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For Immediate Release



MARCH 24–27, 2022 • KNOXVILLE, TN • USA

**CELEBRATED WRITERS & POETS BRING  
LITERARY DIMENSION TO BIG EARS 2022**

**NIKKI GIOVANNI / PATTI SMITH / NIKKY FINNEY  
SAUL WILLIAMS / HANIF ABDURRAQIB / CORNELIUS EADY**

[www.bigearsfestival.org](http://www.bigearsfestival.org)

The **Big Ears Festival**, returning **March 24-27 to downtown Knoxville**, announces a compelling program of readings and performances by several of the most celebrated poets, essayists, and writers working today, joining an [already stacked, multidimensional lineup](#) of **incredible artists from all across the globe**. This exceptional gathering for Big Ears 2022 brings deep connections to music and art, the Black experience, and the Appalachian region where the festival is based. It complements a remarkable multi-genre program of over 150 concerts, scheduled in a dozen venues in Knoxville's historic downtown over the four-day festival weekend.

Poet, writer, commentator, activist, and educator **Nikki Giovanni** was born in Knoxville in 1943 and will return to her hometown to give a featured reading at the festival. One of America's foremost literary voices, and winner of the inaugural Rosa L. Parks Woman of Courage Award, Giovanni's work has been praised by Gwendolyn Brooks for its remarkable "energy, venturesomeness, direct honesty, and courage."

Hailed by Rolling Stone as one of our *100 Greatest Artists of All Time*, **Patti Smith** galvanized the New York punk scene in 1975 with the release of her debut album, *Horses*. She won the National Book Award in 2010 for her memoir *Just Kids*, which chronicles her friendship and artistic journey with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. Smith plays twice at the festival: a full-on rock show with her band, along with *Words & Music*, an intimate evening of readings and acoustic performance.

South Carolina native **Nikky Finney** received the National Book Award in 2011 for her poetry collection *Head Off & Split*, which Nikki Giovanni called “honest, searing, and searching.” Finney will make a pair of appearances at Big Ears: reading in collaboration with cellist / composer **Tomeka Reid** and taking part in a public conversation with singer-songwriter **Tift Merritt**.

Multi-hyphenate artist **Saul Williams** has been breaking ground since his Rick Rubin-produced debut album, *Amethyst Rock Star*, was released in 2001. Williams has been hailed as “the poet laureate of hip-hop” and has toured the world as a musician, poet, and actor. Williams will perform twice at the Big Ears with: a solo spoken word set and a presentation of his multimedia opus *MartyrLoserKing*.

2021 MacArthur Fellow **Hanif Abdurraqib** is a poet, essayist, and cultural critic whose 2021 book of essays, *A Little Devil In America*, was shortlisted for the National Book Award. Abdurraqib has written extensively about music and culture—from The Fugees and Stephen Curry to A Tribe Called Quest and Mo Sallah. Abdurraqib will give a featured reading at Big Ears.

National Book Award- and Pulitzer Prize-nominated poet and playwright **Cornelius Eady** is the co-founder of Cave Canem, an organization that supports the artistic and professional growth of African American poets. Eady is Professor in the Department of English at the University of Tennessee. At Big Ears, he performs music and reads poetry backed by his folk trio. National Book Award- and Pulitzer Prize-nominated poet and playwright Cornelius Eady is the co-founder of Cave Canem, an organization that supports the artistic and professional growth of African American poets. He performs music and poetry at Big Ears with his folk trio.

**For more information about Big Ears 2022—including ticketing options—visit [bigearsfestival.org](http://bigearsfestival.org).**

### **Big Ears Festival:**

Described as both as “one of the world’s greatest music bashes” by *The New York Times* “one of the most quietly earth-shattering, subtly luminous festivals the world over” by the *Oxford American*, Big Ears Festival has established itself as one of the most exciting and imaginative cultural gatherings in the world, bringing together a virtual who’s who of established and acclaimed iconoclasts, innovators and influencers with younger artists who are synthesizing their own experiences into fresh, new creative work. Located in the heart of downtown Knoxville—and taking place in its world-class historic theaters, excellent clubs, and unique alternative performance spaces—all within easy walking distance of one another and intermingled with superb restaurants, bars, and shops—Big Ears offers an unparalleled experience for adventurous artists and

audiences alike. While primarily focused on music, Big Ears is also developing a strong independent/experimental film and literary components, while also presenting installations, exhibitions, and interactive experiences.

The 2022 Big Ears Festival is made possible by the generous support of The Aslan Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, Visit Knoxville, Tennessee Department of Tourism, Pilot Flying J, the City of Knoxville, Knox County, the Tennessee Arts Commission, and additional sponsors, foundations, and individual donors.

Big Ears online:

<https://bigearsfestival.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/BigEarsFestival>

<https://twitter.com/bigearsfestival?lang=en>

<https://www.instagram.com/bigearsfestival/>

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