

OXFORD AMERICAN

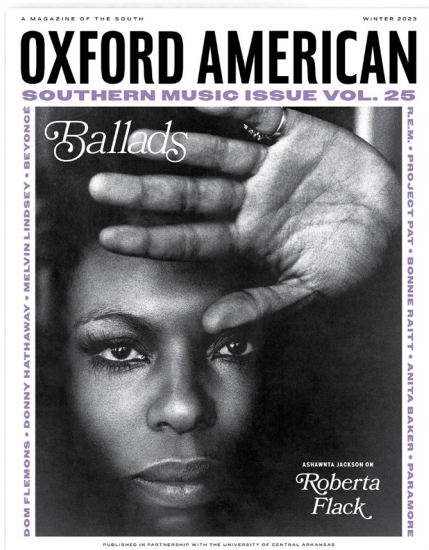
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CONTACT: **Kelsey White** kwhite@oxfordamerican.org 501-374-0000

Introducing the *Oxford American's* Twenty-Fifth Music Issue: Ballads

With an up-close portrait of the inimitable Roberta Flack on the cover; an original sampler CD featuring tracks by R.E.M., Otis Redding, and LeAnn Rimes; a brand-new traditional ballad by “The American Songster” Dom Flemons; and contributions from established and emerging writers and visual artists, this certain-to-be-iconic magazine hits newsstands Dec. 5.

November 1, 2023—CONWAY, AR—The *Oxford American's* 25th annual Southern Music Issue celebrates the dramatic range of the ballad, tracing the form's origins from sung stories to soul-stirring slow songs.



The 25th-anniversary edition will include our always-anticipated CD sampler, a trademark of *OA* music issues. Eighteen carefully curated tracks celebrate the sweeping breadth of traditions, influences, and innovations that ballads can show us. The songs include a gorgeous duet by cover artist **Roberta Flack** and **Donny Hathaway**. Grammy-awarded **Dom Flemons** debuts an exclusive, original ballad written especially for this issue. Other artists include **Otis Redding**, **LeAnn Rimes**, **Christopher Cross**, and more. This CD is sure to live up to *New York Times* critic Dwight Garner's assertion that the *OA's* compilations "practically belong in the Smithsonian." Liner notes for each track are included, along with a Spotify playlist for those who prefer streaming. The CD cover features the beautiful work of painter **Judy Koo**.

We continue the spirit of last year's star-studded cover by featuring Roberta Flack, the singer and songwriter who was born in Black Mountain, North Carolina and who won back-to-back Grammys for Record of the Year. Flack arranged and interpreted timeless and intimate ballads such as "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" and "Killing Me Softly with His Song." In this issue, first-time *OA* contributor **Ashawnta Jackson** writes that Flack's beloved 1972 collaboration with Donny Hathaway produced something cosmic: "something so bright, so beautiful, so heavy in its significance, that even now, some fifty years later, all

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we can do is marvel at its weight and let its brightness cover us... This wasn't just an album for them, this was an album for us."

Motifs of devotion and daydreams, of antiheroes and broken hearts appear throughout the edition. The 2023 Ballads Issue features an impressive lineup of contributors: journalist and Luther Vandross biographer **Craig Seymour** explains how Melvin Lindsey's perennially influential Quiet Storm radio show connected with queer listeners; previous music issue contributor **Lauren Du Graf** slows down to the tempo of Shirley Horn's music and life; and acclaimed poet, author, and academic, **Ed Pavlić**, reaches back to the mid-'80s and relives the memory of an important friendship made to the croons of Anita Baker. For the songbook, we've taken a cue from the traditional thirty-two-bar form and named this section the "Middle Eight": a collection of eight short pieces covering artists ranging from Aretha Franklin to Project Pat to Paramore. Like the climactic section of a great ballad, these pieces open our eyes, expand our understanding, and take our emotions to new heights. Meanwhile, first-time contributor **Gaby Wilson** connects Filipino and American history, karaoke, and Beyoncé—and sings for us in the process. **David Ramsey** dives deep into the tangled history of a traditional murder ballad, while **Benjamin Hedin** searches for R.E.M.'s ineffable coolness in Athens, Georgia.

Published since 1997, the music issue is the *Oxford American's* most acclaimed and popular production. Since 2009, the music issue has centered on a different theme, including Southern states, Visions of the Blues, and Country Roots.

The 2023 Southern Music Issue is available now for pre-order at OxfordAmericanGoods.org.

It will be on select newsstands on December 5, 2023. Or, subscribe to the *Oxford American* by visiting OxfordAmerican.org/subscribe. For bulk orders, contact info@oxfordamerican.org or 501-374-0000

ABOUT THE OXFORD AMERICAN

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 primary medium through which the *OA* accomplishes this mission is the quarterly publication of the *Oxford American* literary magazine. The *OA* values diverse perspectives and encourages artists across disciplines to present work that creates a deeper understanding of the South. It has won four National Magazine Awards—including the 2016 Award for General Excellence in the category of Literature, Science and Politics—and other high honors since it began publication in 1992. The magazine has featured the original work of such literary powerhouses as Charles Portis, Roy Blount, Jr., ZZ Packer, Donald Harington, Donna Tartt, Ernest J. Gaines, and many other distinguished authors, while also discovering and launching the most promising writers in the region. The *OA* has also published previously unseen work by such Southern masters as William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Walker Percy, James Agee, Zora Neale Hurston, James Dickey, and Carson McCullers, to name just a handful. The *Oxford American* is published in partnership with the University of Central Arkansas. For more information, visit OxfordAmerican.org.