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Grant helps diverse local artists find their common thread

By Bryan Cooper Special to the Gazette-Mail

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John Ingram, left, and Morgan Morrison of Rock City Bakery, record a segment of "The Common Thread" for an upcoming show.

CHARLESTON CREATIVITY CONNECTIONS | Courtesy photo

After years of touring as a musician and meeting other artists with their own unique styles across the country, Charleston native and resident John Ingram began to ponder: "What is it that connects artists from different disciplines and mediums? What is it that inspires them and others to create?"

A bass player for Landau Eugene Murphy Jr., Bob Thompson, Fletcher's Grove, Johnny Staats and many others, John is also an assistant producer of Mountain Stage. He naturally thought the best place to explore these questions would be a show. He imagined a show that would allow viewers to learn about local artists, dive into their creative process and perhaps discover their own sense of creativity. Thanks to the Charleston Creativity Connections mini-grant program, this show, "The Common Thread," will soon be premiering on your screens.

John partnered with a local filmmaker, Jason Adams, to help bring the show to life. Adams' work has taken him many different places, from the jungles of Belize to Munich, Germany, where he has met and worked with a wide variety of people.

"But the artists always seem to have a common drive. A common angst. A common joy. There is something connective about the people who dare to create and make things" said Adams. "When John asked me to help explore that, I was all in."

"The Common Thread" will feature a short-form documentary of each artist directed by Adams, followed by a second segment which will be a talk-show-style conversation filmed at The Clay Center. In the second segment, guests sit down with Ingram to deconstruct their process and journey of creativity to help find the common thread that connects all art. Ingram hopes that the show will inspire others to create, chase their passions and take the risk required to make something new.

The show has an initial pilot season of three episodes. The episodes feature musician Walter Debar, culinary artist Morgan Morrison (Rock City Cake Company and the soon-to-open Golden Bagel Co.) and actor Ted Brightwell (drag queen persona Vicki Williams). Adams and Ingram hope to find sponsors and patrons for the second season of "The Common Thread."

"We are very excited to bring this show to life and look forward to connecting artists in Charleston and beyond to their community," they said.

Once the show goes live, viewers will be able to go to CommonThreadShow.com to see the episodes. For more information, visit commonthreadshow.com.

Ingram sat down with Charleston Creativity Connections to answer a couple of questions:

What common thread have you found with yourself and the artists so far?

"Too many to list here! However, one of my favorite themes we've encountered is the idea that you must take risk. It seems like a simple-enough concept, but the reality is we live in a time where commercialism and critical 'success' seem to take precedent over originality and true self-expression. Among the first three guests in this pilot season, the topic of risk-taking has come up naturally in conversation. That's the kind of thing director Jason Adams and I were aiming for throughout this process ... open up a dialogue and see what we can unearth. It's really exciting to see it happen before our eyes, and I think people are going to feel that same excitement when they watch the show too."

What do non-artists have to learn from this series?

"When non-artists watch, I think they are going to see that artists and creators do their jobs a lot like anyone does. There's a process. They're paying dues. Their talent isn't baked in, but rather cultivated over the course of time and with a lot of hard work. Just like any job really. Maybe folks will feel compelled to try their hand at something creative because they realized that they have more in common with these artists than they would have originally thought. I believe the best art imitates life and shows us things about ourselves that we may have had trouble seeing otherwise. My hope is that artists and non-artists alike will realize that we're not all that different from one another. That maybe there's some kind of common thread that is connecting us all."

Charleston Creativity Connections' Mini-Grant program is designed to help individual artists, community-based organizations and businesses bring more art to the Greater Kanawha Valley through paying opportunities for local artists. The mini-grants are available for visual, music, performing, literary and culinary arts. And the application process is short and simple. If you have an idea for such a project, you can apply for a mini-grant up to \$5,000 at www.getcreative.wv.com/opportunities.

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