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Brittany Howard will guest edit the *OA*'s 22nd Annual Southern Music Issue

A special “greatest hits” anthology, featuring the best of the best

September 11, 2020—LITTLE ROCK, AR—The *Oxford American*'s 22nd annual Southern Music Issue will function as a “greatest hits” anthology guest edited by **Brittany Howard**, the Grammy Award-winning singer and songwriter.

Published since 1997, the Music Issue is the *Oxford American*'s most acclaimed and popular production. (In 2012, *New York Times* critic Dwight Garner wrote that the *OA*'s Music Issue compilations “practically belong in the Smithsonian.”) The Music Issue has centered on a different theme, including Southern states and



Visions of the Blues, since 2009. For this year's issue, Howard will select ten essays from the *OA* archive to republish alongside a special section on icons.

As lead singer of the Alabama Shakes and as a solo artist, Howard has connected to both the past and future of the American South with poignancy and an intense attention to its complexity, finding inspiration and rich beauty in the musical traditions Southerners have made vital. For this project, her selections include a deep dive into the fan appeal of R.E.M., written by the late **Elizabeth Wurtzel**, author of *Prozac Nation*, as well as **Kiese Laymon**'s beloved essay on OutKast originally published in the *OA*'s Georgia Music Issue and the poet **Tiana Clark**'s search for Nina Simone and her own matriarchal lineage in North Carolina. In some way or another, these and all of the greatest *Oxford American* stories trouble space, place, boundaries; contemplate and complicate origins; and make music out of the starts and stops of language. “*ATLiens* made me love being black, Southern, celibate, sexy, awkward, free of drugs and alcohol, Grandmama's grandbaby, and cooler than a polar bear's toenails,” writes Laymon, in homage to OutKast's second studio album. Clark, writing about Simone, echoes him: “Nina teaches me how to carry my anger, how to pour the pain into a poem, how to enrapture an audience, how to carry myself like a Black queen even when I feel shattered, even if I have to strain for it. I've got to use it all to sing.”

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An editor's letter by Howard will open the issue: "the South has a *thang*," she writes. "The musicians and vocalists covered in this issue are all important voices in understanding what this *thang* is, and I'm honored to get to play a part."

To accompany the archive, we'll also publish more than a dozen original essays and poems from contributors including Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter **Rosanne Cash**, novelist and songwriter **Alice Randall**, and others. The new stories and poems work in concert as a series of meditations in different registers on a reimagined canon of iconic Southern musicians. Writing on Sister Rosetta Tharpe, her "dad's favorite singer," Cash remembers a particularly inspired performance from "The Godmother of Soul." Alice Randall revisits LaVern Baker's extraordinary album, *LaVern Baker Sings Bessie Smith*, and makes a case for new points on the map of Southern blues. In lieu of a single compilation, this issue will feature multiple playlists from guest curators on the most resonant, enduring Southern music, spanning many eras, genres, and regions.

The 2020 Southern Music Issue is available now for pre-order order at OxfordAmericanGoods.org. It will be on select newsstands on November 25, 2020. Or, subscribe to the *Oxford American* by visiting

ABOUT THE OXFORD AMERICAN

Founded in 1992, the *Oxford American* (OA) is a nonprofit arts organization whose mission is to explore the complexity and vitality of the American South through exceptional writing, music, and visual art. The OA is committed to the development of individuals aspiring to work in the publishing industry and to the production and presentation of multidisciplinary arts events in the Southern United States and is published in partnership with the University of Central Arkansas. For more information, visit OxfordAmerican.org.