom during *Freaknik*'s heyday. But in recent years, 21 Savage has resurrected the "Freaknik" theme for his Atlanta birthday festivities. By opening the film to a 21 Savage voiceover while a grainy 1990s video plays on a camcorder, the filmmakers successfully draw a thread between *Freaknik*'s history and Atlanta's present-day music and culture.

Since the initial announcement of a *Freaknik* documentary, jokes have circulated on social media about that scandalous



Photos by Julia Beverly/The Atlanta Voice

footage of your mother dancing on top of a car. While the filmmakers do make liberal use of archival footage, the majority of it just features college

students having clean fun. Some are genuinely historic, like a clip of the late Notorious B.I.G. performing at *Freaknik*.

The *Freaknik* documentary and the *Magic City* series utilize footage of Atlanta being awarded the 1996 Olympic Games as an important turning point. The Olympics were seen as a \$2 billion dollar windfall for the city. In the case of *Freaknik*, for example, the economic power of business interests forced the city to address the increasingly lawless annual festival that *Freaknik* had become.

While *Freaknik* and *Magic City* both have earned their reputation for Atlanta Vice, these films dive beyond the simply salacious to achieve genuine insights about the cultural draw of the city as a Black mecca.