

CULTURE, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

In dark days, artists can help what ails you



by **Maura Hogan**
February 20, 2026



Percussionist Gino Castillo incorporated therapeutic techniques into a concert at the Gibbes Museum of Art after a training workshop in New York | Ana Jaramillo

It's not you. And it's not just the slog of February's abbreviated daylight. Accelerated

doomscrolling, pervasive financial uncertainty and the relentless bludgeon of bad behavior running rampant the world over is taking its toll on our collective psyche.

But rest assured: Charleston artists are increasingly seeking ways to allay this community's unease by honing their sonic skills to create positive vibrations or shining comforting light.

Let there be light

On Feb. 13 at Redux Contemporary Art Center, arts patrons toasted the opening of *Hirona Matsuda: Warm Light*, which runs through March 14.

They wended through a series of muslin panels and slivers of stained wood suspended from the ceiling and positioned around a muslin-wrapped box glowing with a warm light. As the afternoon sun gave way to twilight, the box glowed all the more, casting subtle shadows on the panels and walls.

Matsuda, who has explored how light interacts with sculpture, shifted for this work to create a light source, making it the focal point of the installation. This evolved from a search for things that gave her a sense of wellbeing and comfort and landing on warm, soft light.

“I noticed that my days were filled with harsh blue light emitted from overhead fixtures and screens. Only switching all that off and basking in the glow of a candle or lamp light let my mind and body relax.”

For the artist, light in the form of hope or community has become increasingly necessary.

“There is so much uncertain and anxious energy everywhere that I wanted to create a public space that would let people gather and feel safe or calm.”

February gallery gatherings

At Matsuda's exhibition, *Buff Ross*, Redux's executive director, said it is hoping to further past partnerships with MUSC's Arts in Healing program, a research-driven focus on the aesthetic environment of its hospitals and public spaces.

Recently Drummond Studio Gallery has done

so as well, programming sound baths in its East Side space. On Feb. 11, Esprit Orees, a holistic bodyworker, stretch therapist and sound bath artist, gently led participants on yoga mats to settle in, lulling them to sleep. Using a variety of crystal singing bowls, rain sticks, chimes and brass bowls to create a grounding, nourishing and blissful experience for participants.

On the gallery walls surrounding them, the exhibition *Still Waters Run Deep* resonated, too. The mental health challenges that artist Cameron Lewis has experienced in his own family has prompted him to donate a portion of the sales to mental health services. Works are on view during a closing 6 p.m. reception on Feb. 24 at 12 Line St.



Drummond Studio Gallery programs sound baths in its East Side space, guiding guests to restful sleep | Maura Hogan

Earlier sonic solace

On Dec. 18 in the throes of the harried Charleston holiday season, a few Charlestonians looked up from gift lists and seasonal festivities to take pause.

Seated in spaced chairs that each glowed from a candle placed underneath it, they settled into the saffron-hued Spoleto Festival USA headquarters. Lights dimmed and room stilled, the space was soon transformed.

Acclaimed operatic singer Davóne Tines joined with flutist and sound healing practitioner Dijji Kay and pianist and composer John Bitoy to perform works from a variety of genres including chamber music, Gregorian chants and jazz improvisations. At times, Tines walked in between the chairs, his voice resonating within each person's body.

The performance illustrated how music can be reframed as a tool for healing, presented by the non-profit Foundation for Spirituality and the Arts (FSA).

“I was thrilled that he was interested in creating a new work, *RITUAL*, for Charleston that was inspired by that one,” said FSA Executive Director Tyler Rollins, who invited Tines. “People seemed deeply affected, and some were moved to tears.”

Arts as a survival strategy

This nexus of art and healing happens to be a tale as old as time.

Lexi Morgan, a board certified art therapist and owner of Haven Healing Art Therapy, explained that “art has been our common language, regulation and connection since the dawn of time. It is how we as humans endure.”

Across human history, she said, rhythmic movement, image making, music and ritual helped regulate emotion, strengthen attachment and create meaning in the face of threat. Morgan cites anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake, who argues that humans are biologically wired for artmaking — not as a luxury but as a survival strategy.

On April 29, she will discuss somatic art therapy, or healing trauma and pain through art, at TedXCharleston at the Charleston Music Hall.

Percussive practice

Percussionist Gino Castillo is similarly drawn to healing in his music-making.

After returning from a New York training workshop to play the gong, he spontaneously incorporated therapeutic techniques into a concert at the Gibbes Museum of Art, shifting the show into a healing session.

“I knew then that was my mission with sound,” said Castillo, who had used this in his own battle with cancer to overcome side effects of medication.

His practice now involves mixing modalities and working with guided voice stimulation to calm the nervous system, then using professionally recorded, scientifically prepared binaural beats with headphones. He uses gong vibrations as well as a bath of pulse electromagnetic frequencies from a Quantum frequency generator. The effects calm the nervous system, relax the mind and body and mitigate stress.

In addition to his performing, Castillo conducts Energy Healing Sessions around Charleston and in his own studio, offering group sessions twice a month and one on one private sessions, available via his Energy Healing Charleston accounts on Facebook and Instagram.□

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