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# Region's musical traditions focus of future museum exhibit

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## MORE INFORMATION



Kentucky Museum exhibit to honor Jonesville legacy

Musicians – from Ragtime artist Ernest Hogan and "Newgrass" pioneer Sam Bush to homegrown hip-hop group Nappy Roots and rock band Cage the Elephant – have provided the soundtrack for southcentral Kentucky for more than a century.

And now those pickers, crooners and rappers will be honored in an upcoming Kentucky Museum exhibit to be called "Sonic Landscape."

Paying homage to the Bowling Green area's rich tradition of musicians and musical venues, the exhibit is scheduled to open in the fall of 2024 in the first-floor space now occupied by an exhibit about the art and science of Mammoth Cave.

"Sonic Landscape," a partnership between the Kentucky Museum and the Kentucky Folklife Program at Western Kentucky University, was aided last month when Warren Fiscal Court approved a request for a grant from the Special Tourism Projects Fund of the Bowling Green Area Convention & Visitors Bureau.

That \$75,000 grant will enable the museum to put together the displays, including audio and video productions, that will make up the exhibit.

"This funding will help us create an exhibit that honors the musicians themselves," said Brent Bjorkman, director of the Kentucky Museum.

"We want it to be an interactive exhibit, something local people will be proud of and something that will bring visitors here.

"We're proud of our musical tradition."

That tradition has a long history, dating back to Bowling Green native Hogan (who, in 1907, became the first African-American entertainer to

produce and star in a Broadway show) and continuing through the more-recent success of local recording artists like Bush, the Kentucky Headhunters and Cage the Elephant.

The museum exhibit will honor those various artists and their disparate genres through recorded interviews, displays of musical instruments and audio and video recordings. It will also recognize the role played by local venues like the Quonset Hut, where such big names as Chuck Berry and Ray Charles once performed.



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"The Kentucky Folklife Program has been doing interviews that celebrate the musical legacy of southcentral Kentucky," Bjorkman said. "Being this close to Nashville, we have this unique musical tradition.

"We've created a website ([skymusicexhibit.org](http://skymusicexhibit.org)) that this exhibit will be based on. That's getting people very excited about how we can celebrate our musical heritage."

Among those who are excited is Bowling Green Area Convention & Visitors Bureau Executive Director Sherry Murphy, who sees the exhibit as a great way to invest the money in the Special Tourism Projects Fund that utilizes some of the lodging taxes collected at local hotels.

"Our musical history alone warrants such an exhibit," Murphy said. "Most people don't realize how deep those roots run in Bowling Green."

Murphy explained that the special fund has been in place since 2006 and has pumped more than \$1 million into such local tourist-related venues as Aviation Heritage Park, Lost River Cave, the National Corvette Museum and the Historic Railpark and Train Museum.

The grant is particularly welcome at the Kentucky Museum, which has seen its funding for exhibits dwindle in recent years. WKU's contribution to the museum has fallen from \$568,916 in the 2016-17 fiscal year to \$495,691 in the current fiscal year.

Thanks largely to the grant funding, Kentucky Museum staff and volunteers will be putting together the "Sonic Landscape" exhibit throughout much of the 2024 calendar year.

Bjorkman said he hopes to have several live events in conjunction with the exhibit, which he says will

be on display "for a number of years."

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