

The Carson McCullers Center is proud to present the twentieth issue of its newsletter.



Columbus State University's Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians is dedicated to preserving the legacy of Carson McCullers; to nurturing writers and musicians and educating young people; and to fostering literary, musical, artistic, and intellectual culture in the United States and abroad.

In Case You Missed It...

Limited Return to In-Person Events



The McCullers Center has returned to hosting selected in-person events. Among those are by-appointed house tours of the Smith-McCullers House in Columbus. Over the course of the summer and fall of 2021, Director Nick Norwood has given tours of the house to visitors from all around the United States and several other countries. Tours focus on Carson McCullers's family history, her time spent in the house, important events that occurred there--including hers and Reeves's first wedding in 1937--and they highlight many of the artifacts on display, including works of art, items of furniture and clothing, and other items associated with the house's most famous resident.

The McCullers Center also resumed co-hosting the David Diamond Reading &

Recital Series in collaboration with the CSU English Department, the Bo Bartlett Center, and the Schwob School of Music. The series, held in the gallery of the Bartlett Center, consists of a two-part performance: a reading in either poetry or prose by an undergraduate student in the creative writing program at CSU and a musical recital by students from CSU's Schwob School of Music. On Wednesday, October 20th, Sandifer Reid Griffin read a selection of original creative nonfiction and Riley Smith performed pieces on classical guitar.

On Saturday, February 19th, Carson McCullers's 105th birthday, the McCullers Center hopes to host its biennial Carson McCullers Literary Festival live and in-person on the Main Stage of CSU's Riverpark Theatre Complex. The event will showcase original work by CSU creative writing faculty Carey Scott Wilkerson, Natalia Temesgen, Allen Gee, and McCullers Center Director Nick Norwood. The culmination of the event will be the awards ceremony for the annual Carson McCullers Literary Awards.

Writing Fellow Reading



The McCullers Center hosted a virtual reading by 16th annual Marguerite and Lamar Smith Writing Fellow Lauren Green via Zoom on Wednesday, November 17. The event, which was free and open to the public, was attended by a number of CSU students, faculty, friends and supporters of the Carson McCullers Center.

Lauren Green, who lived and worked in the Smith-McCullers House from September 1 to December 1, has published in *American Short Fiction*, *Ninth Letter*, *Conjunctions*, *Epoch Magazine*, and elsewhere. She has won *Glimmer Train's* New Writers Award, *Southeast Review's* Ernest Hemingway Prize, and *Philadelphia Stories'* Marguerite McGlinn Prize for Fiction. She graduated with a B.A. from Columbia University, where she was awarded the Louis Sudler Prize in the Arts, and received her M.F.A. from the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas, Austin. While in residence at the Smith-McCullers House, she completed work on a novel.

Named in honor of Carson's parents, The Marguerite and Lamar Smith Fellowship for Writers was inspired by McCullers's experience at the Breadloaf Writer's Conference in Vermont and, especially, the Yaddo Arts Colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. To honor the contribution of these residency fellowships to McCullers's work, the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians awards fellowships for writers to spend time in McCullers's childhood home in Columbus, Georgia. The fellowships are intended to afford the writers in residence uninterrupted time to dedicate to their work, free from the distractions of daily life and other professional responsibilities.

McCullers Center Brings Award-Winning Poet Charles Harper Webb to CSU



The McCullers Center presented a virtual reading by featured poet Charles Harper Webb on Friday, November 12, via Zoom. This event was free and open to the public.

Called “Southern California’s most inventive and accessible poet,” Charles Harper Webb is the nation’s foremost proponent of Stand Up Poetry. A former professional rock singer/guitarist and licensed psychotherapist, he is Professor of English at California State University, Long Beach. His latest of twelve collections of poetry is *Sidebend World* (University of Pittsburgh, 2018). Webb has published a collection of essays, *A Million MFAs Are Not Enough* (Red Hen, 2016), and edited *Stand Up Poetry: An Expanded Anthology* (University of Iowa, 2002), used as a text in many universities. His awards include a Whiting Writer’s Award, a Tufts Discovery Award, and a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation. An avid fly-fisherman, he lives in Los Angeles, CA.

Founded at Mercer University in 1985, the Georgia Poetry Circuit is a consortium of ten Georgia colleges and universities working together to bring three poets of national and international reputation annually to all members’ campuses, providing an important access to the literary arts for Georgia residents across the state. At each school, each Circuit poet gives a free and open reading of his/her work. Visiting poets also meet with creative writing students at each campus for workshops, talks, or extended question and answer sessions. In addition to the opportunity to hear work from diverse writers of national and international reputation, the Circuit events provide Georgia students with an immensely valuable educational opportunity for interaction with many of the best contemporary poets in the United States. Recent GPC poets include Adrian Matejka, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Sholeh Wolpe, Kevin Prufer, and Kim Addonizio.

The Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians has sponsored CSU's participation in the Georgia Poetry Circuit for 17 years, and during that time, in addition to giving readings and making appearances on the CSU campus, visiting poets have stayed at the Smith-McCullers House and met with students and faculty there.

Exciting Big Projects Underway in the McCullers World



As reported in recent issues of this newsletter, the Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians, in collaboration with the English Department of Columbus State University, the Film Production program in CSU's Department of Communication, and the CSU Schwob School of Music's Recording Studio, has embarked on the creation and production of a feature-length documentary film about Carson McCullers. No such film has ever been produced, and the opportunity to collaborate with other CSU entities to pursue such a project makes the timing seem fortunate. To date, McCullers Center Director Nick Norwood has collaborated with these entities to complete the first draft of a script for the film, submitted an NEH Development Grant (\$75,000) to further develop that script, won an internal Seed Grant (\$3,500) to produce a film trailer to enhance the project's application for a \$500,000 NEH Production

Grant, and secured signed commitments from several special consultants, including McCullers Center Founding Director Dr. Carlos Dews, who is currently at work on the collected letters of Carson McCullers and expects that collection to be published by Houghton-Mifflin in 2024, and biographer Mary Dearborn, whose life of Carson McCullers is due out from Knopf in the coming year.

Another project highlighted in these pages, an opera based on the McCullers novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, is still in development by CSU creative writing faculty member Carey Scott Wilkerson, who is writing the libretto, and composer Robert Chumbley. Workshop performances of segments of the opera were presented at the Millikin University Opera Theatre this past summer. Wilkerson and McCullers Center Director Nick Norwood are currently at work on an NEA grant to acquire the funds to stage a premier of the opera in Columbus in the near future.

Lastly, rumor is afoot that a feature-length narrative film about Carson McCullers by a major studio is in the works. Few details are available at this time, but that such a project is underway seems certain. Stay tuned for more!

Roger Williams University Library's Annual Focus to Highlight the Life and Work of Carson McCullers



The Library at Roger Williams University pursues an annual dual online/in-person exhibition under the auspices of the John Howard Birss, Jr. Endowment with the mission of honoring a single widely acclaimed author. In addition to the exhibition--with student fellows assisting with archival research and curation--the program provides for a community reading group and related activities with RWU's local public library and a keynote lecture/discussion. This year the Library staff has selected Carson McCullers for its 2022 Birss celebration. The exhibition and related events, which will be primarily virtual this year, will open in February. RWU faculty member Adam Braver, along with two student winners of the annual fellowship, came to Columbus in October to tour the Smith-McCullers House, visit the CSU Archives, and explore the city that had been the birthplace and childhood home of Carson McCullers. On March 1, RWU will host a panel discussion--available via Zoom--on the life and work of McCullers. Participants on the panel will include, along with Professor Braver, McCullers Center Founding Director and preeminent McCullers Scholar Dr. Carlos Dews, current McCullers Center Director Nick Norwood, and famed Hollywood actress and director of the McCullers short story film adaptation "A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud." Karen Allen.

Features

Recommended Reading from the McCullers Center



The McCullers Center hopes its supporters and their families are able to stay safe and well this winter. Like all seasons, winter is a great time to read and reread the works of Carson McCullers, as well as works about her. Here are three on the Christmas season we'd like to recommend:

#1 "Home for Christmas," Carson's reminiscence about childhood and the wonders of the holiday season. As is always the case in her work about being young, this piece offers more than just nostalgia. It presents a thoughtful child's contemplation of the phenomenon of time. It is available in the Library of America's two-volume boxed set *The Collected Works of Carson McCullers*.

#2 "The Discovery of Christmas," Carson's essay taking us all the way back to when the family still lived near downtown Columbus, before the move to Stark Avenue. She reveals a good deal about her relationships with her siblings Lamar, Jr., or "Budge" as she called him, and Rita, "my hated rival--the new baby sister." One of the pleasures here is that not only do we get the kind of vivid depiction of Southern family life in the early decades of the twentieth century we find in McCullers's fiction, we get a direct depiction of the family that inspired that fiction: her own. Also available in LOA's two-volume set.

#3 "A Hospital Christmas Eve," Carson's poignant short piece focusing on a young woman named Carol who is in the same physical therapy ward as the famous writer. The appeal to McCullers fans will be the window into her sense of compassion so evident in her fiction revealed here in her own private life. It also contains one of Carson's favorite literary passages--a paragraph from James Joyce's "The Dead"--which she reads aloud to Carol. "I read it as much to comfort myself as to comfort her," McCullers writes, "and the beauty of the language brought peace and loveliness to both of us on that Christmas Eve in that hospital ward." Again, you'll find it in LOA's *Collected Works*.

Archived Newsletters Now Available



All of our past newsletters are now accessible on our website at www.mccullerscenter.org! Just click on the "Newsletter" tab and then choose the issue you want to read.



From the Director

As we head into another holiday season, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their continued support. In this trying time, the McCullers Center has been able to offer a return, albeit on a limited basis, to in-person events—the David Diamond Reading & Recital Series, on which we collaborate with the CSU Department of English, the Schwob School of Music, and the Bo Bartlett Center; and to by-appointment house tours of the Smith-McCullers House in Columbus. This October I was able to visit the Carson McCullers House in Nyack for the first time since December of 2019. I have plans to travel there again in January, and, here in Columbus, the McCullers Center is currently planning to host the Carson McCullers Literary Festival on the Main Stage of CSU's Riverside Theatre Complex as a live, in-person event on Carson's 105th birthday, Saturday, February 19. Fingers crossed.

Meanwhile, I'm thrilled about the big McCullers-related projects currently in the works: an opera by Carey Scott Wilkerson and Robert Chumbley, which they have been working on for almost two years now; Carlos Dews's editing of the collected letters of Carson McCullers, due out from Houghton-Mifflin in 2024; Mary Dearborn's biography of McCullers, due out from Knopf in the coming year; a feature-length documentary film about McCullers on which the McCullers Center is collaborating with the Film Production Program in CSU's Communication Department and the Schwob School of Music's Recording Studio; and, substantial rumor has it, a big-studio production of a feature-length narrative film based on the life of Carson McCullers. These are all reasons for us to be thankful, hopeful, and happy as we head into 2022.

Happy Holidays and all best wishes to our friends and neighbors!



To keep up with the latest news and upcoming events, follow us on Facebook and Twitter, or visit us at www.mccullerscenter.org

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