

blackbox: Queen Esther

Jeff McLaughlin
Guitar

Saturday
May 11
8:00 p.m.
The Plaza

Curated by
The Reverend Shawn Amos

Jazz & Blues Sponsor:
Richard and Lisa Kendall

blackbox Sponsor:
Ann Petersen and Leslie Pam

This program will be 75 minutes
with no intermission



Photo Credit: Whitney Browne

blackbox: Queen Esther

About the Artists

Queen Esther

Described as “...the unknown queen of Americana...” (Feedback, Norway), “...a Black Lucinda Williams...” and a “...brutal, original, explosive singer...” (Vanity Fair, Spain), Queen Esther’s creative output musically is the culmination of several critical Southern elements, not the least of which are years of recording and touring internationally as frontwoman for several projects with her mentor, harmolodic guitar icon James “Blood” Ulmer, including a stint in his seminal band Odyssey. Raised in Atlanta, GA and embedded in Charleston, SC’s Lowcountry – a region with African traditions and Black folkways that span centuries and constantly inform her work – Queen Esther uses her Southern roots as a touchstone to explore cultural mores in America, deconstructing well-worn historical narratives while creating a reclamation-driven soundscape.

A member of SAG/AFTRA, Actors Equity, Dramatists Guild and the Recording Academy, her work as a vocalist, lyricist, songwriter, actor, solo performer, playwright and librettist has led to creative collaborations in neo-vaudeville, alt-theater, various alt-rock configurations, (neo) swing bands, trip-hop DJs, spoken word performances, jazz combos, jam bands, various blues configurations, original Off-Broadway plays and musicals, experimental music/art noise and performance art. Thanks to an admin publishing deal with Bug Music (now BMG Rights Management) instigated by the esteemed guitarist/songwriter Alejandro Escovedo, Queen Esther started her imprint EL Recordings and has released five critically acclaimed albums, including the internationally lauded Black Americana project *Gild The Black Lily* (2021).

Queen Esther’s most recent work includes headlining Lincoln Center’s 2022 Summer for the City with her western swing collective The Black Rose of Texas (featuring Queen Esther, Kat Edmonson and Synead Cidney Nichols on vocals, and the legendary Cindy Cashdollar on pedal steel guitar) that was augmented by a performance workshop at Jazz at Lincoln Center, and later that year, a sold out weekend of shows at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola; and a grant from The 2022 New York City Women’s Fund for Media, Music and Theater for *Blackbirding*, an alt-country album – written during an All Media Artist Residency at Gettysburg National Military Park.

Currently, Queen Esther is a playwright-in-residence in the 2022 - 2024 WP Theater Pipeline

PlayLAB, with a full length play scheduled for an Off Broadway staged reading in April 2024. She is a member of Joe’s Pub Working Group, Western Arts Alliance’s Performing Artist Discovery program and Keychange US Talent Development Program. Queen Esther’s pandemic album *Rona* (released June 2, 2023) is climbing the folk charts while garnering airplay and reviews worldwide as her 2018 TED Talk about the true origins of country and bluegrass steadily reverberates throughout the Americana community.

Coming in 2024: *Things Are Looking Up*, a jazz album of original songs and Lady Day’s lost classics, and the alt-Americana album *Blackbirding*.

Jeff McLaughlin (guitarist) creates musical soundscapes filled with passion, depth, and a progressive spirit. His playing and composition are both steeped in tradition and focused on new directions in creative music. He has appeared around the world including the Montreux Jazz Festival, the Banff Jazz Workshop, the Ravinia Festival in Chicago, the Brooklyn Americana Festival, the NAMM Bass Bash, the Indianapolis Jazz Festival, the Jacksonville Jazz Festival, and the Philadelphia Folk Festival. He has performed as a sideman and with his own projects in famed venues such as NYC’s Apollo Theater, Jazz at Lincoln Center, 55 Bar, Blue Note, Minton’s Playhouse, Bar Next Door, City Winery, and LA’s Blue Whale.

Up Next: blackbox

The Reverend Shawn Amos

DATE:

Saturday, June 8, 2024 | 8:00 pm

LOCATION:

The Plaza

American songwriter, blues singer, author, and record producer The Reverend Shawn Amos returns to perform this season with his one-of-a-kind harmonica driven, blues roots revival. The Rev’s performances are always energetic, and no two shows are the same. Experience exactly why *Glide Magazine* refers to him as “...by turns furious, vulnerable, crazy, forlorn and tender; all buoyed by a family approach...infectious in a good way.”