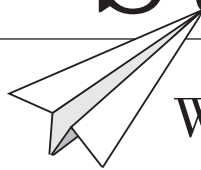


steppin' out



We Recommend: Culture, News + Reviews

Pinned Between Glory and Grit

By Kimberly Ham

PHOTO: DANIEL DENT
Alison Lyn Miller



Professional wrestling has long been one of America's most misunderstood art forms — equal parts spectacle, sport, and storytelling. Author and journalist Alison Lyn Miller brings that complexity to *Novel* in conversation with Rhodes College professor Charles L. Hughes to celebrate the release of her debut book, *Rough House: A Father, a Son, and the Pursuit of Pro Wrestling Glory*.

Miller's deeply reported narrative centers on Hunter James, a Georgia teenager determined to make it to World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and finish what his father, Billy Ray, started decades earlier. What unfolds is more than a backstage look at indie wrestling's bruising circuits — it's an intimate portrait of inheritance, masculinity, and the complicated love between a father who knows the ring's grip and a son who can't resist it.

The project began in 2019 with a single interview. A third-generation wrestling fan told Miller that as a child he found comfort in knowing that every Saturday night, wrestling would be there — a world where “the lines are very clear: you know who the bad guy is.” That clarity, Miller realized, offered something deeper than escapism. It was community, catharsis, and connection.

Embedding herself in Georgia's independent wrestling scene — in Boys & Girls Clubs, VFW halls, and pop-up venues — Miller found a culture built on trust. Wrestlers trade blows in the ring and share meals at Waffle House afterward. Families fill the bleachers. Kids scream for heroes and heckle villains. “It's like church fellowship meets little league,” she says. Far from the high-production polish of WWE, indie wrestling feels like immersive theater: you might have to move if a body tumbles your way.

In Memphis, of course, wrestling isn't niche — it's legacy. From Sputnik Monroe's role in desegregating arenas in the 1950s to Jerry Lawler's legendary feud with Andy Kaufman, the city is sacred ground. Hughes, author of *Country Soul* and at work on a history of professional wrestling and racial politics, will bring historical depth to a conversation that promises to explore how wrestling mirrors America — its pageantry, its inequities, and its ongoing evolution.

For readers who think wrestling is “fake,” *Rough House* offers a corrective. The outcomes may be scripted, but the sweat, soreness, and sacrifice are real. Miller's ringside reporting captures young men chasing glory, pushing their bodies, and using the ring to say what words can't.

Whether you're a lifelong fan or a skeptic, this event will propel you to read Miller's book and search for the nearest indie wrestling show — all while cheering a little louder. ■

ALISON LYN MILLER WITH CHARLES L. HUGHES: *ROUGH HOUSE*, NOVEL, 387 PERKINS EXT., MEMPHIS, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 6 P.M.

VARIOUS DAYS & TIMES February 19th - 25th

Art and Apéritifs: Justin Williams Discusses the Memphis Creative Community

Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, 1934 Poplar Avenue, Sunday, February 22, 2-4 p.m.

Memphis painter and singer-songwriter Justin Williams takes the mic (figuratively) for a laid-back but lively dive into the city's DIY creative scene — the late nights, the shared stages, the makeshift studios, and the magic that happens when artists show up for each other.

Drawing from his recent solo exhibit, “STAGE,” Williams reflects on his shift from music obsessive to visual storyteller, capturing performers not just in the spotlight, but in the in-between moments that make this city hum.

This special edition of Art & Apéritifs pairs thoughtful conversation with a signature

cocktail, inviting you to slow down, sip, and consider why right now feels electric for local creatives — and who's helping spark it. Sponsored by Art Now Collective.

Harlem Nights: Remembering the Harlem Renaissance

Cossitt Library, 33 S. Front Street, Wednesday, February 25, 6-7:30 p.m.

Step back into the swing and swagger of the 1920s at Cossitt Library's Harlem Nights, an evening celebrating the art, intellect, and undeniable cool of the Harlem Renaissance. The program tips its hat to the writers, musicians, thinkers, and tastemakers who transformed Harlem into the epicenter of American culture.

Expect live performances, lively discussion, and plenty of vintage flair. Guests are encouraged to dress the part — think sharp suits, flapper

fringe, and all the elegance and sophistication of uptown New York in its heyday. Light refreshments will be served.

The Sound of Music

Orpheum Theatre, 203 South Main Street, February 17-22

This critically acclaimed North American tour brings the cherished musical to stages across the country to teach a new generation to sing.

For 65 years, *The Sound of Music* has been one of our favorite things — and this acclaimed tour brings the von Trapps' hills to life for a new generation. Directed by three-time Tony winner Jack O'Brien (*Hairspray*), this lush revival celebrates love, courage, and unforgettable songs like “Do-Re-Mi” and “Edelweiss.” Perfect for longtime fans or first-timers (ages 4+), it's a story that soars.