

a special showcase performance of

# LOVE SONGS

from the *Liberation Wars*

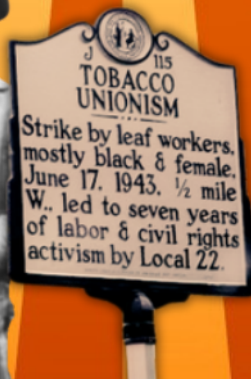
Friday, April 24  
6:30-8:30 PM  
Durham Arts Council

- Music & lyrics by Steve Jones
- Directed by Elise Bryant
- Based on real-life events described in Robert R. Korstad's *Civil Rights Unionism*

in partnership with:



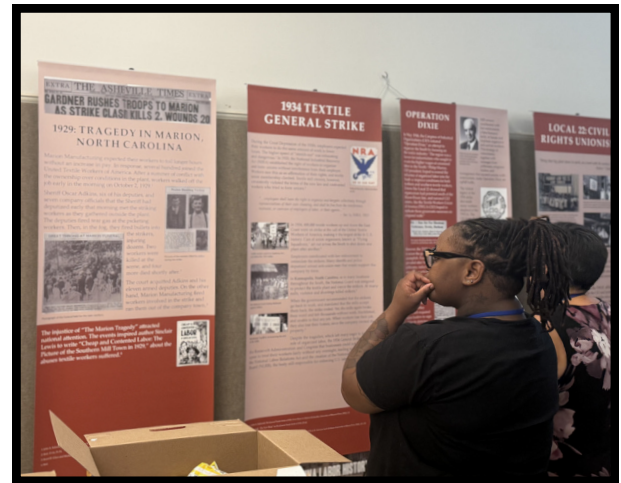
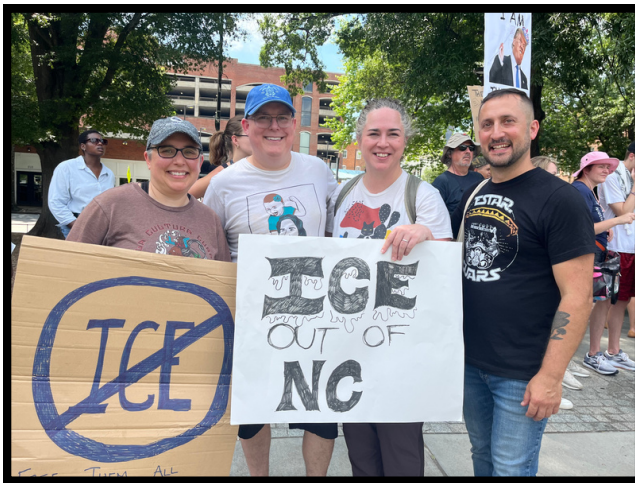
CENTER FOR WORKING CLASS STUDIES



# Labor South: Center for Working Class Studies

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**Labor South** is honored to co-present tonight's special showcase performance of *Love Songs from the Liberation Wars*. **Labor South** brings together students, workers, organizers, educators, and artists to strengthen the movement for racial and economic justice in the US South. **Labor South** anchors current organizing campaigns in Southern labor history, deepens the leadership and organizing skills of young workers, and prioritizes language justice principles in building multi-racial worker unity in the US South.



The US South has a long and rich history of individuals and groups that have organized their communities, families, places of faith, and workplaces. Working-class communities in the US South have generational knowledge of and experience with resistance to oppression.

There is a historic and current lack of investment in infrastructure to support the growing number of unions and worker organizations in the region. There has also been a lack of commitment by academic institutions to support labor studies in the South. Through popular education, **Labor South** is increasing awareness and analysis of labor issues in order to improve racial and economic conditions in the US South.

[laborsouth.org](http://laborsouth.org)



# Love Songs from the Liberation Wars

A jazz opera about the 1940s tobacco workers struggle in Winston-Salem, NC.

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*Love Songs from the Liberation Wars* celebrates an important event in the history of the labor and civil rights struggles in Winston-Salem, NC. On June 17, 1943, several hundred African American workers sat down at their jobs and refused to work until Reynolds Tobacco improved their pay and working conditions. Over the next few days, thousands walked off the job. This began a years-long struggle.



Production shots from a 2017 performance in Silver Springs, MD

An original work, composed by D.C.-area composer Steve Jones and directed by labor activist Elise Bryant, *Love Songs* tells the moving story of an early victory against workplace injustice and Jim Crow segregation, led primarily by African American employees of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company in the 1940s. The show has been performed in both fully staged and concert formats.

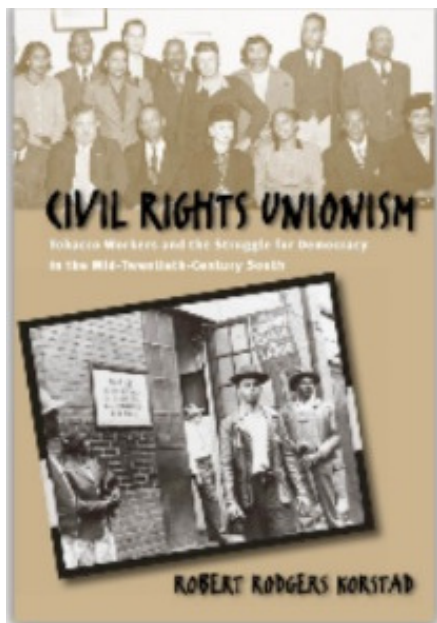


It is fitting to tell this story in the form of a “jazz opera,” as music played a pivotal role in the events of the 1940s. Local choral groups put the union message into popular spirituals and gospel songs used in the organizing campaign. Every union meeting opened with a song and prayer. National performers such as Paul Robeson, Pete Seeger, and Woody Guthrie traveled to Winston-Salem and joined their voices to those of the workers fighting for justice and their union. They sang “We Shall Overcome” as it was becoming the national anthem of the Civil Rights Movement.

The strike became one of the seminal events in the struggle for civil, women's, and workers' rights in the US. Its impact continued to be felt years later during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s when African Americans mobilized to end segregation in Winston-Salem and throughout the country. It spawned activists who fanned out over the South to become leaders over the next decades in the struggle for justice.

# Love Songs from the Liberation Wars

The historical events and the book that inspired a jazz opera.



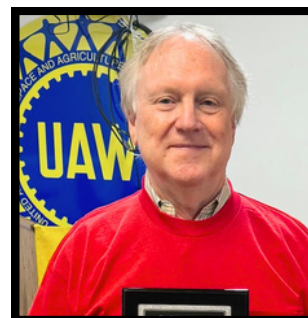
Robert Rodgers Korstad's book, *Civil Rights Unionism and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (UNC Press, 2003), was a key source for composer Steve Jones as he wrote the jazz opera.

"Korstad's dramatic story of tobacco workers in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, during the 1940s and 1950s, reveals the intricate connections between a local struggle for better wages and working conditions and the broader fight for racial democracy and civil rights. On June 17, 1943, a group of Black women at the Reynolds Tobacco plant stopped work, rejecting the authority of a dictatorial white foreman and expressing long-simmering anger over speed-ups, dangerous working conditions, and unjust wages. With the help of [union] organizers, hundreds of Black (and a few white) workers at Reynolds built Local 22 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (FTA-CIO).

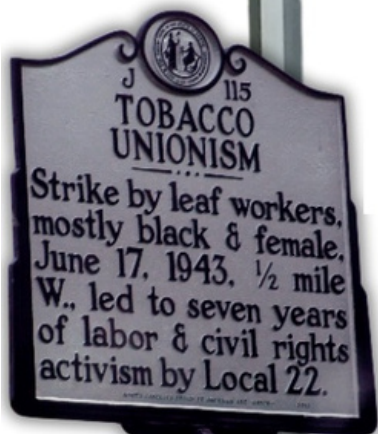
Korstad . . . points to the temporary convergence of factors, an active federal government in labor relations, the labor movement's aggressive Southern Front, and the move in the urban South toward white supremacy with 'a lighter touch' that created a moment of extraordinary opportunity for 'working-class Blacks [who], through their participation in the labor movement, were in the vanguard of civil rights efforts of the 1940s."

- Jeffrey Helgeson, in *International Labor and Working-Class History*

**Robert R. Korstad** is an emeritus Professor of Public Policy and History at the Terry Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. His research interests include twentieth century US history, labor history, African American history, and contemporary social policy, and he co-directed a major documentary research project at Duke's Center for Documentary Studies, "*Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South.*"



Two historical markers in downtown Winston-Salem commemorate the 1940s tobacco workers struggle that inspired *Love Songs from the Liberation Wars*.



# Love Songs from the Liberation Wars

This showcase performance features selections from the full score of *Love Songs*.  
Each member of the 5-person cast portrays multiple characters.

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## Principal Characters in Order of Appearance

Theodosia (worker) .....	Zakiyyah Niang
Moranda (worker) .....	Zakiyyah Niang
Slim (worker) .....	Trevor Ketterling
Ruby (worker) .....	Chelsea Gabrielle Rose
Karl (union organizer) .....	Trevor Ketterling
Buck (organizer/Justice of the Peace) .....	Jason McKinney
Jim Crow (metaphysical manifestation) .....	Jeffery Maggs
R.J. Reynolds (factory owner) .....	Jeffery Maggs
Emma Goldman (ghost) .....	Chelsea Gabrielle Rose

## Supporting Characters

Paul Robeson (singer/activist)/Isaac (worker) .....	Jason McKinney
Pete Seeger (singer/activist) .....	Trevor Ketterling
Woody Guthrie (singer/activist) .....	Steve Jones
James McCardell (worker) .....	Jason McKinney
Foreman .....	Jeffery Maggs

## Production Crew

Jennifer O'Kelly, IATSE 635.....	lighting design and props
Frenchie LaVern Slade .....	costume support
Jick .....	sound engineer

## Special Thanks

Alison Perez Hernandez, Bob Korstad, Elise Bryant, Isaiah Withers, Jennifer O'Kelly, Joe Asamoah-Boadu, Lisa Croucher, Megan Shan, Melinda Wiggins, Muse Scenic Studio, Piedmont Players (Salisbury), RJ Reynolds High School Drama Club, Steve Jones, Tony Macias, Yadira Paz-Martinez

# Love Songs from the Liberation Wars

The following songs from Act One will be performed in tonight's showcase event.

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## ACT ONE

### **"Can't See to Can't See"**

Theodosia, Moranda, Foreman, James, Slim, Ruby, "Workers Chorus"

### **"An Injury to One is an Injury to All"**

Karl, Buck, Pete, Paul, Woody, "Workers Chorus"

### **"Union Card"**

Theodosia, with Foreman, Slim, Karl, Ruby, Buck, "Workers Chorus"

### **"I Am Jim Crow"**

Jim Crow, with Theodosia, Slim

### **"Theodosia and Buck Meet"**

Theodosia and Buck

### **"Door to Door"**

Karl, Theodosia, Buck, Slim, Ruby

### **"I Shall Let Fall A Shower of Roses"**

Theodosia, Ruby, Moranda, "Workers Chorus"

### **"I am R.J. Reynolds"**

R.J. Reynolds

### **"Yeah We Got a Prayer"**

R.J. Reynolds, Jim Crow, Theodosia, "Union Mission Holy Church Choir"

### **"Juneteenth"**

R.J. Reynolds, Jim Crow, Theodosia, Buck, "Workers Chorus"

### **"Divided"**

Pete, Paul and Woody, with Emma Goldman

### **"Jim Crow Shadow Church Choir"**

Jim Crow, Slim, Ruby, "Jim Crow Shadow Church Choir"

# Love Songs from the Liberation Wars

The following songs from Act Two will be performed in tonight's showcase event.

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*15-minute intermission between Acts One and Two*

## **ACT TWO**

### **"You All White"**

Theodosia, Buck, R.J. Reynolds, Jim Crow, Foreman, Ruby, Slim, "Workers Chorus"

### **"They Givin' Out Raises"**

Jim Crow, with R.J. Reynolds, Foreman, Buck, Theodosia, Karl and Slim, "Workers Chorus"

### **"Love Song to America"**

R.J. Reynolds, Foreman and Jim Crow,

then joined by Theodosia, Moranda, Geneva, Karl, Buck, Ruby, Emma, "Workers Chorus"

### **"Song of the Strike"**

Moranda, Theodosia, Foreman, James, "Workers Chorus"

### **"Boycott Camels"**

Theodosia, Slim, Moranda, Ruby, "Workers Chorus"

### **"No Race Mixing"**

Justice of the Peace, Jim Crow, R.J. Reynolds, Slim, Ruby

### **"One Love"**

Slim and Ruby, with Justice of the Peace, "Workers Chorus"

### **"Love Songs Medley"**

Theodosia with "Workers Chorus"

# Cast

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**Trevor Ketterling** is thrilled to be a part of this project. He appreciates the incredibly powerful story being told as it highlights one of the most important fights for workers rights in American History as well as the struggle against Jim Crow, and is absolutely honored to help it all come to life through such a colorful and spiritual medium. He hopes you enjoy the show, and that you take the wonderful messages from these songs and hold them close to your heart during these difficult times.



**Jeffery Maggs** has a B.M. in Vocal Performance from SUNY Fredonia and a Master's in Vocal Performance from UNCG. He has performed in musical theater productions and operas throughout NC and, briefly, off-Broadway in NYC. He then attended Elon University for law school and received his JD in 2012. He spends his days as an attorney helping clients with various illness and injury-related matters. He sings regularly with the Winston-Salem Choral Artists and the Holzhackern Tyrolean Band. Stage roles have included Tamino (*The Magic Flute*), Beppe (*Pagliacci*), Frederick (*Pirates of Penzance*), Che (*Evita*), Joseph (*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*), and Mr. Andrews (*Titanic*). His favorite role is dad to 3 amazing kids!



**Jason McKinney** is a versatile artist and advocate, known for his work as a singer, actor, composer, author, and community leader. With over 25 years of experience in sacred music, he currently serves as Music Director and Cantorial Soloist at Temple Emanuel in Winston-Salem, NC. Born in Milwaukee, WI, Jason holds a B.M. in Vocal Performance from the UNC School of the Arts, where he also studied conducting and composition. He has toured internationally with *Porgy and Bess* and created original works, including *Moments with Paul* (Robeson) and *Frederick* (Douglass), *a Musical Narrative*, which explore the lives of historic figures who have shaped his artistic and social perspective. In addition to his artistic career, Jason is deeply committed to community service. He co-authored the autobiographical children's book *Jason Belongs* with Audrey Ades, published in November 2025.  
(continued)

# Cast

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Jason also serves as Chair of the Human Relations Commission of Winston-Salem, advocating for language access, fair housing, and cultural excellence. Jason is proud of his family's legacy in the fields of arts, sciences, law, politics, academics, athletics, healthcare, and community affairs. He continues to use his platform to foster inclusivity and social change within his community.



**Zakiyah Niang**, a native of Winston-Salem, is no stranger to the stage. She has performed in local and regional theatrical and vocal productions, most recently in *Carmen* and *Pagliacci* with Piedmont Opera, *The Nativity According to the Gospels* with the 40+ Stage Company directed by Mabel Robinson, and *My First Love* with The Royal Curtain Drama Guild—all in Winston-Salem, NC. For a tenure of more than 25 years, she also performed in numerous productions with the NCBRC and the National Black Theatre Festival. She enjoys runway modeling, crafting, spending time with her family, and traveling abroad. She is the proud owner of Mobile Matrimony and More, a specialty event planning and decorating company and serves as the Associate Dean of Students with Wake Forest University. Zakiyah attributes her passion for the arts to her late mother, Carlotta Samuels Fleming.



**Chelsea Gabrielle Rose** is an up and coming multi-hyphenate creative, born and raised in Durham, NC. A graduate of The UNC School of the Arts School of Drama, Chelsea's foundations in acting have inspired and fed her artistic endeavors far beyond the stage. Though Chelsea is classically trained as an actor, her work as a Writer/Director really shined through as she debuted her new original musical, *Loving This Year*. She is a 2026 Mabel P. Robinson Emerging Artist Recipient, a 2020 Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge Winner, and a recipient of The Andrew Lloyd Webber Scholarship by the American Theater Wing (2021-2025). Her art stems from the questions she poses to the human heart, always yearning to find and inspire hope. She is absolutely thrilled to be telling this story tonight. She thanks Jesus Christ, her family, friends, teachers, and supporters from far and wide. Let's have some fun! @chelseagabriellerose

# Creative Team

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**Steve Jones** is a member of the American Federation of Musicians Local 161-710. He dropped out of music school to join his brother Peter in the United Farm Workers Union, thinking he'd take a break from music, but found that he was put to work using music on picket lines and in Teatro Campesino. Steve has performed at Blues Alley, and in music festivals in Ireland, England, and Portugal, and was Composer in Residence at Macalester College, where students performed an earlier jazz opera, *Forgotten: The Murder at the Ford Rouge Plant* ([www.forgottenshow.net](http://www.forgottenshow.net)), also directed by Elise Bryant. Steve teaches jazz piano and music composition at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, and is Music Director of the DC Labor Chorus. Together with Congressman Jamie Raskin, they wrote a new state song for Maryland, "Maryland My Maryland: The Free State Song." Steve won the Joe Hill Lifetime Achievement Award from the Labor Heritage Foundation.



**Elise Bryant** is the former executive director of the Labor Heritage Foundation and founding director of the DC Labor Chorus. Award winning playwright and social justice activist, she served as Artistic Director of the Common Ground Theatre Ensemble and the Workers' Lives/Workers' Stories theatre project. Elise got her start in the labor movement as a member of the Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World) and currently serves as the national president of the Coalition for Labor Union Women. As a labor educator, she taught at the University of Michigan Labor Studies Center and the National Labor College. She received a B.F.A. from the University of Michigan and a M.S. in Organization Development from American University. Elise was awarded the Lifetime Achievement award from United Association of Labor Educators the same year.



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