




TED^xCharleston

x = independently organized TED event

SYMPHONY



April 29, 2026 | Charleston, SC
tedxcharleston.org



Welcome to the 2026
Edition of TEDxCharleston.

This year's theme is **Symphony**.



At TEDxCharleston, we always say: Come to learn, leave inspired. And be prepared to make a difference.

This year, under the theme of Symphony, we present a mix of many voices, ideas, and points of view that can impact our society. It celebrates the blending and bountiful – yet mysterious – forces of nature, art, culture, innovation, history and technology with human minds. Symphony recognizes that great things are often not accomplished alone. Our 2026 TEDx cohort represents a cross section of voices, sounds, and experiences that create a masterpiece of ideas.

Today, you'll hear a melodious mix of words that we hope open your mind to new ideas and new ways to impact change for good. TEDx is a wonderful and impactful platform that's built on the foundation of incredible thoughts, experiences, accomplishments and hopes of the speakers you will see today. From this platform, great things can emerge if you're willing to take the next step. Enjoy the event, amplify what you hear, and be inspired to become a TEDx speaker and change agent yourself.

Mike Sottak
Organizer & Curator
TEDxCharleston

In remembrance

Renee Kahn 1945 - 2025



We dedicate the 2026 TEDxCharleston event to the memory of Renee Kahn, a longtime and beloved member of our TEDx family. A dedicated coach, she inspired and nurtured so many of the outstanding speakers that have

graced our stage in recent years. Renee was also a gifted artist and we honor her partly through an event to be held in June to showcase her work and make it available to the community who loved her.

We thank Sewell, Renee's husband, for his years of dedicated service to TEDx and we pay tribute to the strong bond that represented their more than fifty years of marriage. Together, they touched all of us in the TEDx family as well as countless others in all the local communities and organizations they participated in, and their friends and families everywhere.

Please join us in honoring Renee today, in June at her event, and through her legacy of beautiful artwork that she left behind.

[Renee Kahn Memorial Charity Retrospective](#)

June 21-28, 2026

KKBE Social Hall 90 Hasell Street,
Charleston, SC

All proceeds benefit KKBE, ISEA
and TEDxCharleston

reneekahnfineart.com



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Thank you to our Sponsors

We are extremely grateful for our generous sponsors who make TEDxCharleston a success. None of this is possible without the people and organizations who commit their expertise, support and resources. When you partner with TEDxCharleston, you become part of a global force that delivers transformative ideas and inspired actions.

If you would like to learn more about **becoming a sponsor** for the next TEDxCharleston, please visit our website at: tedxcharleston.org

Presenting Sponsors



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2026 Program at a Glance

6:00 pm *Doors Open*

6:15 pm *Session 1*

7:30 pm *Intermission Snacks by Shokudo*



7:53 pm *Session 2*

9:16 pm *Watoto Charleston Ensemble*

9:30 pm *After Party at the Cocktail Club*



A few reminders

- Remember to set your phone to silent – but please feel free to share your experience on social media.
- No video recording is allowed in the theater.
- Only leave your seat during designated breaks and return to your seat promptly. Due to filming, if you are late, you will not be able to return to your seat until the session is finished.

Join the @TEDxCharleston
conversation #TEDxCharleston

f  in

MCs



Zandrina Dunning
MC

Zandrina is a powerhouse vocalist, producer, and cultural advocate whose dynamic career spans over two decades. No stranger to Charleston music lovers, she is the Executive Artistic Director of The ZD Experience, a multifaceted platform that merges soulful performances with thought-provoking conversations. She hosts the live talk show and podcast on Ohm Radio (96.3FM), which has captivated audiences with its blend of music and meaningful dialogue..



Stephen Washington
MC

Stephen is a gifted pianist, producer, and visionary from Charleston whose music transcends genres, blending Gospel, Country, Hip Hop, and '80s Rock. As Creative Director for The ZD Experience, he shapes the musical direction and enhances the brand's overall presence. His creative approach amplifies the experience, bringing audiences closer to the music and its powerful storytelling.

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Stage Artist



Christine D. Johnson
Art Journey to Inner Peace

Christine D. Johnson is a South Carolina based mixed media abstract painter, poet, and author who is passionate about creating introspective art for wellness. Her paintings, book, and workshops inspire and guide others on a journey

toward inner peace. Through her art, Christine reflects values such as authenticity, humility, patience, and resilience.

Session 1



Guang Ming Whitley
Can Ancient Chinese Tradition Solve A Modern Postpartum Crisis?

What if the Chinese tradition of *zuo yuezi*, or “sitting the month,” could transform maternal health in America? Guang Ming Whitley wrote

the first English-language guide to this ancient practice and knows firsthand that it can strengthen not only mothers, but also their families and communities.



Leonardo Ferreira
Curiosity Is The Cure: What If We Could End Type 1 Diabetes?

Is there a new way to treat type 1 diabetes? MUSC’s Dr. Leonardo Ferreira explores the possibility that an off-the-shelf therapy pairing

stem cell-derived insulin-producing beta cells with regulatory immune cells designed to protect them could move us closer to a cure.



Brian Kendall & Brittany Bankhead
When Seconds Matter: How to Communicate Under Pressure

When someone’s life hangs by a thread, communication has to be crystal clear and roles must be defined. Drs. Brian Kendall (an emergency physician at HCA Trident Medical Center) and Brittany Bankhead (a trauma surgeon at MUSC) - and a married couple - are convinced that the skills they’ve learned in the

hospital trauma center can transform the way we connect in our homes, workplaces, and relationships.



Grayson Rhea
Yo Yo Champion

At just nine years old, Grayson Rhea is redefining what’s possible, one yo-yo throw at a time. He picked up a yo-yo for the first time in June 2024, and just a year later became the 2025 U.S. National Yo-

Yo Champion (9 & Under) and ranked 12th in the world in the Junior 16 & Under Division. A proud member of Team Spotlight, Grayson brings creativity, focus, and joy to every performance.

Session 1



Megan Manigault
*The Power of Voices:
Activating Communities to
Create Safe Spaces*

This international nonprofit founder and 7-time author is dedicated to advancing healing-centered, survivor-led innovation. A survivor of childhood sexual assault and sex trafficking, she understands the cost of silence firsthand. Through her organization, I AM VOICES, Megan builds housing and holistic support systems for women and youth survivors driven by her belief that justice requires more than awareness — it demands communities that listen, invest, and evolve. communities.



JT White
*AI Fork In The Road -
Choosing a Human Future*

Who with children in this digital age isn't concerned of the effects it has on humanity and especially our children? John White says in the age of AI, our greatest act of parenting isn't controlling technology, it's teaching our children how to stay human while leading it.

> **Intermission Break:** 7:30 - 7:50 pm



Session 2



Matthew Dicks
Live On Your Own Clock

Matthew Dicks is an internationally bestselling author, award-winning teacher, and one of the most accomplished storytellers in the world, a 62-time Moth StorySLAM champion and 10-time

GrandSLAM winner. For more than a decade, Matt has helped companies like Amazon, Google, and Salesforce and has also consulted with Harvard University and the F.B.I., to unlock the power of stories to drive results.



Jerome Smalls
Hidden Heroes: From High-Risk to High-Reward

As a member of the Charleston Police Department Jerome Smalls says that in order to address youth violence at its core, we need to view “high-risk” juveniles

as the wounded children they are, with limitless potential, in search of a support system that can help them. These new systems must begin to break silos and give these children a better chance at life.



Treyden McAdams
Martial Arts Champion

On top of being an all “A” honor student, this 15-year old is a Black Belt in Goju-ryu Karate and a 4x NASKA World Champion. Trey is also a student leader in his dojo. Not only has he dedicated to the

mastery of the art, but he also serves as a mentor/coach and instructor to other students. Treyden is also a powerful gymnast with great tumbling ability and has committed himself to the study of the art of acting and stunt performing, making his television debut in 2022 with an acting role on, Netflix’s, “Raising Dion S2”.



Lexi Morgan
Art Gives the Body a Voice

Talk therapy has limitations on the lasting impacts of trauma. But experts in somatic art therapy say words are not enough. Lexi Morgan’s research shows that combining trauma therapy EMDR with

active artmaking in community can reduce burnout and PTSD – after just one day. She knows it works because she’s tried it on herself.

Session 2



Andie Edwards
300,000 Years of Human Habits

We humans have been shaped by an evolutionary past that hasn't prepared us for the isolation and detachment in today's world. As an anthropologist and research

professional, Andie believes that understanding our shared prehistoric humanity can bring us together.



Luke Shirley
Will you Sit with Me? How One Question Changes Mental Health

Suicide takes the individual, but affects us all. Now a different approach to suicide than old school "prevention" could be changed, if first

questioned. Luke, a non-profit founder who has faced his own struggles with depression and witnessed the effects of addiction, wants us to question: could the most effective approach for others be the conversation we have with our Self? better chance at life.



Kelvin Waites
There Is No Magical Elevator

This retired police chief is an author and inspirational coach whose secret to success can be summed up in one word – perseverance. There are no shortcuts, he says. Instead, it's about

resilience and taking each step with purpose. He wants to inspire you to see challenges, not as barriers, but as stepping stones.



Watoto Charleston Ensemble

Featuring students from the WatotoAcademy of the Performing Arts at Meeting Street Schools, this stage production entitled The Happy People features the music, costuming and movements from African to Cuba, Brazil,

Puerto Rico the Caribbean. It is a colorful, exciting festival on stage representing cultural diversity through the arts.

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> **After Party:** 9:30 pm - 1:30 am



THE 

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CREATIVE MORNINGS CHARLESTON





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2026 Leadership

Organizer & Curator

Mike Sottak

Marketing & Branding

Deb Mohnssen

Production

Greg Magnuson

Speaker Selection

Louise Heikes

Performer Selection

Zandrina Dunning

Speaker Coaching

Sewell Kahn

Sponsorship

Brenna Lawrence

Yolanda Harris

Venue

Mike Sottak

Volunteer Coordinators

Melissa Stewart



A Special Thanks

The Teams at Charleston Music Hall. Edith Howle, who started this whole journey 10 years ago. Chris Rucker and his crew at A6 Production, and our great all-volunteer team!

Thank you to our all Volunteer Team

Marketing & Branding

Mike Sottak
Deborah Mohnssen
Ella Arnold
Matchstick Social
Cheryl Irwin
Chris Vestal

Production

Greg Magnuson
Chris Rucker
Zandrina Dunning
Celeste Middleton
Kris Davis
Kerry Mohnssen
Tim Jordan
Sarita Vann
Erika Paula Jaramillio

Speaker Selection

Louise Heikes
Marty Howley
Sewell Kahn
Stephanie Mackara
Jared Bramblett
Herb Frazier
Amber Ludeman
Lia Collabello

Speaker Coaching

Kenya Dunn
Yolanda Harris
Michael Schmidt
Sewell Kahn
Austin Fitzhenry
Jessica Vernon
Susan Nunes
Curt Thomas
Louise Heikes
Jimi Gibson

Volunteers

Cosandra Moten
Evelyn Putnam
Jewel Coan
Kate Everingham
Kathy Vonesh
Mary Garvin
Mary Moravek
Melissa Stewart
Michelle Barnes
Serena Zea
Tonya Dickerson
Tyisha Nick





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Get Social

Be part of the TEDxCharleston community and add #TEDxCharleston to all your social media posts from the day. Share selfies, impressions, favorite quotes and doodles with us by tagging @TEDxCharleston - your photo might get re-shared!

Meet our Speakers


Get one-on-one time with the day's speakers at break and at the After Party. Ask them what you can do to help spread their ideas far and wide.

Commit to Action

As an attendee, we hope you will take an active role in sharing the ideas worth spreading from today. Tell others about the talks and performances you heard today and what inspired you. When videos are online, please share them with others.

Apply to Present

Do you have an idea worth sharing or know someone who does? Help us spread the word when the Call for Ideas goes live later this year at tedxcharleston.org.





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About TEDxCharleston

As uncertainty permeates seemingly every aspect of our lives, we continue to find ourselves in new and unexplored realities. Distilling truth becomes more challenging in our increasingly uber connected world, while the prospect of artificial intelligence entices and threatens us at the same time. But beacons of hope, honesty and humanity give us hope for the future, a confidence that we will be able to navigate what seem like uncharted waters.

- **Electrify** ideas that inspire creativity, education and engagement within our community and world beyond.
- **Influence** change that connects and understands the many layers of Charleston's people, history and culture for a future of good.
- **Encourage** innovation and new perspectives in the fields of technology, art, business and health that seek positive awareness and exposure.

Learn more about TEDxCharleston at
tedxcharleston.org



About TEDx

In the spirit of ideas worth spreading, TEDx is a program of local, self-organized events that bring people together to share a TED-like experience. At a TEDx event, TED Talks video and live speakers combine to spark deep discussion and connection. These local, self-organized events are branded TEDx, where x = independently organized TED event. The TED Conference provides general guidance for the TEDx program, but individual TEDx events are self-organized. (Subject to certain rules and regulations.)

About TED

TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or fewer) delivered by today's leading thinkers and doers. Many of these talks are given at TED's annual conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, and made available, free, on TED.com. TED speakers have included Bill Gates, Jane Goodall, Elizabeth Gilbert, Sir Richard Branson, Nandan Nilekani, Philippe Starck, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Sal Khan and Daniel Kahneman.

TED's open and free initiatives for spreading ideas include TED.com, where new TED Talk videos are posted daily; the TED Translators Program, which provides subtitles and interactive transcripts as well as translations from thousands of volunteers worldwide; the educational initiative TED-Ed; the annual million-dollar TED Prize, which funds exceptional individuals with a "wish," or idea, to create change in the world; TEDx, which provides licenses to thousands of individuals and groups who host local, self-organized TED-style events around the world; and the TED Fellows program, which selects innovators from around the globe to amplify the impact of their remarkable projects and activities.

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