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Nina Simone Memorialized in North Carolina Hometown

Nina Simone left her hometown of Tryon, N.C., relatively early in life. Looking back, the singer/pianist's caustic rebukes of American social ills, especially Southern racism, were widely heard. Still, Simone's daughter, singer Lisa "Simone" Kelly, couldn't be more elated about North Carolina's tribute to her mother's memory, which includes a scholarship, music festival and statue.

"Imagine your mom and the town where she was raised raising her name up in so many wonderful ways," Kelly said. "It's pure joy. She was able to excel in so many different areas in spite of the times and the more I immerse myself in my mother's world, the more I understand her."

Crys Armbrust, a professor of British literature, began planning the Eunice Waymon-Nina Simone Memorial Project (NSP) in 2007 (Waymon was Simone's birth name). That year, the North Carolina plastics recycling company EcoResin donated \$25,000 for the NSP scholarship fund, which selected its first winner this spring. Megan Elizabeth Miller will use the funds as a graduate student in classics at Oxford University this fall.

"Mom was all about education, graduated valedictorian, skipped grades," Kelly said. "It makes sense that the project will be about edu-

cating youths of all races."

Earlier this year, work began on the NSP-commissioned life-size bronze sculpture of Simone as well as the development of *Ninafest*, an international music festival that will be held in Tryon in 2010.

"It's a trans-world music festival because Nina's catalog does the same thing," Armbrust said. "The industry could never quite figure out where to put her. As soon as you had a handle on her, she threw you a curve."

Armbrust and Kelly are also aware that Simone's intelligence and sensitivity as an artist contributed to the resentment she felt towards the South during the civil rights movement, which she vividly expressed in her song "Mississippi Goddam." Armbrust says that, privately, her feelings were complex.

"She had an amazing intellectual acumen, and the realizations she had about the disparities of race and class were a burden she carried throughout her life," Armbrust said. "It's not as if she didn't connect to North Carolina. Oftentimes, she came without telling anyone. A door would open and she'd walk in—and that must have been quite surprising for many of her relatives."

Those relatives are also sure to respond to



Zenos Frudakis' sculpture of Simone, which will be on public display in downtown Tryon. Kelly, who recorded a tribute to her mother last year, *Simone On Simone* (Koch), served as the statue's life model.

"I have my mother's physique," Kelly said. "Having seen my mom's head on top of my body takes *Simone On Simone* to another whole level. It's beyond anything I could have imagined happening with my life." —Aaron Cohen

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