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.

OUR PROGRAMS

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

Sustenance
To ensure 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.

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.


OUR TEAM
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Denise Duffy, Managing Director
Gabi Mendick, Advancement Coordinator
Brittany Anderson, MSW, Artist Services Coordinator
Ardie Dean, Artist Liaison and Producer
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big legal mess records

national endowment for the humanities

the philadelphia foundation

national endowment for the arts

orangecountyartscommission

bible & tire

support live music

Cathedral vodka

support live music

north carolina arts council

fifty years of leadership
Freeman Vines, the luthier and author behind Hanging Tree Guitars, has recently expanded his art to painting. Fountain, North Carolina. Photo by Tim Duffy.

Soul on Wax, Mississippi. Photo by Axel Küstner.

**WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED**

- **PROGRAMS**
  - $884,914
- **FUNDRAISING**
  - $86,557
- **MANAGEMENT**
  - $65,456
- **TOTAL EXPENSES**
  - $1,036,927

86%

*Audited financial statements available upon request*
WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED

1 MISSION
3 PROGRAMS
28 YEARS

32 COUNTRIES TOURED
52 EXHIBITIONS
510 PARTNER ARTISTS

2,817 SONGS RELEASED
8,193 PERFORMANCES
15,214 MUSICIAN GRANTS

left: Willa Mae Buckner, “the Snake Lady,” would have turned 100 this year. Willa Mae was an articulate, self-educated, and fiercely independent woman who blazed her own trail from the day she ran away from home at 12 years old. Pepe and Siam, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Photo by Mark Austin.
Dear Friends of Music Maker,

Amplifying the voices of unheralded roots musicians is what Music Maker is all about. After 28 years, our mission remains the same: to support and document our partner artists’ music to pass their wisdom and courage on to the next generation of Americans grappling with this confounding and often difficult world.

We will release eight new titles in 2022. You can keep up with all the music and support this effort by joining our Listener’s Circle. We are publishing “Deep in the South: A Music Maker Songbook” with tablature and transcriptions to give young musicians greater access to the inner workings of their musical heritage while our museum exhibits continue to tour the country. Live performances are beginning to come back, but the public health environment continues to be challenging for travelers over the age of 65. To keep our artists in the cultural limelight, we are expanding our digital storytelling capacity and seeking more broadcast opportunities for their performances.

If you don’t receive our email newsletter or follow our social media platforms, you are missing out! Sign up to receive heartful, hopeful stories and songs in your inbox each week.

Our Sustenance Program is expanding to support more senior musicians in crisis than ever before. This life changing impact is made possible by your support; so please renew your giving today.

Our deepest thanks for all of your support and encouragement. We are honored to continue doing this important work.

With much gratitude,

Cofounders
“Our nation undeniably, unequivocally has the blues, it may be the case we can learn something from a blues people.

The best four questions a bluesman has ever had is; How does integrity face oppression? What does honesty do in the face of deception? What does decency do in the face of insult? What does courage do in the face of brute force? And that’s the blues!

B.B. King steps up with his guitar and says, ‘Nobody loves me but mamma and she might be jiving too!’ Playing with Lucille, you hear echoes of Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith and Robert Johnson and Lightnin’ Hopkins. B.B., how do you do it? Where did you get that smile? Where do you get that style? Don’t you realize you are in the face of catastrophe? We know you come out of gut bucket, Jim Crow, Mississippi but you still got that hope in you, but you do not talk about the hope, you enact the hope and it’s in your music. That is the blues! It is a narrative of a catastrophe lyrically expressed but does not let the catastrophe have the last word. That love train still flowing, the empathy train still flowing, the justice train still flowing, not because it has a high chance of winning. It is not all about being on the side of the winner. That is the sign of profound insecurity and an adolescent mind and very much like a childish and not a child-like disposition for the world. B.B. is an adult, he is grown up, he is not Peter Pan. Mature. He has been educated, not in college, but colleges have gone through him in terms on how he is holding onto integrity, honesty, decency and his is just one voice amongst others.”

—DR. CORNEL WEST
Freeman Vines: Hanging Tree Guitars
North Dakota Museum of Art (Grand Forks, North Dakota)
Sep 1–Nov 27, 2022
Maria V. Howard Art Center (Rocky Mount, North Carolina)
May 19–Aug 13, 2023
*The National Endowment for the Humanities and Music Maker Foundation together: Exploring the human endeavor. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.*

Blue Muse: Timothy Duffy’s Southern Photographs
Phillips Museum of Art (Lancaster, Pennsylvania)
Jan 17–Apr 28, 2023

A Celebration of Trees
a group show featuring Freeman Vines and Timothy Duffy
Southampton Arts Center (Southampton, New York)
Oct 1–Dec 18, 2022
We founded Music Maker to enable the unheard musical voices of America to find an audience, and to help fill practical gaps in the health and wellbeing of these musicians so that they can focus on sharing their talents with the world. Over the past 28 years, we have achieved that for hundreds of musicians, and counting. We have established a framework for building cultural equity by removing the barriers between artists and audiences in their own communities and beyond.

At Music Maker, we talk a lot about cultural equity. But while equity in a house is easy enough to understand, cultural equity is a far more indelible asset. It’s acquired through the dignity of doing what you love, the joy of self-expression, and the respect that comes from the opportunity to share that joy with others.

Cultural equity doesn’t just benefit the musicians; it benefits everyone. And not just those alive today but also generations to come. Music Maker was founded to foster such equity because we recognized a unique opportunity to nurture the authentic voices of our history and culture, through those who express them through music. We believe these musicians to be national treasures who deserve to know their value.

Their voices are a part of the history, soul, and collective experience of America. And the time to preserve what they do, to record it and help them perform it, is now or never. Music Maker has established the industry relationships and logistical infrastructure to discover these artists, sup-
port them as they find their own career footing, and give them the opportunity to reach audiences worldwide.

Their needs are simple but critical. Nearly 90% of the musicians we support are people of color living on less than $18,000 per year, and 80% of them are over the age of 65. Most of them rely on live performances for about half of their income, but they lost that income source during the pandemic—an income source that has not yet recovered. Music Maker has been there to assist with their healthcare quality and life necessities, paying for medical bills and home repair so they can focus on the beauty they have to offer the world, instead of being consumed by a struggle for the essentials.

Music Maker supports artists like blues singer Robert Finley, the son of a sharecropper from rural North Louisiana whom we met when he was street busking in Arkansas. “Music Maker saw something in me that needed to be woken up, and they gave me an opportunity to display my talent,” says Finley, who has since been a semifinalist on America’s Got Talent, recorded two albums with Easy Eye Sounds—Music Maker Advisory board member, Dan Auerbach’s record label—and he just played a show in Paris, where his song, “Sharecropper’s Son,” won an award as the number one new blues song in France. “Sometimes you have a real good engine, but you just need a boost,” he says, “and Music Maker has a good jumper cable.”

Finley says through a combination of his own determination and the opportunities provided by Music Maker, he’s now “living his childhood dream,” and putting his story into music and sharing it with the world. “If you can touch thousands of people and get them to dance to the same music, then you’ve got the power to bring people together.”

And there’s Ester Mae Wilbourn, a 72-year-old gospel singer from Como, Mississippi who has lived out her own childhood dreams with the help of Music Maker, and traveled the world performing. “Sometimes you’re into something and don’t know how grand it can be for you,” says Wilbourn, who has sung in a church choir all her life and comes from a family of musicians.

“I always wanted music to be a greater part of my life, and Music Maker took it to another level,” she says. “They love the artists, and they’re there for whatever their needs are.” For Wilbourn, Music Maker has helped her have a livable home, a healthy smile, and a way to see the world doing what she loves. “Thank God for them giving me a chance to see more than Como, Mississippi, and visit places I’d only seen on TV.”

With Finley, Wilbourn, and all the artists we have connected with across America, we have found that the depth of talent is astounding. And that if you give these artists a stage, they will rise to the occasion. With your help, we can rise to ours.

“There are more artists out there just like me,” says Wilbourn. “Music is a medicine for people, and it carries a message about life, and working together in harmony.”

Ester Wilbourn’s home was in disrepair, but over the past four years Music Maker has helped Ester renovate and repair the house. We remodeled the kitchen, bathroom, installed new flooring, interior doors and more. It’s been a long road, but the house is now complete! Photo by Marshall Bartlett.
After a two year virtual hiatus, the **Freight Train Blues** concert series honoring Piedmont blues legend **Elizabeth Cotten** was back live in Carrboro, North Carolina in May and June. Thousands of audience members came out to see a breadth of Music Maker artists from gospel to old time to latin, blues, rock, and more.

**Alice Vines** put together a killer revue—one spring afternoon six sacred soul groups performed in her church in Farmville, North Carolina. There is no end to gospel performers in the southeast and we can’t wait to continue to discover and share this treasure trove of music.

“Stay Prayed Up!”, a film about our long time partner artist, **Lena Mae Perry and The Branchettes**, was released to the general public and received critical acclaim. At 82 years old, Perry is receiving well deserved opportunities and recognition - this year she performed at Lincoln Center and the Newport Folk Festival as well as Music Maker’s Freight Train Blues!
Last year on a trip to Birmingham we met soul singer Aretta Woodruff. She fit right in with Music Maker old-timers like Albert White and Ardie Dean, performing with the Music Maker Blues Revue at the Baton Rouge Blues Festival and joining us at Telluride Blues and Brews 2022.

The Telluride Blues and Brews Festival was back on in Colorado. With the striking mountain backdrop and oxygen tanks at the ready, the Music Maker Blues Revue (with Fred Thomas, Sugar Harp, Hermon Hitson, Robert Lee Coleman, Albert White, and Ardie Dean) performed ten times over the course of the weekend.

When Music Maker discovered that bluesman Clarence Davis’ secret weapon was in disrepair (a bass note pedal that grounds his soulful sound), a team effort that included a technician from Peavey getting on board and hours surfing the deep corners of the web for parts, brought the vintage piece of equipment, and Clarence’s sound, back to life.
Larry Bellorín fled Venezuela in 2016 leaving behind a successful musical career and all of his instruments. Music Maker recently granted Larry a classical guitar and an upright bass—he’s now the most in demand salsa bass player in North Carolina. We also granted Larry a bandsaw, so that he can teach middle and high school students how to make traditional Venezuelan harps.

When Birmingham musician and visual artist Elnora Spencer’s car broke down earlier this year, Music Maker gave Elnora a grant to buy a car. Now she can get to the grocery store, to her gigs, and transport her paintings to exhibits.

Anthony “Amp” Daniels, of the Dedicated Men of Zion, received a grant from Music Maker to repair his recording studio that suffered a fire. The studio will be a valuable resource and community space for Eastern North Carolina musicians who have limited opportunities to develop their musical careers.

Pastor Alice Vines gives so much to Music Maker and to her community. This year Music Maker was happy to grant Alice a new roof, a new stove, and a car in a time of need. Musicians cannot perform, work, or play when their daily needs are not met.

Birmingham bluesman Sugar Harp was planning on refurbishing his home with only his own two hands. Though very capable, Sugar quickly learned that that undertaking would be extremely timely. Music Maker was able to lend Sugar a hand, providing a grant for a new roof.
After his P.A. was stolen, Bishop Albert Harrison was in need of a sound system system for his church in Ahoskie, North Carolina. Music Maker granted Harrison a P.A. so that hundreds of congregants can enjoy his uplifting music to which we were treated at Freight Train Blues (and can be heard on Sacred Soul of North Carolina).

We are deeply saddened by the loss of the beloved blues trombonist Lil’ Joe Burton, bluesman Charles “Delta Blues Hog” Hayes, gospel singer Marie Manning, and drummer Willie James Williams.
The essence of blues and roots music is hard to put down on paper. To capture the spirit of traditional music, one must immerse themselves in it completely. The Music Maker Foundation faces the challenge head-on, working tirelessly to cultivate synergistic partnerships with artists who create traditional American music. By fostering trust, we work with partner artists to amplify their voices and create broader access to our nation's hidden musical treasures.

The reasoning behind our work is simple: If we don't document this music, no one will.

We are incentivized by the urgency of an aging population of storytellers whose songs have sustained through the most oppressive circumstances, entrusted into the careful hands of each proceeding generation. To dismiss the strength of such storytelling in our present digital age is a grave mistake, with devastating implications.

Music Maker seeks senior artists who exhibit excellence in their craft by carrying forward an authentic tradition. They learn the music within their communities, often with songs and instruments passed down from family members.

Given the steep lineage of oppression in the Southeast, many artists come from broadly underserved populations. Difficult socio-economic circumstances present daily challenges.

Music Maker aims to remove these barriers, offering financial and personal assistance so that they may prioritize their noble roles as purveyors of an endangered art and language.

But still, these artists are operating far outside of the music business. The songs they sing—though rich with human emotion and historical context—do not serve a commercial purpose in the industry, so there is little financial incentive to make these records. The music business operates to sell units, not save our culture. That's where Music Maker steps in.

Saving our culture means bringing forth tradition for emerging generations. And this is not possible without proper documentation.

Music Maker believes that the customs and lore held within blues and roots traditions are foundational to American music; and the dark histories carried between each chord must be revealed in order to paint a true portrait of American culture.

The organization is bolstered upon three pillars: sustenance, performance, and education. Meeting the artists' day-to-day needs is part of a broader philanthropic effort to document the music and connect with the people who have brought the tradition this far. Working hand-in-hand with artists to produce authentic products—books, CDs, museum exhibitions—ensures their stories will be told, through their voices and perspectives.

Tracking the soulful sounds in state-of-the-art studios and distributing records through our extensive network of industry partners are critical to proper cultural preservation. But the processes bring immense joy to the artists who work tirelessly under the weight of a heavy mantle.

Having their portraits taken and seeing them displayed on prominent gallery walls and watching a recording project come to fruition to reach new audiences are pivotal moments for the Music Makers. And to see them emanate with pride is an invaluable component of the work we do.

The spirit of the blues is resistant to capture, often dodging textbooks and popular memory. Music Maker makes a mission of chasing down these ghosts. Documenting blues and roots music tradition is not just about archiving a catalog of historic footage. By chronicling the complicated history of this music and the folks who make it, we aim to keep the spirit of the blues alive and well for generations to come.

**DOCUMENTATION**

“Blues will never die because it is a spirit. It explains your mishappenings, it explains your misfortunes, it explains your ups and downs, where you have been around. That’s the blues.”

—GUITAR GABRIEL
“Deep in the South: A Music Maker Songbook” will take you on a musical road trip through the South, with tablature and song notes to guide guitarists, as well as stories about the artists whose songs are contained, and photographs that set the scene. This compilation collects 27 songs from our partner artists including Etta Baker, Taj Mahal, Guitar Gabriel, John Dee Holeman, and many more presenters of precious pieces of our nation’s musical culture.

Transcription & Song Notes by Earle Pughe
Artist Stories by Chuck Reece & Timothy Duffy
Photography by Timothy Duffy  |  Edited by Chuck Reece
Spiral bound paperback, 9x12”, 89 pages and accompanying compilation CD
Book: $20  |  book and compilation CD: $25
Order at www.musicmaker.org
"I have played so much guitar it could make your ass hurt. I'm good but I don't brag about it. I know I am good. When you know something you do not have to ask nobody. As long as I feel it in my heart that I am good, I am good."

—GUITAR GABRIEL
Hermon Hitson: “Let the Gods Sing”  
(Big Legal Mess Records)

Long known by some rock ‘n’ roll fans for his close relationship with Jimi Hendrix — so much that some of his own lost recordings were released posthumously under Hendrix’s name — Hermon Hitson’s time has finally arrived at age 79. The fiery soul singer and guitarist’s full studio album, “Let the Gods Sing,” traces his winding and underrated musical lineage back to his 1963 arrival on Atlanta’s bustling Ashburn Avenue scene. A veteran of the bands of Joe Tex, James Brown, Wilson Pickett, Jackie Wilson, The Drifters, The Shirelles, and Lee Moses, Hitson blurs the distinguishing lines between funk, soul, blues, and psychedelic rock. His perspective as a witness of and key player in the shaping of a pivotal era in popular music seeps through these songs.

The ‘wah-wah’ guitar sounds of the psychedelic title track — originally released in 1980 on a Hendrix bootleg album called Free Spirit evidence a broader movement of Black psychedelic guitar musicians in the 60s. Hitson’s entangled career and undeniable influence suggest that Hendrix was not quite the anomaly the modern rock world believes him to be.

But the distinct attributes of Hitson’s artistry resounds in the funky, frenetic “Ain’t No Other Way,” which he released as a single in 1969 and again on his own label in 1972. He also covers “Bad Girl,” written by his longtime bandmate Lee Moses, and a 1972 single for Hitson.

Nearly six decades in, he is still evolving. “Let the Gods Sing” serves as both an introduction to a living legend, and Hitson’s way of saying: “I’m still here, man.”

Albert Smith: “Big Belly Mama”

When you talked with Albert Smith, you’d find him a gentle, soft-spoken man. But when he sat down at the piano to play and sing, he transformed. Smith—who never ventured beyond his home county—played in a rollicking, barrelhouse style. When he sang the gospel or blues, it brought out of him shouts that sounded as if they came straight from the bottom of his soul. Recorded in his rural South Carolina home by Tim Duffy in the 1990s, the album reveals a glimpse of a forgotten America by an artist born in 1912. Living Blues called the album “plain out beautiful...will grab you by the heart.”
Beverly Guitar Watkins: “In Paris”
Not given the spotlight as a headliner in her own right until after turning 60, Beverly ‘Gui-tar’ Watkins nonetheless gave a performance on “In Paris” that nods to her early career days, playing alongside James Brown, B.B. King, and Ray Charles. The New York Times noted the late Watkins captivated crowds by “playing her electric guitar on her back and behind her head, sliding across the stage. When she sang, it was often with a growl.” DownBeat said, “Displaying a confident stage presence formed by performing countless nights in clubs, the 70-year-old has French concert-goers in 2012 eating out of her hand for the duration of ‘In Paris!’”

Dedicated Men of Zion:
“The Devil Don’t Like It”
(Bible & Tire Recording Co.)
Bound together by blood or marriage, the Dedicated Men of Zion tend to keep their circles as tight as their renowned harmonies. But the latest release from this Eastern North Carolina-based gospel quartet is a bold step forward in their mission to cast a wider net with their sacred musical messages. Blending traditional sacred soul sounds instilled a newfound groove to expand their musical imprint, but the secular influence did not disrupt DMZ’s steadfast commitment to working for the Lord. UNCUT called it “glorious,” while American Songwriter said, “Dedicated Men of Zion have a vocal mixture like your favorite honey cake. It’s sumptuous, sweet, and sticky as ever.”

Johnny Ray Daniels:
“What Ever You Need”
(Bible & Tire Recording Co.)
With roots reaching back to the rock n’ roll band The Soul Twisters and years of playing for his wife’s sacred soul group The Glorifying Vines Sisters, Johnny Ray Daniels was more than ready to release his first solo album. Daniels, now 76, credits his faith to a pivotal moment when prayer overpowered a negative diagnosis following a car crash. “Whatever You Need” serves as his re-commitment to the Lord. “Impassioned,” said Paste Magazine, continuing, “Working with Memphis mainstays Will Sexton and Bruce Watson, Daniels has cut a soul-stirring collection of vintage-sounding paeans to the Lord meant to shake the rafters and spark a fire within.”
Sugar Harp: “Sugar Is My Name”
Flames engulfed Alabama bluesman Charles “Sugar Harp” Burroughs’ van, packed with his belongings and instruments. Acting on instinct, he jumped out of the moving vehicle, rolling to extinguish the fire that had caught onto his jacket. It was November, 2019. So when the pandemic hit soon thereafter, Sugar worried he might be done playing the harmonica for good. The aptly titled introductory album “Sugar Is My Name” is a story of perseverance interpreted through inherited “down in the gutter, back alley, storytelling blues.” American Blues Scene called him a “harmonica master,” going on to say, “His original lyrics are a little raunchy, full of innuendo but always clever.”

Shelton Powe: Self Titled
Born into a musical family in Charlotte, North Carolina, Shelton Powe did not pick up the proverbial torch of Piedmont finger-style guitar until his parents passed away in the late 1980s. When he set out to learn old-time blues and gospel in their honor, their stylistic playing flooded back from his childhood memory. Though refined through the Atlanta blues scene, Powe’s playing on the album is still a relic from a regional Carolina blues yesteryear.

Gail Ceasar: “Guitar Woman Blues”
Virtuoso guitarist and niece of Pittsylvania County blues player Pete Witcher, Gail Ceasar's roots run deep through rural Virginia. The 38-year-old musician carries forth the oral tradition of her enslaved ancestors through a unique blend of music style and haunting storytelling. Flowing seamlessly between bluegrass and blues with incredible precision, Ceasar walks the line between dynamic new-age female guitarist and conscious purveyor of familial history and rich regional tradition.
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, we give all people access to our nation’s hidden musical treasures.

Please contribute or shop our store today:
visit www.musicmaker.org

Join the Listener’s 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 2022 selection:
Shelton Powe

December 2022 selection:
Gail Ceasar, Guitar Woman Blues
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.

**IRA ROLLOVER**
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.

David Johnson, Elba, Alabama. Photo by Axel Küstner.
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Jacob Boehm
Bill Boome
Will Boone
Blair and Richard
Bradford
Jeffery Brand
Louis Brand
Devra Breslow
Robert Bresnan
Mark Brewer
Bill Britton
Cullen Brown
David Brown
Luther and Bonnie
Brown
Frank Brown
Trudy Buckingham
Joel Bulkey
Sanford Burns
Sharon Bushnell
Scott Cannon
John and Nancy
Capitanio
Stephanie and Craig
Carey
Joshua Charson
Dale Chesnut
James Chodosh and
Jaya Rajaiya
Kevin Christman
Jeff Christian
John Ciongoli
Charles Clabots
George Clay
Doug and Linda
Cline
Ace Collins
Joceline Colvert
Jane Combrinck-
Graham
Jamie Conway
Beth Cooper
Teresa and Gary
Coppock
Household
Geni Cowan
Sue Cox
Adrienne and John
Cox
Thomas Coyle
Laurie and Crawford
Crawford
Crane Household
James and Audrey
Crawford
Jennifer Creal
Kelly Curtin
Michael and Anne
Curtin
D.Jane Dallas
Dana Davies
Stephen Davis
Tim Dawson-
Townsend
Jeff Dayton-Johnson
Michael Deane
Rachel Decker
Joe DeMattei
Rob Di Maio