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The Newsletter of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities | Winter 2008

Research Within Reach

What *With Good Reason* Brings to the Airwaves

BY LYDIA WILSON

You're dialing around your radio, maybe at home cooking dinner or in the car taking the kids to violin practice on Saturday. A lively Irish jig slowly fades under a rich, thoughtful voice assuring you that James Joyce's famously daunting novel *Ulysses* deserves to be dusted off from your bookshelf. Another voice chimes in: "Joyce's writing is not what you'd call 'page-turners.'"

It is Radford University English professor **Jolanta Wawrzycka**. "Joyce's task when he was composing Ulysses was to render the working mind, the thinking mind, and how senses and sight and smell... participate in prompting thoughts and steering memories.... You are in someone's mind and you are looking out through them, rather than a narrator telling you: 'And next he went here... and then he felt this...'"

Demystifying an intimidating topic is par for the course on *With Good Reason*, the weekly 30-minute public radio program broadcast statewide in Virginia. Host Sarah McConnell invites faculty from Virginia's public colleges and universities into the studio to explore topics touching every corner of academic research in the Commonwealth. Listeners are as likely to hear University of Mary Washington psychologist **Christopher Kilmartin** argue that some males are stuck with an outdated sense of "toxic masculinity" as they are to laugh as J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College lecturer and wildlife photojournalist **Lynda Richardson** recounts her naked plunge into the ocean to escape fire ants, only to be forced to flee by tiger sharks.

No other public radio program calls on public college and university faculty to share their professional passions, which cover the map. "It's been for me, and I suspect many listeners, a kind of graduate education," says host Sarah McConnell. "During an interview with **Henry Wiencek** about his research on George Washington, it finally dawned on me just how the complexities of slavery are still powerfully influencing racial mistrust today."

With Good Reason Associate Producer Jesse Dukes works closely with McConnell to schedule guests and conduct research. In between phone calls to nail down times for an upcoming interview, Dukes reflects that he is still struck by the show's unique focus on Virginia's public scholars. "We seek out guests who are not the 'usual suspects' that other media outlets rely on. *With Good Reason* finds great people who should be on the radio, but maybe have not had the chance. And because of that, we bring unique perspectives to the airwaves."

ABOVE: **With Good Reason Guests** (from left) **Craig Barton, Farzaneh Milani, Aniko Bodroghkozy, and Anne Coughlin**

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vfh WINTER 2008

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Research Within Reach

Continued from cover

Those perspectives are sometimes uncomfortable, questioning the assumptions of our identity as Americans. University of Virginia Law Professor **Risa Goluboff** argues that the Civil Rights movement in the United States was only a partial success. She says that the 1954 Supreme Court mandate for school integration was certainly a landmark decision, but that the public outcry that led to *Brown v. Board* stopped short of demanding full economic equality as well. The interview ends with Goluboff's assertion that Supreme Court rulings in 2007 blinded local governments to consideration of race in public policy, leaving America today at its narrowest point since *Brown* in what we think the Constitution requires for racial equality.

Working on that segment ("The Lost Promise of Civil Rights"), Associate Producer Elliot Majerczyk spent hours researching the legacy of *Brown*. "The interview opened my eyes to the issue of our complacency towards an unrealized ideal of full racial equality in America. The discussion of the correlation between race and poverty is still somewhat of a taboo topic: we often don't hear these hard questions being asked even in public media."

"It was a real effort"

Taking a break from managing his new community newspaper *The Crozet Gazette,* **Mike Marshall** can't quite believe that *With Good Reason* marks its 15th anniversary this year. "We didn't know if it would last 15 minutes, much less 15 years," he laughs fondly. Marshall's entrepreneurial spirit sparked the concept for *With Good Reason* in the early 1990s. At the time, he had been editing a newspaper for UVa long enough to be used to stereotypes about university professors, perceptions that the academy was too far removed from the taxpayers who fund it. "To do research," Marshall observes, "you have to have conditions that look like leisure: time to read, to write, and to have conversations. We have to be patient and let scholars work at it for a while. But the public is not always convinced that is 'working.'"

Marshall believed that opening that process to the public was both necessary and possible. Harvard University's staff newspaper offered a potential model for effective outreach, running transcripts of interviews with faculty discussing new research. But Marshall thought that radio was a better venue for those explorations than print. "What you really need to be able to do is hear these conversations," he remembers realizing. "It humanizes the faculty when you listen to someone on the radio and you hear their voice, and it turns out what they've spent their life research is interesting."

Since a media product created by all of Virginia's public colleges and universities was completely unprecedented, the challenge was immense. **Mike McDowell** of the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia spent enormous energy pitching the idea to all of the institutions. But, no one knew how to produce radio: who would conduct interviews and who would edit the conversations for broadcast? Listening in on an early brainstorming session was **Brenda Barnes** (then Brenda Pennell), then station manager of Harrisonburg's WMRA Public Radio. "As everyone was breaking up to leave," Marshall recalls, "Brenda approached me and said, 'I think you can do it.'"

With one radio station willing to broadcast the show, *With Good Reason* was born. WMRA issued a challenge from the beginning, insisting that the host be a journalist that could meet the standards of National Public Radio programming. Area journalist **Laura Womack** served as the first host, driving from WMRA's donated studio space in Harrisonburg all across Virginia to interview college professors. Transitioning from bi-weekly test broadcasts to regular weekly production in the fall of 1993, *With Good Reason* eventually secured time slots on other Virginia stations. "Really, it was one of those things that made so much sense that all the stations were willing to carry it," Barnes says matter-of-factly. "Because we said 'let's make this a good radio show,' we were able to succeed on all levels."

Production had moved to

VFH Radio staff (from left) **Lydia Wilson, Andrew Wyndham, Nancy King, and Sarah McConnell**

Richmond NPR affiliate WCVE by the time **Carolyn Elliot** became host in 1995. Elliot found her six years at the show challenging, a lot of long hours and full of generosity from station staff (nearly every public radio station in Virginia, at some point, donated studio time to make *With Good Reason* possible). "We were really committed to making this work because we thought it was exciting and new," she remembered. "You would get a topic that was something obscure like birdcalls. But then the professor would turn out to be fascinating!" The nomadic program was adopted enthusiastically by VFH at the urging President Robert Vaughan in 1999, just as Elliot was ready to stay home to raise her son.

The alumni of *WGR* have spread out, moved on, but not forgotten the show. Today, Barnes manages a public radio station thousands of miles from Virginia: Los Angeles classical music station, KUSC. She's seen a lot of projects start and succeed, and she's seen some fail. "Part of the longevity of *With Good Reason*," she believes, "was the decision to move the production to the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. That really stabilized the program because it is in a place where it belongs, where it can grow and thrive. *With Good Reason* is an institution now. None of us could have foreseen that."

A Day in the Life of VFH Radio

It can be pristinely quiet at the cluster of *With Good Reason* offices in the basement of the VFH. The recording light flashes outside the studio, signaling technicians to stay buried under headphones as they both separately edit recent interviews. The studio door finally pops open and the host walks her interviewee out to the VFH entrance, as someone ducks in to set up for a Charlottesville resident coming into record an essay for Roanoke's NPR affiliate WVTF. Majerczyk shouts across the hall to feature producer Nancy King–or anyone listening–in search of a song to pair with an interview about relieving road congestion. After much searching and sampling, McConnell laughs with delight as the team settles on James Taylor's "Traffic Jam" (then wanders around humming it for the rest of the day).

Now heard by 3.3 million listeners statewide annually, the strength of *With Good Reason* today rests on McConnell's creative and nurturing leadership. VFH Media Program Director Andrew Wyndham knew from the start that he wanted McConnell to host the show. After 20 years as News Director at Charlottesville's WINA, she had endeared herself to listeners throughout Virginia through her work with the Virginia News Network. In 1999, she was persuaded to host *With Good Reason*. "With Sarah," says Andrew, "we went from strength to strength: creating sound-rich programs, adding ancillary news features, developing award-winning shows, and gaining attention and airtime from stations in Ohio and New York State."

Wyndham and his staff find themselves doing more recruiting these days. Two new producers joined the VFH Radio team this February, **Tony Field** and **Rachel Quimby** *(see New Staff, p. 11)*. The pair are already working with industry consultant **Tom Voegeli**, creator of American Public Media's *The Splendid Table,* to shape the hour-long program built around the gregarious and sometimes unpredictable personalities of three

Elliot Majerczyk (left) **and Jesse Dukes editing a new show.**

Virginia historians: **Ed Ayers** (now President of the University of Richmond) and University of Virginia faculty **Brian Balogh** and **Peter Onuf**. Like the Humanities Feature Bureau, the carefully developed new program is Wyndham's brainchild, and he believes it furthers the VFH's mission to creatively present the humanities' historical perspective to the public. "VFH Radio is gaining critical mass, and is now poised to move forward as a major provider of excellent radio content, both within Virginia and beyond."

What lies ahead in the next 15 years of VFH Radio? Stay tuned.

Lydia Wilson coordinates publicity for With Good Reason *and is Assignment Editor for VFH Radio's Humanities Feature Bureau. You can contact her with listener comments at* ***lydiawilson@virginia.edu.***

with good reason

As Mike Marshall was setting up the offices for his new community newspaper called "The Crozet Gazette," he found a box of archive material and brought it over to us at *With Good Reason*. Inside were fifteen years of letters from listeners and guests. Here is what they had to say:

"The guests which you have chosen for these programs are uniformly well informed and well spoken, the topics are timely. I would appreciate your passing along to Laura Womack my compliments regarding the hosting of these sessions. Her questions are insightful and a major contribution to each program." *—Charles in 1993*

"I have been interviewed many times, but rarely in such a thoughtful and smart manner. Your questions were tough and impressive. Thank you for an entertaining and very professionally run session." *—Diane from VCU, writing to Carolyn Elliott on 1996*

"I can't afford to sleep late on Saturday lest I miss your good programs." *—Mary in 1997*

"Thank you very much for your program about the Racial Integrity Act of 1924. I am glad that you can provide so much to this community that would otherwise go unsaid." *—Mary Katherine in 1998*

"I started listening to show by chance. Once listening, I'm stuck. Your selection of guests is incredibly knowledgeable with interviewers knowing how to probe for great insight. Only a handful of programs in all media do I truly incorporate what I learn into daily living. With Good Reason is definitely one of them. For example, in your program 'The Art of Negotiation,' I found myself practicing principles I learned from your guests the very next day. Your shows provide valuable content that have positively altered my way of thinking. And for that I thank you. And I look forward to listening to your program this and every Sunday night." *—Franklin in 2005*

"The segment 'Why We Do Good' was one of the most interesting and moving programs I have heard recently on public radio." *—Judy in 2006*

VABook! 2008
Profile Keeps Rising

The Virginia Festival of the Book will soon hold its 14th annual celebration of books in literacy with a dynamic lineup of participants, convening in Charlottesville for discussions with writers and readers in a host of free and open-to-the-public events. The luminaries attending may have already caught your eye—novelists **Colm Toibin** and **Nathan Englander,** poets **Natasha Trethewey** and **Claudia Emerson**, *M*A*S*H*-star **Mike Farrell** and *Three Cups of Tea* author **Greg Mortenson**—but more authors and panels have been added. Plan now to join us in Charlottesville. Go online to **vabook.org** for more information on these events, and hundreds of others!

Special Ticketed Events

Tickets for some Festival events must be purchased. The events below are available online (see specific event for web address).

Saturday, March 29

6 - 7:30 PM

Authors' Reception

Annual wine and hors d'oeuvres reception, hosted by Woody Holton *(Unruly Americans)*, his mother, former Virginia first lady Jinks Holton, and his father, former Virginia governor Linwood Holton *(Opportunity Time)*.

UVA CARR'S HILL
TICKETS $25
PURCHASE ONLINE: VABOOK.ORG

8 PM

Just Call Me Mike: An Evening with Mike Farrell

*M*A*S*H*-star Mike Farrell discusses his memoir, *Call Me Mike: A Journey to Actor and Activist.* Special thanks to Amnesty International Charlottesville Chapter, Quest Bookshop, Covington International Travel, and The Paramount Theater.

PARAMOUNT THEATER
TICKETS $10, OPEN SEATING.
PHONE: 434.979.1333
PURCHASE ONLINE: WWW.THEPARAMOUNT.NET

Sunday, March 30

4 PM

Walter Mosley: A Literary Life
A Benefit for the VFH Center for the Book

Join bestselling novelist Walter Mosley *(Blonde Faith)* for a gala finale to the Festival. Sponsored by Merrill Lynch.

PARAMOUNT THEATER
TICKETS $65, $52, AND $38
SPECIAL PATRON LEVEL INCLUDES PRE-RECEPTION WITH AUTHOR AND BOOK: $125
PHONE: 434.979.1333
PURCHASE ONLINE: WWW.THEPARAMOUNT.NET

Tuesday, March 25

7:00 PM

The Place to Be: An Evening with Roger Mudd

Roger Mudd, CBS anchorman and host of NBC's Meet the Press, will give the first public reading and discussion of his new memoir, *The Place to Be*.

SENIOR CENTER

Wednesday, March 26

Noon

Opening Ceremony

State winners of the Letters About Literature contest, the announcement of *The Hook* contest winners, and opening remarks by author Charles Shields *(Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee)*.

CENTRAL JMRL LIBRARY

2:00 PM

Digging Coal and Moving Mountains

Penny Loeb *(Moving Mountains)*, Michael Shnayerson *(Coal River)*, and Paul Kuczko *(Music of Coal: Mining Songs from the Appalachian Coalfields)* bring old and new coal mining issues to life.

GRAVITY LOUNGE

4:00 PM

The World the War Made: WWII's Legacy in Justice and Diplomacy

With Mel Leffler *(For the Soul of Mankind: The U.S., the Soviet Union, and the Cold War)*, Norbert Ehrenfreund *(The Nuremberg Legacy: How the Nazi War Crimes Trials Changed the Course of History)*, and Steven Harper *(Straddling Worlds: The Jewish-American Journey of Professor Richard W. Leopold)*.

UVA BOOKSTORE

Thursday, March 27

10:00 AM

Virginia Stories: Reconstructing the Past

Explore stories with Logan Ward *(See You in a Hundred Years)*, Earl Swift *(The Tangierman's Lament)*, and Scott Casper *(Sarah Johnson's Mount Vernon)*.

CENTRAL JMRL LIBRARY

Noon

Race and Place: Memoirs

With Margaret Gibson *(The Prodigal Daughter: Reclaiming and Unfinished Childhood)*, Evans Hopkins *(Life After Life: A Story of Rage and Redemption)*, and Kim Reid *(No Place Safe: A Family Memoir)*.

UVA BOOKSTORE

2:00 PM

Return of Virginia's Poets Laureate

Five Virginia poets laureate present their poems: Joseph Awad, George Garrett, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Grace Simpson, and Margaret Ward Morland.

M. L. K. JR. PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

2:00 PM

Independent Scholars on Important Virginia Stories

Independent researchers, Marie Tyler-McGraw *(An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia)*, Miles Barnes *(Gallows on the Marsh)*, James Morrison *(Bedford Goes to War)*, discuss historical books from the region.

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

4:00 PM

Tales of the Sea

Jay Worrall *(Any Approaching Enemy: A Novel of the Napoleonic Wars)*, George Robert Minkoff (*In the Land of Whispers* trilogy), and Neal Bascomb *(Red Mutiny: Eleven Fatal Days of the Battleship Potemkin)* on stories of the sea.

NEW DOMINION BOOKSHOP

6:00 PM

Battles of the Civil War

Jack Hurst *(Men of Fire: Grant, Forrest, and the Campaign that Decided the Civil War)*, John Baldwin *(Last Flag Down: The Epic Journey of the Last Confederate Warship)*, and Marc Leepson *(Desperate Engagement)*.

UVA BOOKSTORE

Friday, March 28

10:00 AM

Science Writing: Life Cycles

Jennifer Ackerman *(Sex, Sleep, Eat, Drink, Dream)*, Michael Sims *(Apollo's Fire: A Day on Earth in Nature and Imagination)*, and Susan Freinkel *(American Chestnut: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of a Perfect Tree)*.

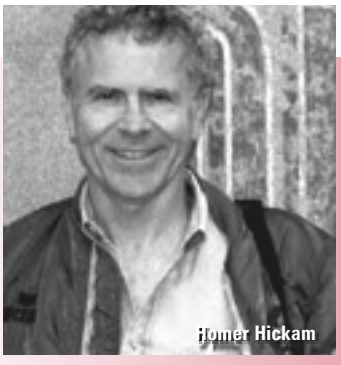
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Noon

The Positive Legacy of Muslim Culture

Michael Hamilton Morgan *(Lost History: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Scientists, Thinkers, and Artists)*.

UVA HARRISON INSTITUTE / SMALL SPECIAL COLLECTIONS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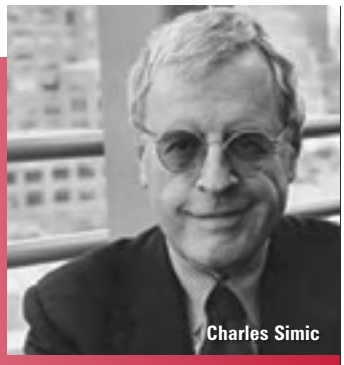
Charles Simic

2:00 PM

How the Media Shapes Life As We Know It

Hank Klibanoff *(The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation)*, Stephen J. Farnsworth *(The Nightly News Nightmare)*, John Semonche *(Censoring Sex: A Historical Journey Through American Media)*, and Mary Beth Mathews *(Rethinking Zion: How the Print Media Placed Fundamentalism in the South)*.

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

4:00 PM

Relevance of Things Past: Why the Big Authors Stay Big

Discuss visionaries who've stayed timely with David Kirby *(Ultra-Talk: Johnny Cash, The Mafia, Shakespeare, Drum Music, St. Teresa Of Avila, and 17 Other Colossal Topics of Conversation)* and Jonah Lehrer *(Proust Was a Neuroscientist)*.

CENTRAL JMRL LIBRARY

6:00 PM

Dracula vs. Frankenstein: A Monster Mash of Fact and Fiction

With Paul Bibeau *(Sundays with Vlad: From Pennsylvania to Transylvania, One Man's Quest to Live in the World of the Undead)* and Susan Tyler Hitchcock *(Frankenstein: A Cultural History)*.

BARNES & NOBLE

8:00 PM

Crime Wave: Murder, Murder Everywhere

David Ignatius *(Body of Lies)*, Margaret Coel *(The Girl with The Braided Hair)*, James W. Hall *(Hell's Bay)* and Jacqueline Winspear *(An Incomplete Revenge)*.

ALBEMARLE COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING

Saturday, March 29

10:00 AM

Re-Viewing the American Revolution and the Constitution

Woody Holton *(Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution)* and Terry Bouton *(Taming Democracy: "The People", the Founders and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution)*.

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Noon

The Original Playlists: Poetry Anthologies

Discuss the art of anthologizing with Heather McHugh (guest editor, *Best American Poetry 2007*), Nickole Brown *(Air Fare)*, and Jeb Livingood (series editor, *Best New Poets*). Moderated by Lisa Russ Spaar *(All That Mighty Heart: London Poems)*.

UVA BOOKSTORE

2:00 PM

A Fix for Political Junkies

Joe Bageant *(Deer Hunting with Jesus)* and Craig Crawford *(The Politics of Life)* discuss their takes on comtemporary politics.

BARNES & NOBLE

4:00 PM

One Bad Book: The Disturbing Legacy of *Mongrel Virginians*

In 1926 two academic researchers published *Mongrel Virginians,* a disparaging treatise on the Monacan Indians in Amherst County. Tribal council members Sharon Bryant, Diane Johns Shields, and Karenne Wood reflect on an era of state-sanctioned racism and how Virginia has changed.

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Sunday, March 30

Noon

Artists' Books Now and Next

A talk on the artists' books of today and where the art is going by internationally renowned book artist, Johanna Drucker.

VIRGINIA ARTS OF THE BOOK CENTER

1:30 PM

20th Century Virginia History--Living It, Writing It

Ronald Heinemann *(Old Dominion, New Commonwealth)*, Professor Emeritus of Hampden-Sydney, and Linwood Holton *(Opportunity Time)*, Governor of Virginia from 1970-74, discuss their perspectives on Virginia history.

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Check online for updated program information and directions.

vabook.org

Culbreth Theatre Events

Culbreth Theatre events are free and open to the public, but seating in this 600-seat venue is limited. Free tickets to hold seats are given out beginning one hour before start time, limit two per person. Arrive early to be assured a good seat, doors open one-half hour before start time. See you there!

Wednesday, March 26

6:00 PM

In Search of Irish America

Peter Quinn *(Looking for Jimmy)*, Daniel Cassidy *(How the Irish Invented Slang)*, Dan Barry *(Pull Me Up)*, Maureen Dezell *(Irish America: Coming into Clover)*, and T. J. English *(Paddy Whacked: The Untold Story of the Irish American Gangster)*.

8:00 PM

Wayward Sons: Fiction with Nathan Englander and Colm Toibin

Nathan Englander *(The Ministry of Special Cases)* and Colm Toibin *(Mothers and Sons)* explore characters grappling with the parent-child relationship.

Thursday, March 27

6:00 PM

Three Cups of Tea with Greg Mortenson

Greg Mortenson *(Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace... One School at a Time)* will discuss his work building schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

8:00 PM

Fiction Favorites

With Adriana Trigiani *(The Big Stone Gap* series), Homer Hickam *(Rocket Boys, Red Helmet)*, and Jill A. Davis *(Ask Again Later, Girl's Poker Night)*.

Friday, March 28

8:00 PM

A Poetry Evening: Charles Simic and Charles Wright

The *Virginia Quarterly Review* presents a reading by Griffin Prize-winner Charles Wright *(Littlefoot)* and the current U.S. Poet Laureate Charles Simic *(My Noiseless Entourage)*.

Traveling E
Blaze Trails

"Those who have no record of what the
inspiration which comes from the teachi

BY CHRISTINA DRAPER

Carter G. Woodson, a Virginian, is called the father of black history. His belief that African Americans must know and celebrate their past led him to establish Negro History Week, a precursor to Black History Month. Not only did Woodson wish to see African Americans take pride in their heritage; he also wanted all Americans to recognize the contributions made by African Americans to this country. With thanks to Woodson's vision, today we have a wealth of educational resources dedicated to the celebration of the history, heritage, and contributions of African Americans from Virginia.

The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, located in Richmond, for example, received a grant from VFH to create *African American Trailblazers*. This exhibition features 12 vignettes of historic African Americans born in Virginia. Exhibit audiences learn little-known facts about the lives of noted educators, performing artists, athletes, business leaders, and others who served as pioneers in their fields, breaking down barriers, and inspiring young people to follow in their footsteps. Included are **Anthony Johnson, James Lafayette, John Mercer Langston, Booker T. Washington, Carter G. Woodson, Maggie Walker, Roger Arliner Young, Anne Spencer, Ella Fitzgerald, Josephine Baker, Arthur Ashe**, and **Max Robinson**. In addition to the vignettes, a timeline of significant events coinciding with their achievements, at both state and national levels, creates the historic context for one's appreciation of the exhibit.

This exhibition is used as a complementary piece to the Richmond Region 2007 legacy project, *African American Trailblazers: Commemorating Four Centuries of the African American Experience in Virginia*, a documentary film. Slated for statewide distribution to elementary schools and libraries throughout the Commonwealth, the film highlights the achievements of each of the individuals. The exhibition will be on display at City Hall in Alexandria, Virginia, from February 1-29. If your organization is interested in hosting this exhibition, please contact the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia (**blackhistorymuseum.org**) for more information.

Don't Grieve After Me: The Black Experience in Virginia, a new adaptation of the African American Heritage Program's traveling exhibition, is also an excellent resource for communities throughout the Commonwealth. The original exhibition was created by the Hampton University Museum in cooperation with the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities with additional assistance from Colonial

Exhibitions
s in Virginia

ir forebears have accomplished lose the
ng of biography and history."
—Carter G. Woodson

Williamsburg Foundation in the late 1980s. In 2001, a 25-panel traveling exhibit was created using more than 100 archival photographs to reflect the black experience in Virginia and Virginia's African American legacy in the 21st century.

In August of 2007, a new 16-panel display was created which discusses migrational patterns and the establishment of black Virginia culture; family, community, and religious life; the contributions of blacks to Virginia society through skilled and professional work; and their social and educational achievements. Readers of the book that accompanies the exhibition will be inspired by the four narrative essays that contribute to the understanding of the African-American experience in Virginia over nearly 400 years. To learn more about the *Don't Grieve After Me* exhibition and how you may reserve it or a copy of the book for your organization, go to **aaheritageva.org** and click on special projects. Both exhibitions are now available to non-profit and educational institutions. Once your organization has chosen either of these resources, you will discover the celebrated record which Carter G. Woodson once dreamed would be revealed.

Black Expo Event in Hampton, Virginia, August 2007—part of Jamestown 2007.

Recordings Document Ladino Ballad and Appalachian Gospel Traditions

Laboring Soldier: A Tribute to Billy Gene Mullins (Mountain Tone Music Workshop)
From Her Nona's Drawer...Sephardic Folk Songs: The Journey Continues (Susan Gaeta)

BY DAVID BEARINGER

"...So build you an ark, and build it strong.
Noah, I'll give you the plan,
For someday surely it's gonna rain
Such water not seen by man.
Gather in the creatures that I have made,
O'er the waters you'll safely glide.
Build a window on top, and you will see
That I'm ever by your side..."
–Billy Gene Mullins (from Noah*)*

TOP: **Scott Mullins**
MIDDLE: **Billy Gene Mullins**
BOTTOM: **Mullins Family Trio, ca. 1946**
All photos courtesy of Jim Scott Mullins.

On the surface, the music and personal stories of **Flory Jagoda** and **Billy Gene Mullins** could hardly be more different. Each has been the subject of a recent CD recording made in tribute to their artistry and their continuing influence on the musical traditions they represent. Both CD projects were funded in part with grants from the VFH, and each received additional support from the Virginia Folklife Program. But apart from this, and beyond their obvious differences, these two recordings also share some important common ground.

Flory Jagoda was born into a well-known musical family in the Sephardic Jewish community of Sarajevo. Her ancestors were among the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. They settled in Turkey and eventually moved to Bosnia, bringing with them a language—known as Ladino—and a tradition of ballad-singing that is deeply expressive of Sephardic Jewish life. She immigrated to the United States after World War II, the only member of her family to survive the Holocaust, and has lived in Northern Virginia for the past fifty years. She received the National Heritage Fellowship in 2002 and was acknowledged at that time as the sole bearer of the Ladino ballad tradition, the "keeper of the flame."

Billy Gene Mullins was born in Dickenson County, Virginia, and raised in the community of Ghost Rock, not far from Clintwood. He too came from a musical family: they sang gospel, with roots in the Church of the Brethren and Free Will Baptist traditions. He was also a gifted songwriter and a coal miner for most of his working life. In the 1940s, as part of the Mullins Family Trio, he sang with his parents on a weekly Sunday morning radio show broadcast out of WNVA in Norton; and later, at church and community gatherings with members of the original Carter Family and The Stanley Brothers. Ralph Stanley has acknowledged the Mullins Family as an important early influence on his own music.

Laboring Soldier is a collection of songs written by Billy Gene Mullins and performed by some of the finest Gospel and Old Time musicians from the Southwest Virginia/Eastern Kentucky/East Tennessee region. In these songs, you can hear musical roots extending back to the earliest recordings of the Carter Family, but their power is fresh, energetic, and full of life. In fact, their deep, soulful harmonies reach back even further, into the *a cappella* church singing traditions of the Appalachian mountains.

From Her Nona's Drawer...Sephardic Folk Songs was produced by Susan Gaeta, who sings and plays guitar on all but one of the album's tracks. Jagoda and Gaeta were one of the Master-Apprentice teams during the first year of the VFH Folklife Apprenticeship Program, and the idea for this CD was born out of that collaboration. The roots of the tradition are evident here as well, in Spanish, Turkish, Greek, Moroccan cadences and colorations, in the traditional ballads as well as the newer songs, which Jagoda herself composed.

These are two superb recordings, designed to honor both the master and the tradition he or she represents. In Sephardic communities, women were the guardians of secular culture. The ballads Flory Jagoda brought with her to Virginia had been passed from mother to daughter, or from grandmother to grand-daughter for many generations. *Nona* is the Ladino

word which means grandmother, and these songs are—among other things—an embodiment of a community's memory and resilient culture, of its soul.

The same could be said of the Gospel songs on *Laboring Soldier*. These are songs that could not have come from any other place but Appalachia. But they also have something deeply in common with the music that traveled from Spain to Turkey to Bosnia, and finally to Northern Virginia. These are songs of faith, and of family: songs rooted in place—or the longing for place, for home; spiritual songs, seasoned by life.

The two recordings, although in very different ways, express the search for permanence and peace in the face of hardship and loss that is universal in the human experience, as well as joy, the pleasures of family and community, and religious faith. They also represent traditions that are still very much alive.

Billy Gene Mullins died in 2000, but his son Scott and other members of the Mullins family carry on the tradition within the place where it began. In the 1940s, the Mullins Family Trio took the older Gospel songs that had been sung *a cappella* and added instruments—banjo, autoharp, and mandolin. In much the same way, **Scott Mullins** who produced this CD has conspicuously avoided any "futile attempt" to render these songs the way his father would have done.

He writes: "Nobody will ever perform these songs just like Dad did. If this [record] is anything, it is a love letter to an individual who left behind a testimony of music, a life of sincerity, and an indelible mark on the place where he lived. We have tried to emulate that sincerity here." Thus, the recording has a striking contemporary feeling, and draws on the talents of a diverse group of younger performers.

From Her Nona's Drawer is, likewise, almost entirely the work of Flory Jagoda's "aprentesita." In fact, Jagoda herself only sings on one of the album's tracks. The rest is a loving tribute, inspired by the master; but it's the student's own interpretation nonetheless. In both of these recordings, the tradition is treated with the greatest respect, but still refreshed and made new in the hands and voices of a new generation.

And it's probably safe to say that this is how both masters—of the Sephardic ballad and the Appalachian gospel song—would have wanted it.

"...All my songs that I brought to this country, I learned from my Nona—a real Sephardic folk singer. She sang a lot of Bosnian folk songs and little by little the Sephardic songs were losing the Spanish touch and adapting the flavor and the rhythms of Bosnia....

I sing it in a very old-fashioned way. Then I taught my daughter, my daughter taught my *aprentesita*. It doesn't sound the same—but it traveled—and this is the story of Sephardic songs. They could sound French, they could sound Greek, or Turkish, because they settled in so many different lands. So when I heard them singing for the first time I said, 'My God! It's American now!' and I was so happy..."

–Flory Jagoda

VFH grants have supported a number of other recordings of traditional music, including "Home Craft Days," a 5-CD boxed set of music and story-telling compiled from 30 years of the Home Craft Days Festival (Mountain Empire Community College) and "Homrong," a classic Khmer song-cycle performed by National Heritage Fellowship winner, Chum Ngek (Cambodian American Heritage, Inc.). A grant to the Ralph Stanley Museum supported ***Laboring Soldier. From Her Nona's Drawer*** was supported by two grants to the Adat Shalom Reonstructionist Congregation.

For further information and to purchase copies of ***From Her Nona's Drawer*** visit **susangaeta.com**. For further information on ***Laboring Soldier*** contact Aaron Davis, Director, Ralph Stanley Museum, **ralphstanleymuseum.com**. To make a tax-deductable donation to the ***Flory Jagoda Sephardic Music Endowment,*** contact the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.

TOP: **Susan Gaeta and Flory Jagoda,** photo by Morgan Miller.
MIDDLE: **Young Flory,** photo courtesy of Flory Jagoda.
BOTTOM: Photo by Abby Greenawalt.
ABOVE: CD Cover Design by Tamera Finn.

DONOR PROFILE

The Verizon Foundation

Making a Difference

The Verizon Foundation calls it "technology that touches life" when describing their commitment to improving education, literacy, family safety, and health care. With their recent grant to the VFH in support of the African American Heritage Program (AAHP), Verizon is making a difference in the work of the VFH and in the lives of students, teachers, heritage travelers, and anyone with an interest in the African American experience in Virginia.

The grant provides funding for visual and content enhancements to the heart of the AAHP, its searchable database website. The AAHP database website currently includes more than 400 heritage sites representing most regions of Virginia and a fully searchable inventory of landmarks which are involved in the interpretation of African American history and culture throughout the Commonwealth. Grant funds have enabled a conversion of the current database into a more interactive format, and the addition of new dynamic pages, map illustrations, images, audio, and video.

Christina Draper, AAHP Director, said, "The grant from Verizon will allow us to create and develop multi-media components that will make this database website more useful and appealing to teachers, students, and heritage travelers. It should also help spark the interest of other individuals and corporate donors who have a commitment to, and interest in, preserving the rich contributions African Americans have made to Virginia's history."

The two-year project includes research on additional sites, and the creation of teacher resource materials, all provided at no cost to users. While K-12 teachers and their students are primary audiences, heritage travelers from within as well as outside of Virginia, and the general public interested in Virginia and African American history will also find the website database useful. Several new features have already been unveiled:

- More than 30 additional heritage sites;
- Interactive maps showing the location of heritage sites;
- Images of historic locations providing a visual reference for students and travelers;
- Related audio and video providing context and history of heritage sites;
- The "My Suitcase" feature allowing visitors to bookmark their favorite historic sites. Travelers can use this to plan a trip and teachers can use it to build classroom activities.

Steve Clementi, director of external affairs for Verizon, says, "The goal of the Verizon Foundation is to utilize the power of technology to connect people. We're pleased to partner with the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities on this worthwhile project. We view our grant as an important investment and are confident that it will deliver educational benefits to many people."

*To explore the searchable database visit **AAHeritageVA.org***

New Staff for History Call-in Radio Program

Tony Field, the Producer of VFH Radio's new history call-in program (provisionally dubbed *The History Hotline*) is an honors graduate of Wesleyan University in Latin American Studies with a concentration in history. From 2003-2007, he was Associate Producer, frequently acting as Senior Producer, of NPR's award-winning *On the Media*, based at WNYC Radio in New York City. He has also served as an editor and producer for WNYC's *Radio Lab*, contributing to two stories in the program's 2008 Spring series. He recently had primary responsibility for production of *The New Yorker* magazine's "Campaign Trail" podcasts. Tony began his public radio career as the Associate Producer of Rhode Island station WRNI's Morning Edition, and later became a Senior News Writer for Boston NPR station WBUR's *All Things Considered*. He has lived and worked throughout Latin America.

Rachel Quimby, Associate Producer of *The History Hotline*, is an honors graduate in psychology of Barnard College, Columbia University, where she was head writing fellow at the Erica Jong Writing Center. She recently completed studies in radio production at Maine's Salt Institute for Documentary Studies. While at Columbia, she served as a news intern and licensed news programmer at WKCR-FM, then creating a half-hour interview program called *Grey Matters,* on psychology related themes, which she wrote, edited, and hosted. Rachel has worked as Information Coordinator for the National Aphasia Association and as an editorial intern and writer for *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. She is a practiced vocalist and an ACE certified fitness instructor.

Spring 2008 VFH Fellows

Virginia Foundation for the Humanities Resident Fellows for Spring 2008 are (left to right) *We the People Fellow* **Thomas Jackson** from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, working on *American Ghandi: Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black Freedom Movement, and the Culture of Celebrity;* **Cecelia Conway**, Appalachian State (NC), *Ballad Keepers of Appalachia's Musical Crossroads;* **Christian Spielvogel**, the Edna and Norman Freehling Fellow in South Atlantic Studies, Hope College (Michigan), *An Online Role-Playing Simulation of the American Civil War;* VFH Research and Education Director **Roberta A. Culbertson**; and **Hilary Holladay**, University of Massachusetts Lowell, *Herbert Huncke: Muse of the Beat Generation*.

Not pictured are **Viktoria Sukovata** and Senior Fellow **William W. Freehling**. Sukovata is affiliated with Kharkiv National University (Ukraine) and her research project at the VFH is *Jewish Theater in the Holocaust;* Freehling is continuing his editing of a documentary publication of the Virginia Secession Convention's Debates and his book of essays, *Disunion Reconsidered: Shorter Descriptions, Longer Perspectives*.

Encyclopedia Virginia Taps New Associate Editor

Brendan Wolfe, new Associate Editor of Encyclopedia Virginia, earned a BA degree in English and an MFA degree in nonfiction writing, both at the University of Iowa. Prior to joining VFH in the fall of 2008, Brendan worked at Buckle Down Publishing, where he was a senior editor specializing in education titles that augment preparation for state-administered standardized tests throughout the United States. Previously, he taught at the American Language School in Daejeon, South Korea, and worked as a journalist in Iowa, New Hampshire, and Maine. Brendan has published freelance essays and book reviews in journals across the country and is working on a book-length cultural history and biography of Bix Beiderbecke, an early jazz musician.

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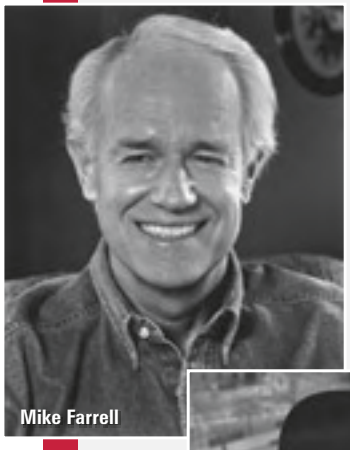
Mike Farrell

Walter Mosley

Don't miss
these Virginia Festival of the Book headline programs at The Paramount Theater!

Mike Farrell of *M*A*S*H* fame will discuss his memoir **Saturday March 29, 8 PM.** Novelist Walter Mosley will host a benefit for the VFH Center for the Book on **Sunday, March 30, 4 PM.**

Go online to ***theparamount.net*** to buy tickets to these events.