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## Singer Gregory Porter brings holiday music to Huntington

By DEREK HALSEY

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Courtesy of gregoryporter.com Tuesday, Dec. 4, Gregory Porter will be bringing his jazz group and orchestra to the Keith Alb Theatre for the Performing Arts

Jazz, one of the great musical genres to be created in the U.S., has seen its ups and downs as far as popularity goes in this digital age. Over the last three years, there have been many articles written about the demise of jazz music with headlines that read, "Jazz Has Become The Least Popular Genre In The U.S." and "When Jazz Stopped Being Cool." In the overall scheme of the music business, jazz music has a market share of under three percent.

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Yet, there is hope to be found in some current artists who are making their mark. Jazz music is slowly being revived in the form of singer and songwriter Gregory Porter and musicians like Kamasi Washington, whom Rolling Stone Magazine dubbed 'The New Jazz Torchbearer.' Washington's tune "Truth" and its accompanying video found on Youtube is a stunning example of sonic brilliance that is moving jazz forward.



As for Porter, his wonderful, emotive singing is just what jazz has needed for a long time. His love for jazz music is infectious, and his belief in the genre is true. As a result, he has created a fan base stretching around the world.

On Tuesday, Dec. 4, Gregory Porter will be bringing his jazz group and orchestra to the Keith-Albee Theater for the Performing Arts. A part of the wonderful Marshall Artists Series, Porter's concert will begin at 7:30 p.m. and tickets range from \$30 to \$65. More information can be found at [www.marshall.edu/muartistseries](http://www.marshall.edu/muartistseries) and [www.keithalbee.com](http://www.keithalbee.com).

Gregory Porter's latest studio album is called Nat King Cole and Me. He has won two Grammy Awards for Best Jazz Vocal Album of the Year and has garnered five other Grammy Award nominations. Porter's video "Liquid Spirit - Claptone Remix" has achieved an amazing 24 million views on Youtube. On Friday, Dec. 21, Porter releases his new video project One Night Only - Live at Royal Albert Music Hall on CD, digital and on DVD.

Porter grew up in California with a mother who was a minister who instilled in him a love of gospel, soul and jazz music. As a young man, Porter played college football at San Diego State University until an injury ended his career. He then relocated to New York City where he was a cook. Yet, music never left him and he cultivated his singing voice in the clubs in Brooklyn where he gained the attention of pianist and saxophonist Kamau Kenyatta and jazz legend Hubert Laws.

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As The Herald-Dispatch interviews Porter, he is on the 200 mile-per-hour EuroStar train going from London to Paris. While traveling at high speeds through the English and French countryside, and under the English Channel, the phone signal is intermittent. Yet with a combination of Porter's giving personality and patient perseverance, we get to talk about why his version of jazz music resonates in this chaotic world.

"I think I have a contribution to the music that is based on emotion and telling the modern story," said Porter. "I am thankful for the road that has been paved already in jazz music. I am clinging to that and clinging to something new as well, trying to bring those two things together. You can't abandon or dismiss the roots of jazz and blues music, so that is what I think about."

While there was a lot of gospel music played in the household when Porter was young, his mother also played other music that was positive and soulful.

"I didn't know I was listening to jazz when I was listening to some jazz pieces I heard on a radio station when I was a little boy in Los Angeles," said Porter. "They used to play music by Horace Silver as well as by Stevie Wonder and Nat King Cole. It was a while before I realized I was listening to jazz, like Dave Brubeck's album Take Five, which was a record that my mother had in her collection. We also listened to Sarah Vaughan. I picked up on it organically. I was struck by the emotion in jazz by artists such as Louie Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Nat King Cole. A lot of their music was similar to church music. I didn't make a distinction between all of it."

On Tuesday evening at the Keith Albee Theatre, Porter will be bringing to life the music of Nat King Cole as well as Christmastime fare. When doing his album of songs by Cole, Porter gained more insight into the legendary singer's personality and life experiences.

"It has been a long journey so far as I learn about Nat's life and his struggles and triumphs," said Porter. "I have learned quite a bit about him, about his level of excellence and his level of productivity and how terrific he was as a performer. That he did it at all while going through the stress and strain of the time in the 1950s and 1960s shows he was an extraordinary artist. He was the first Black musician to have his own television show and he did a lot of firsts. Aside from that, he was just an excellent singer."

The main thing Porter has learned from his ever-growing career and global travels is how music translates into a universal language. And with Porter, that truth thankfully comes in the form of jazz.

"I am still fascinated that all over the world, the same story and the same melody and the same thing that moves a person in North Dakota, Chicago, California or Detroit moves people in Istanbul and Japan," said Porter. "We are more the same than we are different, and I like that. Wherever I go, it is an amazing thing and the love that I feel; I try to reflect that back into the music."

## Welcome to the discussion.

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