



THE CARSON MCCULLERS CENTER FOR WRITERS AND MUSICIANS

Quarterly Newsletter

SPRING 2017

PRESERVING THE LEGACY OF CARSON MCCULLERS

Columbus State University's Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians is dedicated to preserving the legacy of Carson McCullers; to nurturing writers and musicians and educating young people; and fostering literary, musical, artistic and intellectual culture in the United States and abroad.

WHAT'S NEXT

Upcoming Events at the McCullers Center's Smith-McCullers House, 1519 Stark Avenue, Columbus, GA; and the Carson McCullers House, 131 S Broadway, Nyack, NY.

EVENTS COMING SOON

Please stay tuned for our upcoming summer newsletter for a list of fall events hosted by the Carson McCullers Center at both the Carson McCullers House in Nyack and the Smith-McCullers

House in Columbus. We look forward to seeing you there!

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

THE MCCULLERS CENTENNIAL

This February commemorated what would have been Carson McCullers's 100th birthday. To celebrate the life and the legacy of McCullers, the Carson McCullers Center partnered with the several organizations in both Columbus, GA, and Nyack, NY, for a McCullers centennial celebration. The month-long series of events included special film screenings, guest talks, and book clubs, all of which culminated in the showcase event: the premiere of Karen Allen's short film "A Tree. A

Rock. A Cloud.," based on the short story by McCullers, which debuted on McCullers's birthday, February 19th.

While Allen's film premiered in McCullers's hometown, the birthday fete also continued in McCullers's adult home. In Nyack, a salon concert and dramatic reading of McCullers's work was held in the Carnegie Room of at the Nyack Library. The event was followed by a reception at the Carson McCullers House.

Highlights from the centennial celebration include guest talks by famed *New Yorker* critic Hilton Als and former director of the Carson McCullers Center Courtney George. The festivities also incorporated several art installations and museum exhibitions, honoring and



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For more information, please visit mccullerscenter.org or email mccullerscenter@columbusstate.edu

exploring McCullers's life and impact.

This September will mark the 50th anniversary of McCullers's death. Please stay tuned for information about the upcoming special events commemorating the life, work, and legacy of one of America's greatest writers, Carson McCullers.



Nick Norwood & Karen Allen

Norwood, the Director of the Carson McCullers Center, and Allen, Director of "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud.," give a special Q&A for Columbus State University students.

OPEN MIC & FEATURED POET JAMES HOCH

In March, the McCullers Center hosted award-winning poet James Hoch at the Carson McCullers House in Nyack, NY. Hoch, whose work has appeared in *The New Republic*, *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry* and many other top journals, was the featured poet at an event that also included an Open Mic session for local Nyack poets and writers. Among them was novelist Sophronia Scott, whose new book *Unforgivable Love* will be released on September 26. The event was co-hosted by the Nyack community writers group River River Writing Circle.

DAVID DIAMOND READING & RECITAL SERIES

The Center hosted two David Diamond Reading & Recital events this spring. On March 15th, the Schwob School of Music's 9th Street Brass entertained audiences with a lively jazz performance, and Creative Writing student Toni Stauffer read both original poetry and prose pieces between the band's musical numbers.

At the semester's second David Diamond event on April 19th, Lyric Mitchell, another Creative Writing student, also offered both original poems and short-fiction between musical pieces performed by the Schwob School of Music's Guitar Studio. The David Diamond R&R Series will resume in the fall.



Rachel Eliza Griffiths

Author of *Mule & Pear* (New Issues Poetry & Prose), and most recently, *Lighting the Shadow* (Four Way Books).

POET PERFORMS IN COLUMBUS & NYACK

In April, the GA Poetry Circuit brought poet and visual artist Rachel Eliza Griffiths to Columbus. The author of four collections of poetry, Griffiths's visual and literary work has appeared widely, including in the *New York Times*, *Poets & Writers*, *American Poetry Review*, and many others. Like McCullers, she has spent time at Yaddo, and currently, she teaches creative

writing at Sarah Lawrence College and the Institute of American Indian Arts.

Having visited Carson McCullers's childhood home in Columbus in April, Griffiths visited McCullers's adult home in Nyack on June 9. She was the featured poet at an event that also included an open mic session at the Carson McCullers House, another evening co-hosted with River River Writers Circle.

THE CARSON MCCULLERS HOUSE, NYACK

In 1944, Carson McCullers's father Lamar Smith died, and her mother Marguerite Smith left Columbus, GA, to move to New York, presumably to be closer to McCullers. On May 15th, 1945, McCullers's mother bought the three-story white house at 131 South Broadway, in Nyack, NY.

McCullers lived with her mother and sister Rita off and on in this house for a number of years, eventually buying the house from her mother. The home quickly became a hub for talented artists throughout Nyack and the greater New York area, hosting the likes of Isak Dennison, Tennessee Williams, Marilyn Monroe, and David Diamond, among others.

McCullers was living in this house when she died in 1967. After McCullers's passing, Dr. Mary Mercer, Carson's physician and longtime friend, purchased the beloved home, which she continued to maintain, and in 2006, the Nyack House was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

When Dr. Mercer passed in 2013, she bequeathed the Carson McCullers House to Columbus State University's Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians so that it could be used to carry on the legacy of Carson McCullers.

Recent efforts have been made to turn the Carson McCullers House into a cultural center for the Nyack

community. It was Dr. Mercer's intention that the Carson McCullers House become what she called "a sort of mini-Yaddo," referring to the famous artist-writer retreat in Saratoga Springs, NY, that was so important to Carson McCullers's own life and career.

Kicking off with the McCullers Centennial Celebration (see above), the Carson McCullers Center has hosted a number of public events at the Carson McCullers House, such as a series of poetry readings and Open Mic nights. Additionally, the Center has partnered with the Nyack Library, the Nyack Center, Rivertown Film Society, and River River Writers Circle to bring together several other events this spring.

In March, The Century Club held the book launch for the Library of America's second volume of the collected works of McCullers in New York City. The launch featured screenings of Karen Allen's "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." and Kristi Zea's "A Domestic Dilemma," both short films based on the McCullers stories of the same names. The Nyack Center also hosted screenings of both films, followed by a Q&A with the filmmakers and Nick Norwood, Director of the Carson McCullers Center. In April, famed *New Yorker* critic Hilton Als was featured at a reading of Carson McCullers's short stories at Symphony Space in New York City.

Like the Smith-McCullers House in Columbus, the Carson McCullers House will also soon be home to an faculty-in-residence program, as well as a students-in-residence program. The summer 2017 resident fellows have been selected and will be living and working in the Nyack house during June and July.

The Carson McCullers Center will continue to develop new programs and host events at Nyack's Carson McCullers House as it strives to fulfill its mission of carrying on the legacy of Carson McCullers, nurturing artists, educating young people, and fostering cultural advancement.



Lauren Miley

Introducing Lauren Miley, incoming Student Assistant to the Director of the Carson McCullers Center!

NEW FACES AT THE MCCULLERS CENTER

This spring, the Carson McCullers Center's student assistant to the director, Cailee Davis, graduated from Columbus State University with a Bachelor's of Arts in English Literature. Davis's position as the student assistant will be taken over by Lauren Miley, a rising junior English major with a concentration in Creative Writing.

Miley has worked as a staff writer at CSU's student newspaper, *The Saber*, since February 2017, and will begin working as a copy editor for *The Saber* in the fall. She is involved in the International English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta, and is also a member of the

National Society of Leadership & Success, Sigma Alpha Pi.

Miley first encountered McCullers's work when she was a freshman in college. Of her new position, Miley says, "Little did I know that a few years after I discovered Carson McCullers, I would find myself living just twenty minutes outside of her hometown of Columbus, Georgia...I am honored to fill the position of student assistant and continue Cailee Davis's work at the McCullers Center. I look forward to the exciting opportunity to educate the community and to help preserve Carson McCullers's legacy."

Having begun training in early spring, Miley will continue to train throughout the summer before she officially assumes the role of student assistant in the fall.

Please join us in welcoming Lauren Miley to the Center!

SPREADING THE WORD ON CARSON MCCULLERS

This spring, Nick Norwood, Director of the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians and professor of English at Columbus State University, was invited to the University of Sofia in Sofia, Bulgaria, to present a lecture on Carson McCullers and her work. Norwood was also invited to present a paper on poetry at "LETTERS," an international and interdisciplinary academic conference in Varna, Bulgaria.

In July, Norwood will also attend "Carson McCullers in the World: A Centenary Conference" in Rome, Italy, an academic conference planned and directed by Carlos Dews, the Founding Director of the Carson McCullers Center. The conference is co-hosted by the Carson McCullers Center, the Carson McCullers Society, and John Cabot University, and explores the international importance of Carson McCullers.

Norwood hopes to continue to speak about McCullers and her life and work to audiences both at home and abroad.



WHAT DOES CARSON MCCULLERS MEAN TO YOU?

Lauren Miley is a junior English major with a concentration in Creative Writing at CSU. This fall, she will begin work as the Student Assistant to the Director of the Carson McCullers Center.

For Miley, Carson McCullers means honest, compelling writing and characters that never leave you:

"I was first introduced to Carson McCullers during my freshman year at Gordon State College...As I read the [short story by Carson McCullers, titled "A Domestic Dilemma."], I was captivated by McCullers's narrative about a family torn apart by alcohol, and drawn to her terse and straightforward style. Combining realistic imagery, colorful dialogue, and dynamic characters, McCullers weaved a simple story about a married couple's marital problems into a poignant examination about the "immense complexities of love."

"I was introduced to the works of many literary greats of the

20th century during my freshman year of college: Faulkner, Hemingway, Capote...Yet none of these writers made an impact on me quite like Carson McCullers. To me, Carson was a trailblazer in literature, a rebel with a cause, a prophet of human nature. She was unashamed to expose the raw and honest truths of humankind, to give a voice to the voiceless, and to shed light on taboo social issues.

"Put simply, Carson McCullers's stories stick with you.

"Perhaps it's McCullers's deep understanding of human nature that is so intriguing to readers, or her remarkable ability to give a voice to the eccentrics and the freaks of society; or perhaps it was her gutsy exposition of social issues such as racism and poverty—issues that were rampant in the Deep South during McCullers's time, but not openly discussed. There isn't one single element that draws readers to Carson McCullers's writing, but a tapestry of elements, weaved together to create a unique reading experience that forms a rare bond between reader, writer, and story."

A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Carson Readers of this newsletter, friends and supporters of the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians, we all owe a debt of gratitude to the Center's outgoing student assistant Cailee Davis. Among her many other duties, she has been the primary author of this publication—not to mention its designer and distributor! Cailee was the first-ever student assistant for the Center whose sole responsibility was to help facilitate its many programs and activities. She has been indispensable to me

and to the Center in that regard. Those of you who have been able to attend our events at the Smith-McCullers House or on CSU's Main Campus have no doubt seen her working cheerfully and efficiently to make things happen. If you have received email invitations to attend events, you received them from Cailee, who also designed and wrote them, as she did with all our social media posts, electronic and print advertising. She has served as both the emcee of the David Diamond Reading and Recital Series and as my surrogate tour guide at the Smith-McCullers House at times when I was away or otherwise occupied. Meanwhile, she also worked as a tutor in CSU's Writing Center, was a study abroad student in Germany, a student-traveler to other places domestic and foreign, and all this while being a full-time student in the Honors Program, where she completed an honors thesis in history. I could not be prouder of her and the work she has done. The Carson McCullers Center is a more vital and worthwhile entity because of her.

And, if that weren't enough, as a final service to the Center Cailee helped me identify the perfect replacement, Lauren Miley, an excellent student in CSU's creative writing program and another young Georgian who, like Carson McCullers and Cailee Davis, is becoming a world traveler, having visited Ireland just this summer. Cailee will be continuing to work for the Center over the next month or so to help Lauren learn the ropes. For this, too, we should all be grateful.

And to Lauren Miley: welcome!

-Nick Norwood



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