



Valentine for MUSIC LOVERS

Darius Baker follows passion with Tallahassee Nights Live



TOP: Tallahassee Nights Live is planning a Valentine's Themed "Lover's Lounge" production. ABOVE: Scott Carswell channels James Brown during a Tallahassee Night Live's performance at the Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce Annual Community Conference at Amelia Island several years ago. PROVIDED; CARLOS MORENO

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

"Music allows me to get away," says Darius "Doc D" Baker, program director at Hallelujah 95.3 FM and the creator behind Tallahassee Nights Live. "It takes you to another place. If you allow yourself to, you can get lost in any song. I'm going on a vacation every time I listen."

Baker launched Tallahassee Nights Live 18 years ago at the Ramada Inn. The monthly, live music showcase has since grown and relocated to The Moon. Baker co-produces the shows with a team to provide the community with exciting, new music from local talent, while also giving musicians practical industry knowledge and experience.

Baker is looking forward to the next showcase, "The Lover's Lounge," on Feb. 12. Themed for Valentine's Day, the music will take listeners on a journey through trials, tribulations, and triumphs

If you go

What: The Lover's Lounge – Tallahassee Nights Live Valentine Edition

When: 6-9:30 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 12

Where: The Moon, 1105 E Lafayette St

Cost: General Admission \$25 until Feb. 1 then \$30, VIP tickets available

Contact: For more information, call 850-321-5765 or visit tallahasseenightslive.com.

of a relationship. Like other showcases, a variety of singers will perform throughout the night alongside a 13-piece band.

'A beautiful story'

"It's going to be a beautiful story told with live music and video the way that Tallahassee Nights Live does it," says Baker. "It doesn't matter if you just started a relationship or are celebrating your 50th anniversary, it's going to be beautiful for either."

Baker's relationship with music started at an early age. His moniker, "Doc D" was formulated in middle school, and stuck with him throughout rap battles and his early hip-hop career. While he was passionate about performing and traveling the country, Baker found himself drawn to the inner workings of the music-industry machine.

Baker studied sociology at Flori-

da A&M University. He began his own company in 1994 producing major and independent artists alike. He looked up to giants in the field, such as Teddy Riley, Timbaland, Quincy Jones and Berry Gordy. As he cultivated his own distinct sound as a producer, Baker learned to sharpen his ear to help bolster new artists' careers.

"You have to have an ear for the artist because every artist is different," says Baker. "They may sing in the same genre, the same style, the same tone of music, but some sounds just will not fit every artist. Knowing that comes with your expertise and your gift as an individual producer."

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Tallahassee Nights Live led a Soul Train-style dance-off for kids at a previous Dare to Dream Festival in Cascades Park. HALI TAUXE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT FILES

Baker

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Producing and radio

As he learned more about the behind-the-scenes work that went into building artists and making stars, Baker programmed his first radio station, Heaven 98.3.



Baker

The station was nominated for two Stellar Awards — what Baker refers to as “the gospel Grammy’s.” His current station, Hallelujah 95.3 FM, plays more than the hits.

“I furnish 24 hours of entertainment, but I’m only on air for three hours of the day,” says Baker, who programs segments meant to be good for the soul.

“It’s not just gospel music. There’s segments on finance, mental health, physical health. That’s why the station is growing and people love listening because everyone can get something out of it and that’s what keeps me going.”

Baker approaches programming the station like a puzzle. He figures out when to play the top songs on the charts in order to give people a good mix of music without the sound becoming redundant or predictable.

Though some producers use a well-worn playbook, Baker prides himself on thinking outside of the box in terms of how he reaches listeners.

Sharing his insider knowledge

His experience extends beyond his job as a radio jockey. Working within the industry every day gives him insider knowledge that he shares with the artists who perform as part of Tallahassee Nights Live. He cautions them against old school practices like dropping CDs full of new music off at the station. Instead, he uses his expertise to teach them about how to access the proper channels and get radio plays.

“It’s another opportunity for me to reach people and to inspire people,” says Baker. “It also gave me a background look into how radio really works. I give my artists and the people that come up through Tallahassee Nights Live an inside look at things, so they don’t have to go through mistakes others have made.”

Baker is proud to have created a springboard for musicians from Tallahassee Nights Live. Many alumni of the performance series have gone on to Grammy-winning careers. Baker says musicians have played with artists like Lionel Richie, Bette Midler and Ce-Lo Green. He’s excited for February’s show, which he says will be a full experience from beginning to end. Doors open at 6 p.m., with performance beginning at 8 p.m. followed by an after party with DJ King Green.

“It’s a great thing when you have so many creative minds that can have great ideas,” says Baker. “Tallahassee Nights Live is not just a show. It’s a movement it’s a lifestyle, it’s an experience. It’s not just a band, but a platform to catapult artists to higher levels.”

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).