

REAL ARTISTS. REAL IMPACT.





On the Cover
The Parchman Band.
Parchman, MS, 2026.
Tintype by Tim Duffy.

Contents

A Letter from Our Co-Founders	1
At Our Core	3
Our Programs	8
Music Maker at a Glance	9

Financials	11
2026 Releases	12
Redemption in Real Time	13
Events	21
Stories of Sustenance	25
Catching Up With Little Freddie King	29

A Letter From Our Co-Founders



Dear friends,

We are so grateful for this community—for you.

What seems to matter most in these strange days is connection. Bringing artists together to record. Meeting with our supporters. Reaching out to the most isolated people in our society, like the men we worked alongside this year at Parchman Farm in Mississippi. Culture is what binds us in an ever more isolating world, and small communities like ours are worth protecting.

We invite you to experience this firsthand. Join us at our studios in eastern North Carolina on **October 17th** for the first annual **Fountain Fest**—a gathering of musicians representing the many living traditions of the Carolinas, in the heart of a small farming community we're proud to call home.

The changes reshaping modern music have placed real strain on artists of all ages. Fewer gigs, diminishing recording revenue, and rising costs bear down on senior artists and younger working musicians alike. When we sit with these artists and listen, one thing is clear: Music Maker's model of support and community remains a powerful force for good in their lives.

Both artists and supporters have expressed a longing for something tangible, a record of the music and the lives behind it. This fall, we'll publish the first in a series of tiny books documenting living artistry. You'll meet our neighbor in Fountain, **Lamont Lane**, in that inaugural volume. In the spring, we'll document the remarkable culture of reform and creativity emerging from Mississippi with a book and album by **The Parchman Band**.

Looking ahead, our board and staff have spent the past year in a serious strategic planning process, examining how Music Maker can modernize, deepen its impact, and train the next generation of leadership to carry this work forward.

None of this happens without you. Thank you for being part of our family.

With gratitude,
Tim and Denise Duffy

Tim and Denise Duffy at the Great Smoky Mountains Music Train. Bryson City, NC, 2026. Photo by Tim Duffy.

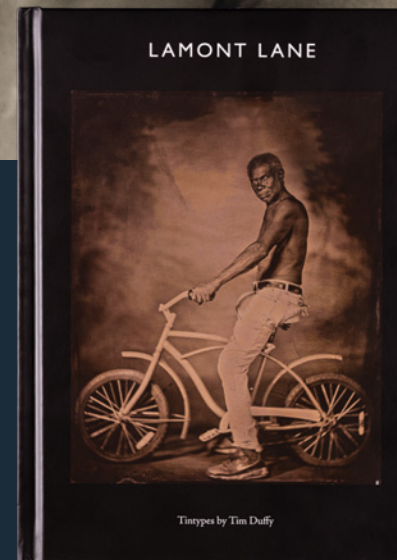


Music Maker Editions

Tiny Books. Deep Roots.

This series presents curated selections from Music Maker Foundation's vast photographic and musical archive. Each volume documents a single artist, theme, or body of work. Created in small, collectible runs, these books preserve the stories of the musicians and the communities who shape the sound of the South.

These photographs grew out of the years Music Maker spent working in Fountain, North Carolina, in a small studio where artists come to reveal themselves. Long before these sessions, Music Maker knew Lamont Lane through the steady work of being neighbors. In the studio, Lamont moved in his own way, standing in the light with the strength and history carried in his body. These tintypes reflect his presence and the friendship that made this work possible.



Lamont Lane. Fountain, NC, 2025. Tintype by Tim Duffy.

AVAILABLE OCTOBER 15
AT MUSICMAKER.ORG

At Our Core

Music Maker undertook a strategic planning process in the first half of 2026. Working with an outside consultant, our staff and board held a series of meetings to discuss our long-term vision, review

our mission and values, and develop an ambitious and inspiring blueprint for the next 3–5 years. Input from artists and several outside experts also helped us to form the plan.

Our Mission

Music Maker Foundation tends the roots of traditional American music by meeting the day-to-day needs of the artists who create it, ensuring their voices are heard, and giving all people access to our nation's hidden musical treasures.

Core Values

Music Maker's Core Values were also reviewed, and the values below reflect the essence of what Music Maker holds to be most important in its work:

- 1 RESPECT**
For artists, musical traditions, our supporters and staff
- 2 COLLABORATION**
To provide a musical community for artists and music lovers
- 3 CREATIVE AGENCY**
To ensure musicians have the essentials to pursue artistic excellence
- 4 SUSTAINABILITY**
Nurture roots music in communities and American musical heritage
- 5 ENTREPRENEURIAL THINKING**
Foster innovation and make the most of resources

The Pillars Shaping the Future of Music Maker

Our core values and mission statement served as a touchstone for the rest of the strategic planning process. Each of our key Objectives and Strategies advances the

Mission while holding true to our Values. Through our intensive planning work, we determined that **five key pillars will shape the next 3–5 years for Music Maker:**

PILLAR 1



FOUNTAIN, NC

Strengthen and leverage the organization's presence in Fountain as a creative hub for artists, musical traditions, supporters, and staff, while using the location to enhance public access to their work.

PILLAR 2



ARCHIVES

Provide a musical community for artists and music lovers that maximizes access to Music Maker's archives and leverages its contents to help further Music Maker's mission and purpose.

PILLAR 3



ARTIST RELATIONS

Nurture roots music in communities by continuing to offer support that connects artists to audiences while providing sustenance to meet personal needs and ensuring that their voices are heard and preserved for the future.

PILLAR 4



AUDIENCE CONNECTIVITY

Connect roots musicians with the public to build and retain an audience for artists, foster appreciation for American roots music, and encourage support for Music Maker Foundation.

PILLAR 5



ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Foster innovation and make the most of resources to strengthen the internal components of the organization to position Music Maker for future growth, leadership, and impact.



Music Maker Team

Front row: Kim Anderson, Denise Duffy, Lucas Duffy, Sam Horn.
Back row: Tim Duffy, Bill Moore, Taylor Kennedy.
 Hillsborough, NC, 2026. Photo by Tim Duffy.

To make an impact for those we serve, it truly takes a team. Luckily, we have the best lineup around.

TEAM

Timothy Duffy, Executive Director
 Denise Duffy, Managing Director
 Sam Horn, Community Coordinator
 Taylor Kennedy, Programs Coordinator
 Lucas Duffy, Artist Services Coordinator
 Kim Anderson, Finance Coordinator
 Bill Moore, Communications and Programs Associate

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Timothy Duffy, President
 Henry Slyker, Treasurer
 Michael Stallings, Secretary
 Denise Duffy, Chief Financial Officer
 Dom Flemons
 David A. Jones Jr.
 Tom Wallack
 Louis Mintz

ADVISORY BOARD

Dan Auerbach
 Elvin Bishop
 Bonnie Raitt
 Jackson Browne
 Phil Cooke
 Jerry Harrison
 Jimmy Herring
 Taj Mahal
 Tift Merritt
 Pura Fé
 John Price
 Tom Rankin
 Ken Shepherd
 Kenny Wayne Shepherd
 Derek Trucks
 Susan Tedeschi
 Pete Townshend
 Don Was
 Jimbo Mathus

BOARD MEMBERS EMERITUS

B.B. King 1925–2015	Levon Helm 1940–2012	Bill Krasilovsky 1926–2018	Dickey Betts 1943–2024
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Our Partners

D'Addario



ENBRIDGE



CARY
— NORTH CAROLINA —



THE PHILADELPHIA FOUNDATION

**BECOME A PARTNER TODAY
 AT MUSICMAKER.ORG**



“
Thank you so much for your generous grant acknowledging my work. It was a welcome surprise at the end of an expensive year! I wish all artists had this encouragement!
”

Leyla McCalla
Next Generation Artist and
Lean Season Grant recipient

PROGRAMS

★ PRESERVATION ★

To ensure that American roots music is always accessible to current and future generations, we write books, record artists, create exhibitions, and archive documentation for future generations.

★ PERFORMANCE ★

To help our artists build their careers, their income, and their skills through touring, we book shows for them and provide tour management and professional development.

★ SUSTENANCE ★

To make certain that the day-to-day needs of the most vulnerable artists are met, we provide grants and social services to musicians who are in crisis or who live in chronic poverty.

WHAT WE
ACCOMPLISHED
SINCE 1994

18,097
GRANTS



BOOKS
PUBLISHED



9,156
PERFORMANCES



3,124
SONGS RELEASED



32
YEARS



634
ARTISTS



56
MUSEUM
EXHIBITIONS



32
COUNTRIES
TOURED

3
PROGRAMS



1
MISSION



Left page, top to bottom: Andy Edmonds. Fountain, NC, 2026. Leyla McCalla. Hillsborough, NC, 2011. Member of the Leroy Harper Jr. All-Starz. Carrboro, NC, 2026. Photos by Tim Duffy.
Right page, top to bottom: Antwan Daniels. Carrboro, NC, 2026. Albert White. Telluride, CO, 2021. Photos by Tim Duffy.



2025-26 HIGHLIGHTS

EVENTS

17,500

Total
Attendance

12

Live events
(95% over 18-)

133

Artist
performances

GRANTS

673

Grants

\$264,705

Total

116

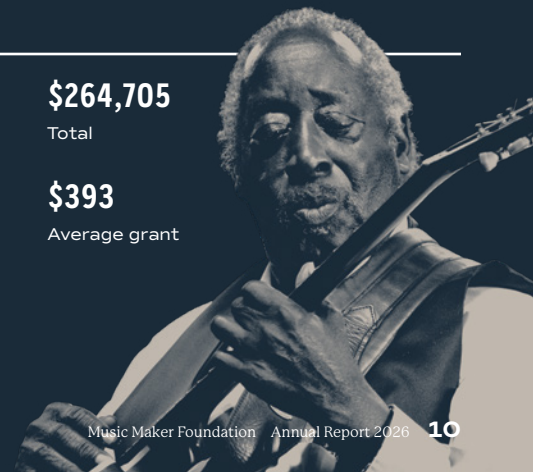
Artists

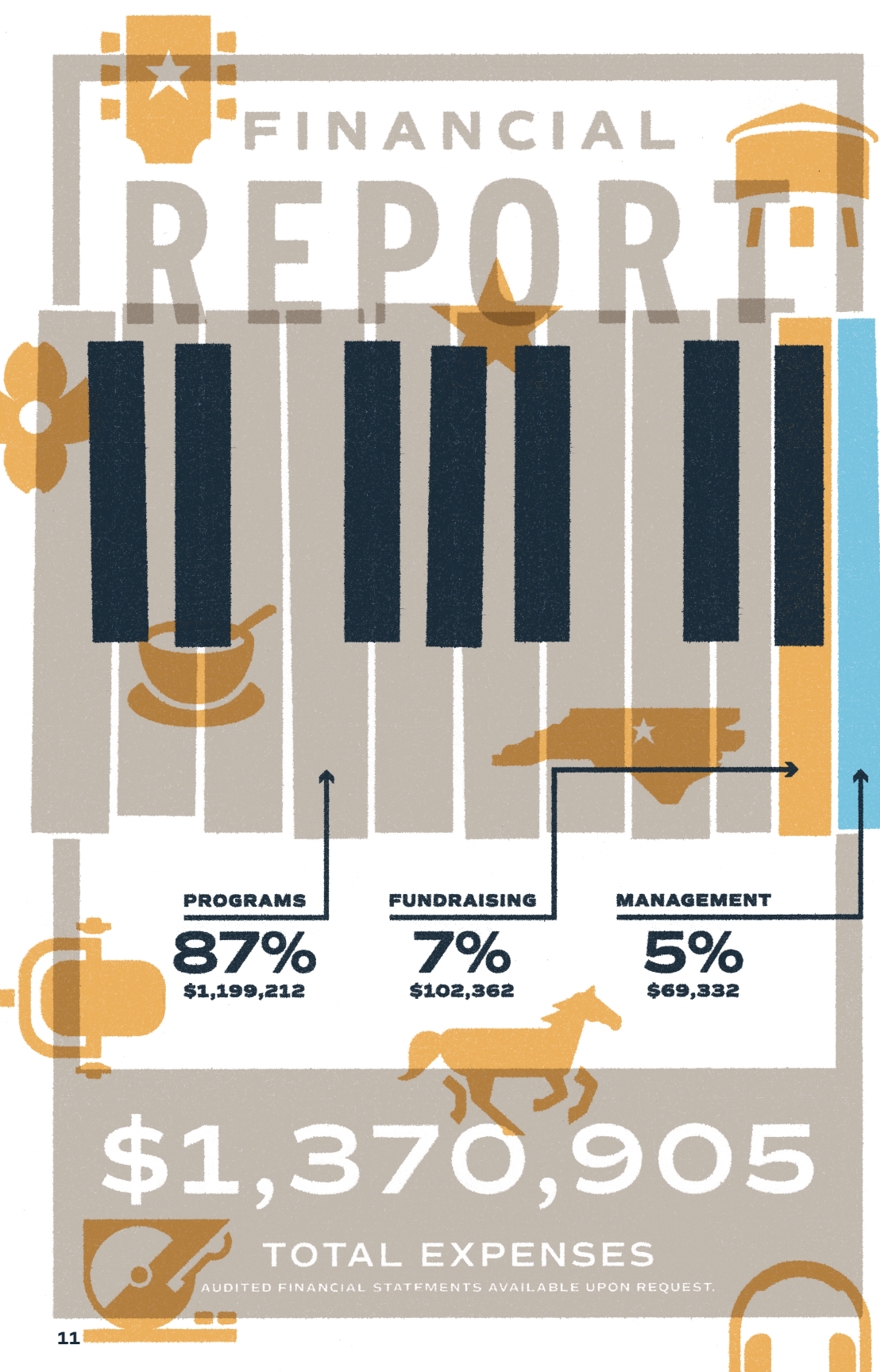
\$393

Average grant

15

States





2026 Releases



Squirrel Nut Zippers
"FAT CITY" (The Ballad of Lil' Tony)



Earl Guitar Williams
Soul King of Bessemer, AL



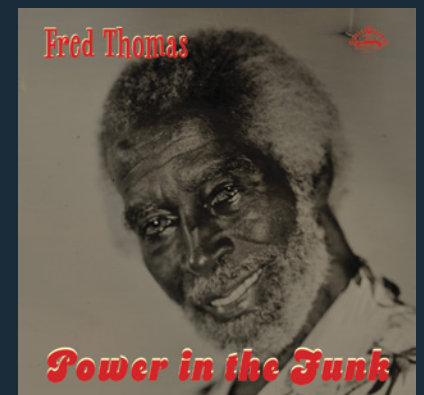
Kelley Breiding
Nightingale



Trenton Ayers
Takin' It To The Mountain



Cool John Ferguson
Where is Harold?



Fred Thomas
Power In The Funk

Some stories are about the work. Others reveal why the work matters. *The Parchman Band* is a collection of music, photography, history, and personal testimony that documents the rebirth of a legendary prison band and the lives behind it.

In “Redemption in Real Time,” Music Maker Foundation co-founder Tim Duffy reflects on his journey into the project, offering a deeply personal account of the people, purpose, and possibility he encountered along the way.

Mississippi State Penitentiary gate.
Parchman, MS, 2026. Tintype by Tim Duffy.

MISSISSIPPI STATE PENITENTIARY

REDEMPTION IN REAL TIME

WORDS AND TINTYPES
BY TIM DUFFY

I first traveled to Parchman in early March of 2026 with Music Maker Foundation board member David A. Jones Jr., expecting to learn more about the prison's musical legacy. What I did not expect was to witness one of the most hopeful places in the United States today.

Thanks to the generosity of Superintendent Marc McClure and his wife, Lee Ann, we were given a full day to see the remarkable

transformation underway at this once-notorious institution. As Marc walked us through the grounds, it became clear that Parchman is no longer defined by its past. Instead, it is becoming a model for what prison reform can look like when dignity, faith, and purpose are placed at the center. David and I left that day deeply moved, convinced we had seen something rare and urgently needed in America.

A NEW CHAPTER

Our visit coincided with the recording of the new Parchman Band's debut album, a project made possible through our partnership with the Parchman Community and Culture Foundation. The group was to embark on two intense days of recording with producer Jimbo Mathus at Dial Back Sound, a studio an hour away in Water Valley. The result is a raw, emotional collection of all-original material.

Listening to the early cuts of the album, I was deeply moved by the honesty, faith, and optimism the men poured into their lyrics. These are not down-and-out songs about prison life; they are declarations of transformation. Band member Michael Snell writes about staying on the "Str8line" for his family. Lee Andrew Smith and Charles Kimball Glassco IV describe incarceration as a crucible where divine intervention reshapes the self. Jakellsey Hollis' song speaks of "putting away the old me" to embrace a future rooted in moral clarity. Together, these songs are a collective roadmap for renewal. I can't wait for you to hear them.

During our visit, Dave and I learned that the band needed new gear for their upcoming performances. I promised them we would help, and soon after I left, Music Maker donated high-quality guitars, sound gear, and photography

equipment to the band. We sent them all they needed to get started for a recording studio inside the prison. This will mark the first time in Parchman's history that incarcerated musicians can control how their music is recorded, documented, and preserved.



BUILDING THE SONGBOOK

Struck by the depth of the lyrics and by Houston Jones' beautifully-written history of the Parchman Band, I asked him if he would consider editing a songbook to accompany the upcoming album. He immediately agreed. His vision was ambitious: each song includes lyrics, a band-member biography, and the story behind its creation. Houston shaped this material into the first Parchman Band Songbook.

To support this effort, I returned to Parchman on April 6, 2026 with my wet-plate wagon (a mobile darkroom built into a trailer) to create tintype portraits of every member of the band. It took me a day to break down my studio and another to load all the gear up. My Suburban was completely full of 1940s-era steel light stands, a bank of heavy Speedotron power packs, and every other piece of gear I use in

Top: Tim Duffy and Lee Smith. Parchman, MS, 2026. Photo by Houston Jones.
Bottom: Stephen Chambers. Parchman, MS, 2026. Tintype by Tim Duffy.



Charles Glassco IV.
Parchman, MS, 2026.
Tintype by Tim Duffy.

each of them. Wet-plate photography is slow, deliberate work, each image taking up to half an hour to create. The men embraced the process, writing their stories and inspirations, playing dominoes while they waited their turn. Houston and Lee documented everything with my digital camera, capturing the sessions' joyful quiet intensity.

On the second day, writer James McWilliams arrived to interview the band, volunteering his time to help Houston with the songbook. On day three, we reviewed the tintypes and the band members selected which image they wanted in this book. Their openness, curiosity, and pride in the project were palpable.

That Saturday, I joined the band on a bus to Clarksdale for their performance at the annual Juke Joint Festival. Houston gathered the musicians, secured the driver, and shepherded everyone into town. The band delivered a powerful set. Jimbo Mathus introduced them, and Music Maker artist Rachel Ammons (who had played in town the night before) stopped by to visit and gifted the men small rubber chickens, which delighted them. After they played, the band members even visited with their children and families, who had traveled to Clarksdale to watch them perform.

It was a morning full of joy, camaraderie, and purpose. Watching them perform, it was clear these men are more than musicians. They are ambassadors of the McClures' vision of faith and redemption.

my complicated photo studio setup. The trailer can easily hold up to four people to stand in, with two long work benches and a sink; it, too, was full of thirty years' worth of carefully chosen studio gear.

I have a true affinity for tintype photography. These images capture the deep musical history each performer carries, drawing the viewer into the artist's emotional world and inviting us to inhabit their reality. These images suspend us in a timeless realm, one that could be today or a century ago, offering a fresh perspective as both the subject and the viewer drift together across the boundaries of time.

I left North Carolina at four in the morning and drove thirteen hours down to Mississippi. The next day Houston and I spent four hours transforming the prison's Visitors Center into a full studio, complete with flash packs, stands, backdrops, and all the equipment I use at our photo studio in Fountain, NC.

For three days, the band members sat patiently as I made three to four tintypes of

Tim Duffy.
Fountain, NC, 2025.
Photo by Ethan Payne.





Family Day,
Parchman, MS, 2026.
Photo by Tim Duffy.



The Parchman Band at Juke Joint Festival with a young fan, the child of band member Leonard Stevenson. Clarksdale, MS, 2026. Photo by Tim Duffy.

JUST THE BEGINNING

Spending a week moving through Parchman—meeting the men, hearing their stories, and witnessing their work—was life-changing.

This is just the beginning of Music Maker's collaboration with the Parchman Band. At the end of May, I returned with director Ethan Payne to create a short film about the band and their upcoming album. Our trip coincided with Parchman's Family Day, a cherished annual event where incarcerated men, staff, and their families gather for a picnic with minimal guard presence. This celebration, the first of its kind in Mississippi, is the brainchild of Marc McClure and is now being replicated in other prisons across the state.

Marc and Lee Ann describe Family Day as their favorite day of the year, a rare time when fathers can throw a football with

LIFE INSIDE PARCHMAN

During my stay at the prison, I was housed in the Burl Cain Suite, named for the Commissioner of the Mississippi Prison System. Burl's reform work at Angola Prison in Louisiana laid the groundwork for Parchman's transformation. Being welcomed into this space was an honor.

My second trip also included a visit to Unit 17: death row. I had previously sent the men there several Music Maker books, and they greeted me with warmth, asking me to sign them. Some are gifted songwriters, and Houston and I were able to sing and play with them. Many had spent years locked up 23 hours a day, shackled during their single hour outside their cell, living with inadequate heat, no air conditioning, and failing plumbing. Now, thanks to the efforts of reformers like Burl and the McClures, those conditions have changed dramatically.

As Marc often says, "The punishment is the sentence." Everything else should be humane.

The goal of these reforms isn't just to improve life behind bars. Many of the men incarcerated at Parchman come from the roughest communities in Mississippi. Focusing on rehabilitation means that, when their sentences are up, they can be a force for good in their own neighborhoods—and maybe help others escape the cycle of violence and crime.

"If we don't change the heart, we don't change the man," Burl once said. "And if we don't change the man, he's coming right back."



The Parchman Band,
Clarksdale, MS, 2026.
Photo by Marc McClure.

sons they haven't seen grow up. It is an event that embodies the spirit of Parchman's reforms.

During the picnic, the Parchman Band took the stage to play for their loved ones. They were also joined by the band from Marshall County Correctional Facility in Holly Springs, whose superintendent had asked if Marshall's gospel group could



Fantasya Allen with tintype of Leonard Stevenson Jr. Parchman, MS, 2026. Photo by Tim Duffy.

the spirit within this group—and within those who stand behind them—reaches deep into the prison population, signaling something larger stirring in the heart of Parchman. The band members' courage, their hunger to create, and their belief in one another reveal a shift that is slowly spreading through the prison, a quiet but powerful change that suggests healing is possible even in a place long defined by suffering.

The men of the Parchman Band are living proof of what can happen when people are offered purpose and dignity. As Charles Kimball Glassco IV told me, "Parchman saved my life. It gave me a purpose, I got sober, and provided me a marketable skill learning to be a welder." I am grateful to be part of their story—and to witness redemption not as

an abstract idea, but as something unfolding in real time.



Leonard Stevenson Jr. Parchman, MS, 2026. Tintype by Tim Duffy.

eventually do their own recording session at Parchman. At the end of the day, I passed out museum-quality plates of the portraits in this book for the band members to share with their families.

With no formal music programming in the Mississippi prison system in over 30 years, inmates have a massive hunger to form bands and create. The McClures envision a future where Parchman is the heart of a statewide prison music program, one that nurtures inmates' creativity and gives them control over how their voices are heard. Marc has approved my proposal for Houston to produce and oversee all musical recordings at the Mississippi State Penitentiary.

Music Maker Foundation is doing everything we can to support this vision. We have spent more than 30 years shining light on unseen artists, and this project fits perfectly with our mission. The extraordinary talent documented here since John and Alan Lomax's first visit in 1933 is spellbinding. Imagine how many more voices were lost.

Houston and the Parchman Band have embarked on a righteous, inspirational project that fully realizes Parchman's new direction. The depth of future projects here is infinite. This initiative is the living embodiment of the power of music, and it deserves our nation's full support.

Parchman is no longer the symbol of brutality it once was. It is becoming a place where music, faith, work, and community can be tools of transformation. And while not every inmate can perform in the band,

“
The punishment
is the sentence.
Everything
else should
be humane.”

Michael Snell and Tim Duffy reviewing a tintype. Parchman, MS, 2026. Photo by Houston Jones.

The Parchman Band

**Original songs.
Powerful stories.
New hope.**

The Parchman Band brings together incarcerated musicians at Mississippi State Penitentiary to write and record original songs of hope, healing and redemption. Their forthcoming debut album and deluxe book celebrate the transformative power of music—and the human dignity, faith and community it can inspire.

Album produced by Jimbo Mathus

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- THE DELUXE BOOK
- THE ALBUM
- UPCOMING SHORT FILM



The Parchman Band Cover. Parchman, MS, 2026. Tintype by Tim Duffy.

VISIT OUR SHOP AT
MUSICMAKER.ORG

AVAILABLE
EARLY
2027

Leroy Harper Jr. at Elizabeth Cotten
Freight Train Blues. Carrboro, NC, 2026.
Photo by Tim Duffy.

2026 EVENTS

Fountain Fest

Join us for the first annual Fountain Fest! Enjoy an afternoon of live music, art, and celebration as we showcase some of the Carolinas' finest roots talent across two stages, featuring: Da Funky Leroy Harper Jr. All Starz with special guest Fred Thomas, Kelley Breiding, Lightnin' Wells, The Carolina Cutups, Scott Pearce, Dedicated Men of Zion, Faith & Harmony, Alice Vines. Plus guided tours of Music Maker Studios, an exhibition of tintype photographs by Tim Duffy, and a book signing to celebrate the launch of Music Maker Editions! VIP Passes and general admission tickets available.



We hope to see you in
Fountain, Oct. 17, 2026!

← SCAN FOR TICKETS OR
VISIT [MUSICMAKER.ORG](https://musicmaker.org)

Fred Thomas.
Fountain, NC, 2025.
Photo by Tim Duffy.



Freight Train Blues

In 2026, Music Maker celebrated the 12th anniversary of Elizabeth Cotten Freight Train Blues, our annual concert series in Carrboro, NC featuring roots artists from North Carolina and beyond. These performances honor the legacy of Piedmont blueswoman Elizabeth Cotten, born in Carrboro in 1893.

Join us in Spring 2027 for our 13th annual
Freight Train Blues, Friday nights in May and June!

Telluride Blues & Brews

For 12 years, Music Maker has been a proud charity partner of Telluride Blues & Brews Festival in Telluride, CO. We returned in September 2026 with partner artists Little Willie Farmer, Albert White, and Terry "Harmonica" Bean—plus the encore of our BluesKites exhibit, featuring new art kites inspired by Music Maker artists!

We hope to see you in Telluride
next year, September 18–20, 2027!

VISIT [MUSICMAKER.ORG](https://musicmaker.org)
FOR DETAILS



OUR 2026 SERIES FEATURED

Kelley Breiding
Gail Ceasar
Brenda Evans & Family
Da Funky Leroy Harper Jr.
All Starz
Lynn Grissett
David Childers
Lightnin' Wells
Dedicated Men of Zion
Faith & Harmony
Orquesta K'Che





Support Today

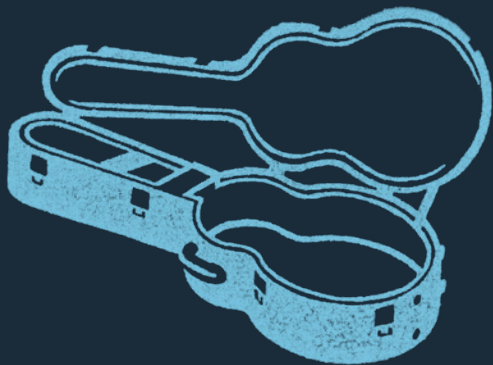
Give Online or Mail a Check

Music Maker Foundation depends on thousands of supporters. Together, we work to meet the day-to-day needs of the artists who create traditional American music, we ensure their voices are heard, and we give all people access to our nation's hidden musical treasures.



SCAN AND DONATE

Make a difference in just a few clicks. Donating online is quick, easy, and secure.



Your Donor Advised Fund

Make the most of your charitable giving by contributing to Music Maker through your donor-advised fund (DAF). Making a one-time or recurring gift through a DAF allows you to create a meaningful legacy while enjoying immediate tax benefits.

Ask your DAF's sponsoring organization to address your gift to:

Music Maker Foundation
EIN: 13-3782018, PO Box 1358
Hillsborough, NC 27278

IRA Contributions

Individuals age 70½ years old or older can transfer up to \$100,000 per year to Music Maker Foundation from an IRA to satisfy the required minimum distribution for the year.

Join the Listeners Circle!

Be the first to get all of our featured releases—including new recordings and never before heard tracks by your favorite Music Maker artists.

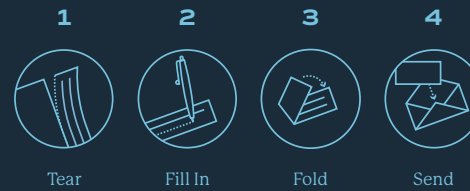
For a donation of \$30 a month or \$300 a year you'll receive six CDs filled with the best music we've found in our travels! Also available by digital download.

OCTOBER 2026 SELECTION

Cool John Ferguson
Where Is Harold?

DECEMBER 2026 SELECTION

Fred Thomas
Power in the Funk



Leave Your Lasting Legacy

You can help us to tend the roots of American music for generations to come when you make a planned gift to Music Maker. As a tax-exempt organization, Music Maker is an ideal beneficiary for any heavily taxed assets, while you leave less-taxed assets to your loved ones.

Your Will

Include language in your will or trust designating the "Music Maker Foundation (EIN 13-3782018)" as beneficiary of your assets. Contact us so we can coordinate with you to ensure your gift is used in accordance with your wishes when received.

Retirement Plan Assets

Complete a beneficiary designation form provided by your retirement plan custodian. Designate the "Music Maker Foundation (EIN 13-3782018)" as beneficiary. Submit the form to your retirement plan custodian.

Donation Form

AMOUNT:
☐ \$100 ☐ \$250

OTHER:

PAYMENT INFO: ☐ CHECK ☐ CREDIT CARD		BILLING INFO:		ADD-ONS:
NAME:		CC#:		
STREET:		EXP:	CVV:	
CITY:	STATE: ZIP:	Please make checks payable to: Music Maker Foundation PO Box 1358, Hillsborough, NC 27278		
PHONE:				
EMAIL:		JOIN THE LISTENERS CIRCLE ☐ \$300		



Right page top:
Lamont Lane.
Fountain, NC, 2026.
Photo by Tim Duffy.
Right page bottom:
Ironing Board Sam.
Hillsborough, NC, 2013.
Photo by Tim Duffy.



Fighting Hunger

When we learned that SNAP benefits would be affected by the federal shutdown in fall 2025, we knew our partner artists would need a helping hand.

81% of our artists have experienced food insecurity in the last year, and nearly one-third qualify for SNAP (food stamps).

For seniors already struggling to survive on fixed incomes, losing this extra assistance could mean the difference between staying healthy and skipping meals.

Because of your support, we were able to issue emergency grants to every Music Maker artist who receives SNAP, covering the full amount of their missed benefits. Thanks to you, these senior tradition-bearers had food on the table heading into the holiday season.



STORIES OF SUSTENANCE

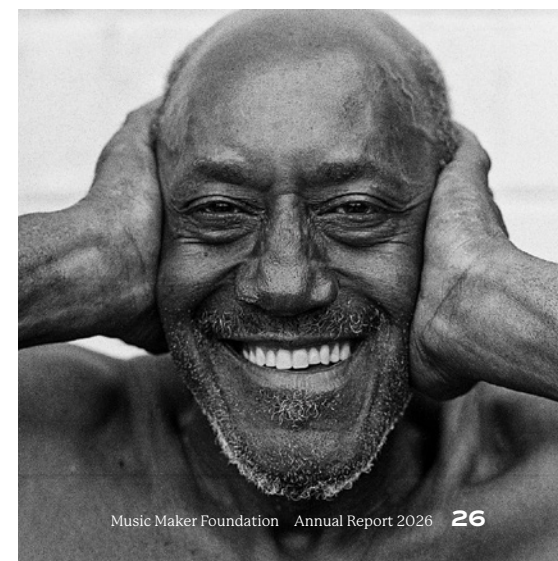


Lean Season Grants

Freezing temperatures, skyrocketing light and heat bills, damaging storms: For many, winter is the most difficult time of the year. But for working musicians like Trenton Ayers of Holly Springs, MS, January and February are especially challenging. During this stretch between the holiday rush and the start of music festival season in the spring, paid gigs are few and far between. Would-be audiences opt to stay home due to cold and bad weather, and bars and other venues cut back on live performances as fewer patrons come through their doors.

This year, Music Maker Foundation introduced Lean Season Grants to help our partner artists get through this seasonal lull. These grants were created especially for our Next Generation Artists, younger working musicians who have devoted their lives to keeping American roots traditions alive—and who may have trouble making ends meet in the dead of winter. Our first round of Lean Season grants went out to 27 artists this winter.

Left page, top to bottom, left to right: Pat “Mother Blues” Cohen. Hillsborough, NC, 2015. Trenton Ayers. Telluride, CO, 2025. Albert White. Telluride, CO, 2021. Little Freddie King. New Orleans, LA, 2014. Lena Mae Perry. Carrboro, NC, 2017. Jimmi Mayes. Clarksdale, MS, 2025. Photos by Tim Duffy.



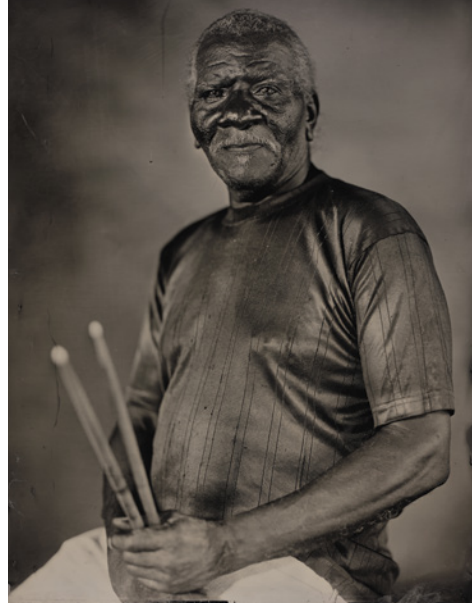
Curtis Harper. Fountain, NC, 2025.
Tintype by Tim Duffy.

Curtis Harper

Born in rural Farmville, gospel drummer Curtis Harper has spent his life bringing eastern North Carolina's sacred soul tradition to the world. He grew up in the same circles as celebrated gospel quartet The Glorifying Vines Sisters and became their drummer in 1975; he also joined the Vines family officially in 1982, when he married singer Mattie. In 2025, Curtis and Mattie celebrated their 43rd wedding anniversary—and saw the group to which they've devoted their lives receive the prestigious North Carolina Heritage Award.

But despite their contributions to our culture, music never brought in enough money to keep their family afloat, forcing Curtis to take on extra jobs to make ends meet. Now in his 70s, Curtis continues to work as a school bus driver; in the summer, when school isn't in session, he mows lawns. When Mattie lost her mobility after a stroke, he took on yet another job: caregiver.

Last year, the truck Curtis used to transport his landscaping equipment finally gave out. He found a reliable used vehicle to replace it, but couldn't afford the \$2,500



price tag. Without a way to transport his equipment, he would have to shutter his lawn business—and lose much of his family's income.

That's where Music Maker stepped in. When we learned about Curtis' situation, we issued him an emergency grant to cover the full cost of replacing his truck. Curtis and Mattie also receive monthly grants from our Sustenance Program to ease their financial burden. Thanks to generous music lovers like you, Curtis can continue supporting his family—and the vibrant gospel community of eastern North Carolina.



Curtis Harper with his truck.
Fountain, NC, 2025.
Photo by Tim Duffy.



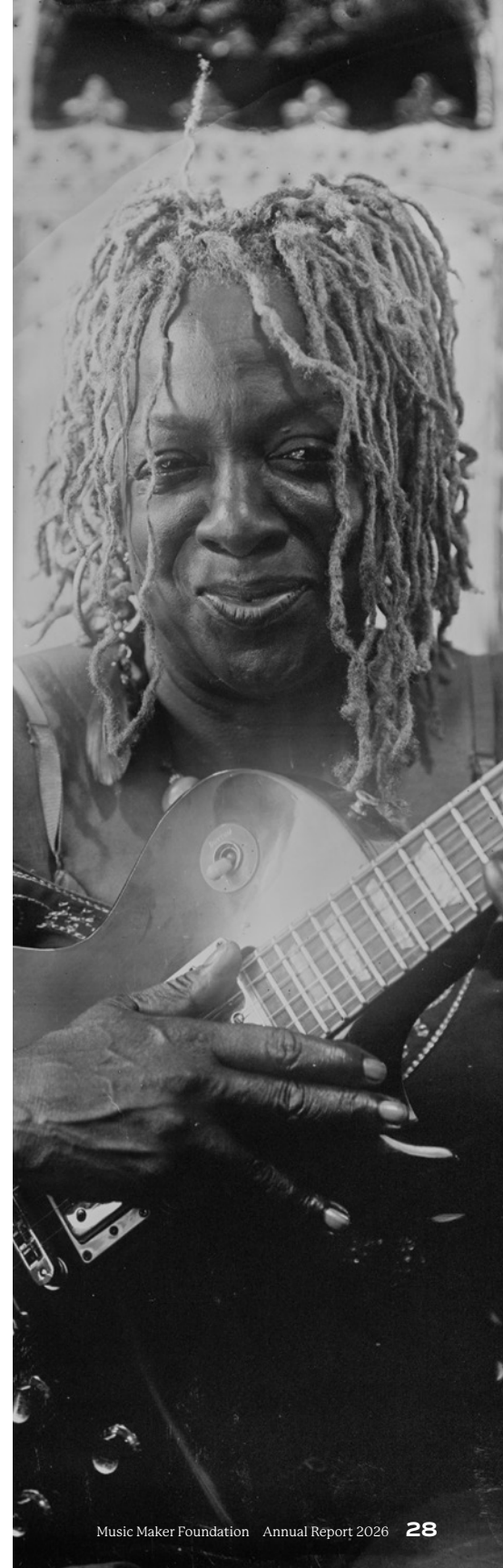
“
I feel just fine
loving everybody
”

Pat Wilder

Whether she's playing blues, gospel, soul, or funk, Pat Wilder of San Francisco, CA has one goal: creating joy. Her virtuosic guitar skills, husky contralto voice, and powerful stage presence are matched only by her deep love for music and people. “I feel fine just loving everybody,” she once told us.

This April, we received a call from Pat with devastating news: A burst pipe in her upstairs neighbor's unit had completely flooded her apartment. Her landlord put her up in a nearby hotel while they began making repairs, but until the workmen were finished, she wouldn't be allowed back in her home. The severe damage meant it might be weeks, even months before she could retrieve any of her possessions, including her guitars—a serious blow to a working musician.

Pat has spent her career bringing comfort and joy to music lovers across the globe. Thanks to supporters like you, we were able to return the favor. We quickly granted Pat \$1,500 in emergency funds to help her afford essentials while she was forced out of her home, giving her the time and resources she needs to get back on her feet.



Pat Wilder. Hillsborough, NC, 2013.
Tintype by Tim Duffy.



Little Freddie King,
New Orleans, LA, 2015.
Photo by Tim Duffy.

Catching Up With Little Freddie King

Longtime Music Maker Artist Survives a Debilitating Accident and Returns to the Blues Tent at Jazz Fest

Written by Cree McCree

The undisputed monarch of New Orleans down-home, gut-bucket blues, Music Maker artist Little Freddie King has snatched life from the jaws of death multiple times, surviving a litany of close calls over the course of his 85 years. But this past September, life threw him a couple of curve balls that really knocked him for a loop. First he suffered a debilitating bicycle accident that left him partially paralyzed and severely affected his guitar-playing fingers. Then the rent on his home in Musicians Village, built in the wake of Katrina, skyrocketed when it was sold to new owners.

Despite these travails, Freddie was in good spirits when I went to visit him at

his home on Bartholomew St., where we were joined by his longtime drummer and manager Wacko Wade. A living museum bursting with memorabilia, outrageous stage wear and a world-class guitar collection that includes a custom Dr. Bones model, it was the perfect backdrop for the lively conversation that ensued.

We discussed everything from his forthcoming double vinyl album *Live at B.J.s* (Made Wright Records), recorded the night before his accident, to his plans to appear at this year's Jazz Fest, with the help of a wheelchair and several fellow musicians. Fueled by the caffeine in Freddie's drink of choice, Coca Cola, we bantered for a couple hours.

Edited for length and clarity, excerpts from our lively conversation follow.

Cree McCree: Your accident sounds really scary.

Little Freddie King: It was. When the paramedics pulled me out from underneath the bike they cracked both of my hip bones and my backbone. That's why I can't walk, you know, without a walker or a wheelchair.

CM: It also affected your fingers, right?

LFK: My poor hands are numb, but thank the good Lord I can move 'em some now. I can play a few notes with the first 3 fingers. The other two are still numb, but every day I get stronger. I've been doing exercises, squeezing balls, and I can work my fingers much, much better. I feel like I will be able to play at Jazz Fest.

CM: Your relationship with Music Maker goes way back to 1998, right?

LFK: Yes. When Wacko first connected me with Music Maker I was living on Pauger Street in a house with a ceiling that leaked every time it rained. When the people sold it to me, they put some tar paper on top of the sheetrock and painted the house to make it look good. And when the first little storm came through it started leaking. They told me the house was only 40 years old and the man across the street said they ought to be ashamed of themselves. He said that house is 88 years old. And so Wacko called Tim Duffy at Music Maker, and they came down and fixed my house.

Then in 2005, after Katrina came through, and we was in Dallas, Music Maker bought me a brand new guitar and blessed me with some funds. That's when Tim came down and we cut my first album: *The Mighty Flood*.

CM: Is that when you moved into the Musician Village, after Katrina?

LFK: Right, in 2007. It was built to bail

out musicians when we came back. But now they've raised the rent... They didn't notify none of the tenants that they was fixing to sell. Otherwise, I would have bought this joint. They pulled the rug out from under us. They just wrote and said hey, you got a new landlord.

Wacko Wade: And I said, Freddie's grandfathered into this place, they built this place for him. And people like Bob French, right next door. Senior musicians in New Orleans, to keep the culture here.

CM: And Music Maker is paying your rent here for the next year. That's a good start.

LFK: Such a blessing. I can't never thank 'em enough. Music Maker has done a lot for me over the years. Tim used to buy my medicine for me. And he would book jobs

for me in different places, that was a real good deed that he done. When he come down here, he'd stay here, and bring different people by the house for interviews. And I was glad to do it because of all the favors he did me. I really think a lot of Tim and his wife Denise. They are very good people, who have been

good to me over the years.

CM: Wacko, you were actually instrumental in connecting Freddie with Music Maker, Wacko, in the early '90s right? How did you know about Music Maker?

WW: I have no idea how I knew about Music Maker. [laughs] No. I was trying to get Freddie false teeth and a guy I know suggested I write to Music Maker and ask if they could assist us with paying for false teeth for them. So I took Freddie over to the LSU dental school and Tim picked up the cost for that. I think it was around 800 bucks or something. But anyway, Freddie put the teeth in his mouth and he didn't like the way they looked. He said, I'll go without them.

CM: Well, you have 'em in now, don't you?

I've been doing exercises, squeezing balls, and I can work my fingers much, much better. I feel like I will be able to play at Jazz Fest.

LKK: No, nothing in. See. [opens mouth] What happened was I went back to the dentist and he said, you gotta eat soft food and keep 'em in your mouth. And every time I go to eat the soft food, the teeth would jump up. And I couldn't chew, couldn't close my mouth. So when I went back and told him what was happening, he said all you gotta do is put some polygrip in there. So he put three drops, one in the back jaw and one in the front and the other jaw. And when I got home, got ready to eat, then they jumps out again. I said, I'm going to fix it just right. And sure enough, I did fix it just right. I took the polygrip, I went all the way around top and bottom. And when I slapped 'em in there, they was tight, like super glue. I said, oh boy, I got 'em now. [laughs]

I ate five, six times with the teeth in and I didn't know the damage I had done until the next morning. The jaw bone was gyrating and hurting me so bad. So I reached up there to try to pull 'em out, and they was like cemented in there. For four days and four nights I had to suffer, and when the good Lord cut me loose, I snatched them out and threw them in the refrigerator [laughs]. They're still back there.

CM: What can people expect when they see you in the Blues Tent at Jazz Fest?

WW: I got two guitar players that are learning his songs. He's gonna sit in the chair with the mic and sing, and they're gonna play the music behind him with his regular band: Robbie Snow, Bobby Lewis and me. The Jazz Fest people really want



Freddie out there, and are going above and beyond to get him there. They're building ramps so I can roll him up in a wheelchair, and sending an electric car to the parking lot to get him.

CM: I believe you played every single Jazz Fest since it started, except 1980, right?

LFK: You definitely right. Because in 1980 I couldn't find anyone to take my place at work.

CM: Your fans are very excited to see you in the Blues Tent this year, where I plan to get there early to get a good seat. You also have a new album coming out, right?

LFK: Yes. Live at BJ's On Made Right Records. A double vinyl LP.

WW: It's a really great recording, and the last show he played before he had his accident.

CM: Well, it's not gonna be your last show ever. Even if you have to be sitting down, you got a lot more shows in you.

LFK: That's the truth.



Top: Little Freddie King. New Orleans, LA, 2013. Photo by Tim Duffy.
Bottom: Tim Duffy and Little Freddie King. New Orleans, LA, 2014. Photo by Tim Duffy.

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On behalf of Music Maker and our partner artists, thank you to all those who have donated during our last fiscal year ending in June 2026.

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