

'A natural healing'

Singer Adrian Morris feeds on energy of Southside festival

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"My grandmother told me, 'Your gifts will open up doors for you,'" reflects vocalist and musician Adrian Morris. "I may have slept on a gift that had been there for a while."

Growing up, Morris was an avid football player, surrounded by music—whether it was hearing his mother sing or his siblings and cousins play various instruments. Although music was always in his home, Morris didn't pursue his own vocal talents until college when he won his school's talent show.

Morris sang Gerald Levert's "My Forever Love" and fondly remembers the crowd's enthusiastic response. Morris always looked up to Levert, who was part of the R&B group, The O'Jays, as well as musical group LeVert. Morris won a second talent show singing LeVert's "All Seasons," and realized what path he wanted to take in life.

"I'll be paying a tribute to Gerald Levert in the Soul of Southside festival," says Morris, who will perform both as a featured soloist and with Tallahassee Nights Live.

Festival celebrates diverse history

The Soul of Southside Arts and Humanities Festival is an intergenerational festival that celebrates the rich and diverse history that exists in Tallahassee's Southside.

This year's festival features neighborhood history tours, a "drive by" fish fry, and all-day music festival that culminates with a musical headliner act and light show honoring Southside neighborhood trailblazers and community icons.

Events will kick off on May 14 and continue through May 22 in and around Lake Anita.

Morris participated in last year's festival with Tallahassee Nights Live and enjoyed the energy the event brought to the community. While the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow him to perform as much as he would have liked, Morris is ready to take the stage at this year's event and share original and cover music.

"It's been a while since I've done a solo show here in town," says Morris. "I'm going to bring all the different talent and energies I've come across during my time at Tallahassee Nights Live."

Morris on 'A Change is Gonna Come'

After realizing that music was his true calling in the early 1990s, Morris transferred to Florida A&M University and delved deeper into songwriting and



If you go

What: Soul of Southside Arts and Humanities Festival

When: May 14-22

Where: Anita Favors Plaza at Lake Anita, 116 W Van Buren St

Cost: Free and open to the public

Contact: For more information, visit sosfesttlh.com

Adrian Morris will perform both as a featured soloist and with Tallahassee Nights Live at the Soul of Southside Festival May 14-22. PROVIDED

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May 9, 2022 6:14 am (GMT -4:00)

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Carla King Richardson waits for cheese to be added to her grits during the sunrise brunch offered during the final day of the Inaugural Soul of Southside Festival on May 22, 2021. ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Southside

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singing. He joined the Fat Cat Players, whose popular song “Sundress,” charted on the U.S. Billboards and sent him on a tour around the globe. Morris has shared stages with Destiny’s Child, The O’Jays, the Isley Brothers, and more.

During his tours in cities that span from Bosnia to Italy, Morris most enjoyed giving performances for U.S. troops as a part of USO tours. He and his fellow performers would board a Black Hawk helicopter and travel to remote locations to share their music with over 10,000 troops.

At the end of each show, Morris sung Sam Cooke’s “A Change Is Gonna Come.”

“I usually end the show with that song, and will probably do so at Soul of Southside,” says Morris. “It’s a special song to me because it helped me get through things. I had a soldier one time break down crying because it helped him get

over his daughter’s passing. It’s a powerful song that helps so many people.”

When it comes to his own songwriting process, Morris says inspiration may strike anywhere. A hook or concept will find its way into his ear, and he’ll either grab his phone or a piece of paper to record his ideas before they’re gone.

‘Collaborating with others’

Morris says many of his friends who are producers or musicians will also send jingles or tracks. With microphone in hand, he’ll record tracks on a computer program and sort through his ideas in the moment. One of his favorite tracks, titled “Wife,” was inspired by his own wife and featured the late saxophonist Marques Adams.

“A lot of times I’m collaborating with others so I’m feeding off of their energy, and what they bring to the table might make me write faster or better,” says Morris.

Morris says one of his long-time creative partners, has been musician, radio DJ, and Tallahassee Nights Live foun-

der, Darius “Doc D” Baker. The Fat Cat Players first connected Morris with Baker, and together they bring new music to the area each month. Morris says Baker has pushed him to be a better musician and is grateful for his constant support and friendship over the years.

That energy is what lives at the heart of the Soul of Southside Arts and Humanities Festival. Morris says that beyond bringing new music and art into the community, he’s excited to be a part of a festival that shines a light on the Southside.

“I’ve been in Tallahassee since 1992 and I’ve never been a part of anything like it,” says Morris. “I think it’s going to continue to bring about a certain healing. It’s something about music and art, it’s a natural healing, and it’s very important to bring everybody together.”

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).