

THE NINTH ANNUAL
KINDLING ARTS FESTIVAL
JULY 23-26, 2026

utopias

DANCE THEATER MULTIMEDIA COMEDY PERFORMANCE ART



LETTER FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

Dear Festival-goers & Firestarters,

For the past nine years, Kindling Arts Festival has created a celebratory, justice-oriented, artist-centered space where Nashville creatives can share their bravest creations. This year's Festival, inspired by the theme UTOPIAS, brings together 22 radically original performances and events featuring more than 160 local performers across West Nashville, inviting artists and audiences alike to imagine what becomes possible when we dream beyond the limits of what already is.

At a time when the arts are increasingly under attack through censorship, shrinking support, and political backlash, the act of imagining a better world is both radical and necessary. Kindling stands firm in our belief that artists must be free to speak truth, challenge existing systems, and create boldly without fear. Kindling provides a fee-free festival structure that removes barriers and covers essentials like venue rental, technical labor, and marketing, allowing artists to focus on what they do best: making art that reflects our reality and invites brighter futures.

This year, we ask: What does it mean to create in the direction of a world that is not here yet? How might artists model new systems of belonging, justice, care, and joy? And what could happen if we treated utopia not simply as a distant destination, but as something we begin building together, here and now?

We invite you to explore all that Kindling Arts Festival 2026: UTOPIAS has to offer and to join us in imagining, creating, and moving toward a better world.

Happy festival season!

DANIEL JONES & JESSIKA MALONE

Co-Founders & Co-Artistic Directors

SUSTAIN THE FESTIVAL

A monthly membership sustains Kindling year-round as we develop new works from local artists and produce the annual summer Festival. Monthly members are entitled to the following perks after their first 3 months of recurring donations:

**\$5/month min
\$60+ annually:**

Name listed on website + thank yous in Festival Program.

**\$25-\$49/month
\$300+ annually**

Name listed on website, thank yous in Festival Program, special discount for Festival passes and tickets and early access to special event tickets.

**\$50-\$99/month
\$600+ annually**

All benefits of the \$25 monthly level, plus one special member event held during the summer Festival, plus a limited edition merch item at the Festival.

**\$100 or more/month
\$1,200+ annually**

Includes all \$50 level benefits, plus access to exclusive rehearsals, Premium VIP seating at shows and special events, limited-edition merch, and a members-only event during the summer Festival.

Join Kindling Arts as a member today at KindlingArts.com/Donate

MISSION

Kindling Arts develops innovative new works by Nashville's experimental artists, empowering diverse creators with the resources required to explore challenging ideas in a multidisciplinary context.

VALUES

ARTIST-CENTERED
COMMUNITY-DRIVEN
TRANSPARENT
AUTHENTICALLY-DIVERSE
JUSTICE ORIENTED
ANTI-RACIST
CROSS-POLLINATED
COLLABORATIVE

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MUST SEE

★ DANCE
‡ THEATER
☪ PERFORMANCE ART



FRI & SAT, 8:30 PM — OZ ARTS NASHVILLE

- ‡ Deliciously sweet and abundantly heartwarming, *Fairy Floss* is a whimsical new musical that reimagines the story of the creation of cotton candy as an uplifting queer romance. Director and writer Madeleine Hicks joins songwriter and musician Kara McLeland to tell the story of how two locals created a love for the ages, starring Seth Nathan Green and Andrew Newton.



THUR & FRI, 7 PM / SAT & SUN, 2 PM & 7 PM — THE CURB CENTER AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

- ★ Found Movement Group invites audiences into an immersive dance-theater experience following a young girl's dream of hosting the perfect Southern tea party. Through theatrical storytelling and contemporary choreography, *Tea* reimagines Southern traditions for a new generation.



THUR, 8 PM / SUN, 7 PM — OZ ARTS NASHVILLE

- ★ Three of Nashville's boldest choreographers premiere new works exploring personal identity through inward and outward reflection. Emma Morrison, Becca Hoback, and Asia Pyron with PYDANCE each present a distinct journey—from the effects of time on the body to transformation, freedom, and the pursuit of artistic success.



SAT, 2 PM / SUN, 4 PM — DARKHORSE THEATER

- ☪ Catch some of the Festival's most experimental and daring new works at our annual Performance Art Showcase, featuring four bold original creations exploring business, pleasure, and contemporary life. Thought-provoking, tongue-in-cheek, and occasionally glittery, this unmissable showcase offers a funhouse mirror of our moment.



SAT, 8 PM / SUN, 1 PM — DARKHORSE THEATER

- ‡ Some of Nashville's boldest emerging voices present 10-minute excerpts from five exciting new works-in-progress, offering audiences a first taste of the plays that could define tomorrow's stages. Featuring stories that span family, futurism, romance, philosophy, and movement theater, *The New Play Platter* serves up a vibrant sampling of Nashville's evolving theater community.



FRI & SAT, 6 PM — SPERO DEI CHURCH

- ‡ Nashville's newest chamber orchestra, Blueprint Ensemble, joins Nashville in Harmony to premiere *Faith*, a new opera by composer and librettist Jeremy Smith. Blending operatic drama with Southern gospel hymns and Appalachian folk, this Southern Gothic tale explores devotion, deception, and destruction through the story of a charismatic preacher whose hunger for power turns deadly.

OZ ARTS

6172 Cockrill Bend Cir.

DARKHORSE THEATER

4610 Charlotte Ave.

CURB CENTER AT VANDY

2612 Clifton Ave.

BARBERSHOP THEATER

4003 Indiana Ave.

THURSDAY

JULY 23

7pm
8pm
9pm
10pm

OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR

MILK MAKES ME SICK BUT
MY BODY NEEDS IT

TEA.
FOUND MOVEMENT GROUP

FRIDAY

JULY 24

5pm
6pm
7pm
8pm
9pm
10pm
11pm

FAIRY FLOSS

MILK MAKES ME SICK BUT
MY BODY NEEDS IT

TEA.
FOUND MOVEMENT GROUP

LATE STAGE ELISABETH

SEE YOU IN HELL

SATURDAY

JULY 25

12pm
1pm
2pm
3pm
4pm
5pm
6pm
7pm
8pm
9pm
10pm
11pm

COMMON GROUND

OFF THE CLOCK
PERFORMANCE ART

TEA.
FOUND MOVEMENT GROUP

KINTSUGI: ART OF SCARS

CHISME
FANTASMAGORICO:
POOL PARTY

THE WRECK OF THE
MANIFEST DESTINY

30 PLAYS IN 60 MINUTES

TEA.

FOUND MOVEMENT GROUP

RUINED CAUSES

NEW PLAY PLATTER

FAIRY FLOSS

LATE STAGE ELISABETH

SUNDAY

JULY 26

11am
12pm
1pm
2pm
3pm
4pm
5pm
6pm
7pm
8pm
9pm
10pm
11pm

COMMON GROUND

NEW PLAY PLATTER

TEA.
FOUND MOVEMENT GROUP

KINTSUGI: ART OF SCARS

OFF THE CLOCK
PERFORMANCE ART

THE WRECK OF THE
MANIFEST DESTINY

OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR

30 PLAYS IN 60 MINUTES

TEA.
FOUND MOVEMENT GROUP

SPERO DEI

3701 Park Ave.

GLOBAL EDUCATION

4822 Charlotte Ave. #3

BACK BAR AT VERN

210 Louise Ave.

RICHLAND PARK

4601 Charlotte Pike

THURSDAY

JULY 23

7pm
8pm
9pm
10pm

WRITER'S GYM WORKSHOP

FAITH: A NEW OPERA

FREE NASHVILLE POETRY
LIBRARY READING

THE QUEEREST
COMEDY SHOW

FRIDAY

JULY 24

5pm
6pm
7pm
8pm
9pm
10pm
11pm

EMBODIED CREATIVITY
WORKSHOP

DANCE STUDIO SHARINGS

FAITH: A NEW OPERA

THE QUEEREST
COMEDY SHOW

SATURDAY

JULY 25

12pm
1pm
2pm
3pm
4pm
5pm
6pm
7pm
8pm
9pm
10pm
11pm

COMMUNITY FROLIC

FAULTY PREMISE
SETH NATHAN GREEN
(WITH ACT BREAKS)

DANCE STUDIO SHARINGS

UNSCRIPTED: FESTIVAL REMIX

2026 FESTIVAL
WRAP PARTY

SUNDAY

JULY 26

11am
12pm
1pm
2pm
3pm
4pm
5pm
6pm
7pm
8pm
9pm
10pm
11pm

THE FEATURES

- ★ DANCE
- ‡ THEATER
- ↻ PERFORMANCE ART
- * PARTICIPATORY GATHERING
- ∞ COMEDY

COMMON GROUND

New works by DancEast, Friends Life Community, and Autumn Wegner

SAT, 4 PM / SUN, 2 PM — OZ ARTS

- ★ Showcasing unique and timely perspectives from the local community, Common Ground invites audiences to celebrate a sense of joy, resilience, and belonging. DancEast brings a group dance piece “Voices in Motion: Practicing Utopia.” Autumn Wegner’s “Kinder(Garten)” uncovers the playful and profound movements of preschool students, navigating interpersonal conflict and exploring creativity. Finally, Friends Life Community debuts a new work inspired by the Festival’s theme of “Utopias” that features original movement, spoken word, photography, and a festive “Big Book” inspired by the artwork of Paul Collins.

MILK MAKES ME SICK BUT MY BODY NEEDS IT

Hannah Dorfman

THUR & FRI, 7:30 PM — DARKHORSE THEATER

- ‡ Part “I Love Lucy,” part “The Twilight Zone,” Milk Makes Me Sick But My Body Needs It is a dreamlike story of a woman’s journey towards self-love and acceptance, complete with splendid musical numbers and a live band.

30 PLAYS IN 60 MINUTES

Where House Ensemble Theater

SAT, 5:30 PM / SUN, 7 PM — DARKHORSE THEATER

- ‡ Inspired by this year’s festival theme of Utopias, Where House Ensemble Theater will dream up 30 wildly different worlds to share in just a single hour – if they can make it in time.

SEE YOU IN HELL

Viola Vainglory & Kinetic Kristen

FRI, 10 PM — DARKHORSE THEATER

- ↻ *See You in Hell* features a mix of performances utilizing pole, hoop, burlesque, contortion, and more, with a special headlining appearance from Chicago-based “demon dandy” Willy LaQueue.

THE WRECK OF THE MANIFEST DESTINY

Clay Steakley

SAT, 4 PM / SUN, 5:30 PM — THE BARBERSHOP THEATER

- ‡ The survivors of a disastrous shipwreck find themselves between the end of one world and the beginning of another in Clay Steakley’s evocative new epic play. Embodying mythological icons, these waylaid voyagers must work together to build a new world on the bodies of dead gods.

KINTSUGI: ART OF SCARS

Cameron L. Mitchell with Thea Jones

SAT, 1 PM / SUN, 3 PM — THE BARBERSHOP THEATER

- ★‡ *Kintsugi: Art of Scars* is a choreopoem that confronts actions of abuse and moves to a place of healing. Poet and performer Cameron L. Mitchell collaborates with choreographer and dancer Thea Jones and a company of four vibrant women who tell meaningful stories discovering the beauty amidst the emotional scars.

LATE STAGE ELISABETH

Elisabeth Donaldson

FRI, 7 PM / SAT, 9:30 PM — THE BARBERSHOP THEATER

- ∞ One of Nashville’s most outrageous voices laments the inevitable process of getting older in a world that’s coming apart at the seams. Mashing up sketch comedy and a variety show format, the hilarious Elisabeth Donaldson provides her musings on these turbulent times with her singular dramatic flair.

RUINED CAUSES

Stuffed Spider

SAT, 7 PM — THE BARBERSHOP THEATER

- ↻ *Stuffed Spider* is the genre-defying project of Matt Parish, blending tape samples, fractured beats, distorted guitars, and synth textures, into immersive sonic landscapes. For the first time, the project expands from a solo endeavor into a full five-piece live band.

FAULTY PREMISE

Seth Nathan Green

SUN, 1PM — GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER (STUDIO A)

- ∞ Faulty Premise is an Actual Play show (a la Dimension 20, Critical Role, etc.) that uses a bold, original tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) created by beloved local actor and comedian Seth Nathan Green. Five of Nashville's finest improvisers sit at the game table, roll dice, and concoct wild, character-driven stories.

CHISME FANTASMAGORICO: POOL PARTY

Olivia Jimenez

SAT, 3:30 PM — DARKHORSE THEATER

- * Building on her interactive performance concept from last year's Festival, the multi-talented Olivia Jimenez invites audiences to build community with kin of all kinds, complete with kiddie pools and refreshments.

THE QUEEREST COMEDY SHOW

Griffin Bohn & Bec Groner

FRI & SAT, 9:30 PM — THE BACK BAR AT VERNA

- ∞ Fast-paced, quick-witted, and gayer than you can possibly dream, The Queerest Comedy Show is a smorgasbord of quirky improv, relatable stand-up, and outlandish drag numbers queer the intimate space. Come turn up and get your daily dose of rainbow-colored joy and have a gay old time.

EMBODIED CREATIVITY WORKSHOP

McKay House & Carley Haggerty

SAT, 12PM — GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER (STUDIO A)

- * This interactive workshop is led by McKay House and Carley Haggerty, combining improvised play and creative expression in community, originally developed with Unscripted. It blends comedy and dance improvisation to prompt you to get in touch with your creativity.

DANCE STUDIO SHARINGS

Works-in-Progress by Arelys Hernandez, Erika Hernandez & Winston Harrison, Amanda Howard with co-creators, and Kaylee Lane

SAT & SUN, 5PM — GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTER (STUDIO A)

- * Catch these highly collaborative new dance works-in-progress with styles that include comedy-movement mash-ups by Amanda Howard and collaborators, heels dance led by Arelys Hernandez, contemporary choreo by Kaylee Lane, and global forms in Erika Hernandez's collaboration with musician Winston Harrison.

COMMUNITY FROLIC: AN OUTDOOR WORKSHOP

Amanda Cantrell Roche

SUN, 11AM — RICHLAND PARK

- * Amanda Cantrell Roche leads this fully participatory, outdoor movement workshop, prompting participants to consider and express what feelings, concepts, and attributes they would include when building a utopic world.

UNSCRIPTED: FESTIVAL REMIX

SUN, 6:30 PM — THE BACK BAR AT VERNA

- ∞ Our friends at Unscripted Improv are putting together the perfect cherry-on-top to your 2026 Festival experience: a hilarious, wild, and star-studded night including a mix of improvised acts, comedic sketches, and maybe even a lively musical number or two thrown in!

WRITER'S GYM WORKSHOP + FREE NASHVILLE POETRY LIBRARY READING

Simba Alik + Free Nashville Poetry Library Reading: Utopics

WORKSHOP WITH SIMBA ALIK: SUN, 5 PM / READING: 6:30 PM — THE BACK BAR AT VERNA

- * A writing workshop led by poet Simba Alik (Genderbend: Poetry into Film Collaborations, The Naughty Tree), followed by an engaging reading from the Free Nashville Poetry Library by a host of talented writers and spoken word artists including Simba, Simp Goddess, and more.



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Thank you to the following supporters who keep the Kindling flame alive with financial support. Giving levels reflect donations received between July 15, 2025 and July 15, 2026.

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