Before She Was Nina Simone, Tryon Invested in Eunice Waymon. Now, the North Carolina Community Is Doing It Once Again

The Nina Simone and Samuel Waymon Music Scholarship Fund brings musicians, visual artists and community together to create opportunities for a new generation.



Nina Simone in Concert. Credits: Tom-Copi-Michael-Ochs-Archives Getty-Images

TRYON, NC, UNITED STATES, September 15, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Before the world knew Nina Simone, Tryon knew Eunice Waymon (1933 - 2003). She was a remarkably gifted young pianist whose talent was evident early — and whose community helped make continued musical education possible.

Muriel Mazzanovich, the highly regarded piano teacher who taught both Eunice and her younger brother Samuel, recognized that talent and helped establish the Eunice Waymon Fund.

> Anything human can be felt through music."
>
> *Eunice Waymon (Nina Simone)*

Money raised through performances and community support helped Eunice continue her education, including attending Allen High School for Girls – a private school in Asheville for African-American students - and later studying at the Juilliard School in New York – all against the backdrop of a socially segregated, economically stratified early 1950's southern society, where clear lines were drawn between 'the haves' and 'the have-nots'.

Years later, Samuel Waymon would study music at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee and at Levitan Business College in Philadelphia.

Eunice Waymon would become Nina Simone ('The High Priestess of Soul') — an internationally

influential pianist, singer, composer, social activist and artist whose work continues to reach audiences around the world.

Samuel Waymon would find success as an award-winning composer, performer, actor and lecturer. His credits include films such as: Ganja & Hess (1973), Just Crazy About Horses (1978), Personal Problems (1980), Weeds (1987), Philadelphia (1993) and the Last Disintegrated School (2019).

More than seven decades after the community first supported Eunice Waymon, something with a remarkable historical echo is happening in Tryon. The Nina Simone and Samuel Waymon Music Scholarship Fund has been launched by Dr. Samuel Waymon (aka 'Magic Man') with assistance from the AFRICAN CONNECTIONS Research and Education Fund, Inc. (ACREF), to support young musicians of all backgrounds from throughout the Southeastern United States. On Saturday, October 3, internationally renowned pianist, conductor, and educator Awadagin Pratt will perform a special benefit recital at the Tryon Fine Arts Center in support of the Fund.

October 3rd Benefit Recital

Awadagin Pratt will perform Saturday, October 3, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. on the Main Stage at the Tryon Fine Arts Center. The internationally known pianist, conductor and educator is Professor of Piano at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the Principal Conductor of the Miami Valley Symphony Orchestra in Dayton, Ohio. Pratt is also the driving force behind the Nina Simone Piano Competition staged in collaboration with the Art of the Piano Festival, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

What Does Music Look Like?

Nina Simone once spoke about music as something far greater than sound. In an interview preserved in her official historical archive, she described music as a way to feel the vibrations of people throughout the world and said that through music, a person could experience sadness, joy, love, learning — even color.

That idea has an unexpected visual counterpart in a vivid photographic and digitally transformed artwork created by Tryon photographer and visual artist Carri Bass featuring Miss Simone's brother, Samuel Waymon (now 82), at the piano.

It is more than a conventional portrait. The musician, grand piano, saturated color and sense of movement seem to occupy the same energetic space. The image suggests something difficult to capture in a still photograph: not simply what a musician looks like while playing, but what music itself might look — and feel — like.

Posters of this art will be available to Music Scholarship Fund donors.

Tickets to the concert are available on the Tryon Fine Arts Center website at: https://tinyurl.com/2hm58am4

More information about the Scholarship Fund can be found at: https://africanconnections.com/simone_waymon.html.

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Editors Please Note:

The venue for Awadagin Pratt's Tryon recital, the Tryon Fine Arts Center, sits immediately to the west of the historic Lanier Library, one of but a handful of membership libraries still open in the United States.

Named in honor of Sidney Lanier, the 'Poet of the Confederacy', the Lanier Library was the site of a memorable Eunice Waymon recital (circa 1944).

As has been widely reported in various journals, the young Miss Waymon refused to perform in front of an otherwise all-white audience until her parents were returned to their seats in the front row - having been moved to the rear to accommodate white patrons.

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