

# 'Clay Tablets' arises out of the quarantine

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The COVID-19 quarantine has turned musician and interdisciplinary artist Grant Peeples into an urban farmer. This month, he would have been playing shows in Sarasota, Lakeland and Tampa. Instead, he's tending to chickens in his backyard and an assortment of plants and greenery out front.

"I've always had something in the ground," says Peeples, who moved back to his hometown of Tallahassee after living off the coast of Nicaragua. "Now, I'll go outside and plow around my plants with my hands in the dirt. It's been a way to sustain myself through all of this."

Peeples likens his draw to music and the guitar as being more of a push from



**Grant Peeples created "Clay Tablets," a virtual broadcast that bridges culture and politics using poetry, music, visual art and interviews.** DONNA MAVITY

## If you go virtually

**What:** Clay Tablets

**When:** 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 19

**Cost:** Donation of \$1 or more to receive Zoom broadcast link

**Contact:** For more information, visit <https://www.grantpeeples.com/claytablets.html>. To send a letter to the Clay Tablets Mailbag, write to: Grant's Clay Tablet's Mailbag, 1617 Branch St., Tallahassee, FL 32303.

behind than a calling. His career weaves in and out of music scenes, starting in Nashville and making his way across the southeast. He's played shows across the country and briefly owned a night club. Even as music came and went, he

remained an artistically driven hunter-gatherer of history and society at his core.

When the pandemic forced venues to close and concerts to be cancelled, Peeples used this passion for the past to shape his new future. In a flash of light, "Clay Tablets" was created, a virtual broadcast that bridges culture and politics using poetry, music, visual art and interviews.

"I have always been very cognizant of and interested in voices from the past in order to help define what the situations were at that time," says Peeples. "You can read a history book about the Civil War or you can read 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' or 'Gone with the Wind' or diaries that were from people who lived through it.

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# Peeples

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You can read letters from soldiers and hear the songs the soldiers sang from that time.”

Each “Clay Tablets” show is designed as a collage using a number of artistic mediums. The broadcast’s name is derived from the Mesopotamian tablets that were unearthed as some of the world’s oldest writings and the first voices in human history.

While these artifacts give indications of what people believed, revered and feared in their time, Peeples hopes his show will serve a similar purpose as an archive for art created during the pandemic. He feels that is the main responsibility of artists now and considers the words one of his mentors, writer Jack Saunders, spoke when he said that his audience “hasn’t been born yet.”

“That’s the fire I’m trying to light,” says Peeples, who laughs as he adds that he has bitten off more than he can chew. “I think it’s a much bolder idea than I am capable of, but I’m trying it anyhow. I hope by the time I do 10 of these that they’re more accurate and consolidated, and I’m hoping other people will do the same thing.”

Peeples has always sought out the best tool for what he’s wanted to communicate, whether it was through writing, singing, speaking or building. His most known song is called “Sunshine State,” which has a satirical edge that informs much of Peeples’ style. He considers himself to be a thinking person’s songwriter, influenced by the work and words of poet Robinson Jeffers, writer Pema Chodron and icon Joseph Campbell.

Given the current circumstances, older songs aren’t really “sticking” for Peeples much right now as he delves deeper into metaphor and allegory. He wonders how his newer songs will resonate with listeners.

“Songs have nerves in them, so when you’re sitting there and singing it you feel it when the audience touches that nerve,” says Peeples. “You see it happening on faces, you hear it in laughter or when people lean back and clap in the middle of a song. There’s a chance that my new songs will not have that experience and I won’t have that experience with these new songs.”



**Grant Peeples’ new project, “Clay Tablets,” uses a number of artistic mediums.** SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

While he’s witnessed many musicians turn to virtual livestreams, he’s noticed how many platforms become metaphorical bars where people come and go, placing a few dollars in a virtual tip jar but never committing to stay and listen. Peeples much prefers creating a longer-format show, similar to a cinematic experience with a clear beginning, middle and end.

Peeples is grateful to Pete Winters for the use of his studio where technology enhances each segment, peppering them with photos, videos and live interviews. He reads questions submitted to his mailbag and tweets from “God.” Last month, he interviewed artist Matthew McCarron, and for his May show he’ll speak with local songwriter, Steve Holtz.

His May show will focus on a death penalty execution that is occurring the same day, and he’ll sing his song, “The Hanging” to frame his thoughts on the event. While his first two broadcasts drew in a multitude of his fans, he’s looking forward to connecting with nearly 200 people at his upcoming show. “Clay Tablets” has ignited his anthropological spirit, as Peeples continues to collect and assemble, his mind stays firmly planted in the present.

“It’s a new art form for me and it’s a medium that I’m excited about,” says Peeples, who reflects on his performing career. “The truth is, I’m not sure, no matter what happens, if I’ll ever return to that former life. Certainly, this year I’m not leaving my garden.”

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*