



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Executive producer Greg Nicotero and friend on the set of AMC's *The Walking Dead*; AlunaGeorge performing at Shaky Beats Music Festival; Musician Kristian Bush; Donald Glover as Earnest Marks (at right) in a scene from *Atlanta*.

Imagination Incubator

ATLANTA IS HOME TO CREATIVE INDUSTRIES—THANKS TO A TRAVEL-FRIENDLY INFRASTRUCTURE, A TALENTED WORKFORCE AND THE CITY'S BUILT-IN HEART AND SOUL. **BY SARAH NETTER**

► Welcome to Atlanta—where zombies lurch through the forests, where superheroes scale the tallest buildings and where the soulful sounds of Grammy-winning artists bounce off the walls and melt like butter.

The city affectionately dubbed “Hotlanta” is enjoying its time in the sun as the go-to destination for major films, popular television shows and every kind of music one could possibly imagine.

“Anything made in Atlanta has a heartbeat and a soul in it,” says Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter Kristian Bush. “Even the hamburgers taste better.”

Bush, one-half of the country music duo Sugarland and a successful solo artist, has made Atlanta his home base since cutting his teeth

on the city’s eclectic music scene when he was a college student at Emory University. “[Atlanta] gave me my start, but it also never let me down as a I grew,” he says. “It grew with me.”

Atlanta is a creative hub unlike any other, where top recording artists will show up unannounced to a bar and jam with local musicians. Or where a young film student can wind up working alongside top Hollywood producers and directors.

“It’s big enough to give you some anonymity so that you can incubate your ideas,” Bush explains. “Once that happens, the open-mindedness of Atlanta and the people who live there—those people are interested in something new happening from their own town.”

And there is a lot happening in this town. The music industry brings an economic impact of more than \$3.7 billion to the state of Georgia. Atlanta boasts numerous top recording studios, including Patchwerk Recording Studio and Tree Sound Studios. It’s also home to the A3C and Shaky Beats Music festivals.

Atlanta is a major hot spot for blockbuster movies and popular television shows as well. In September, Stone Mountain, Georgia, native Donald Glover walked away with two Emmy awards for FX’s *Atlanta*—the nuanced, sometimes gritty portrayal of the city and its people that Glover executive produces, directs and stars in.

Innovator

PAULA WALLACE

President and co-founder, Savannah College of Art and Design

Paula Wallace started her career as an elementary school teacher in her hometown of Atlanta, preparing her classroom every summer to become a "laboratory of creativity," before realizing she wanted to foster the same environment for older students. She founded the Savannah College of Art and Design, an institution unparalleled in creative degree programs and working partner-

ships—which now has additional locations in Atlanta, Hong Kong and Lacoste, France. **How do SCAD and its alumni contribute to creative fields?** Atlanta may be the hottest region right now for creative careers—and SCAD graduates are choosing to stay here when they graduate. [We have a] 98 percent employment rate, with more than 2,800 SCAD

students and alumni [currently] working in Georgia's entertainment industry. . . . Atlanta's emergence as a hub for the animation industry deserves recognition, which is why in summer 2017 we launched SCAD AnimationFest.

How does SCAD partner with creators and media?

SCAD's globally renowned programs prepare students for immense career moments, and the relationships we forge—with [fashion designer] Guo Pei and Rolls-Royce, John Mal-kovich and Mercedes-

Benz Stadium—contribute to their success. Last year, nearly 50 SCAD alumni and students were featured in the credits of Oscar-nominated films, a SCAD alumnus claimed the Supima Design Competition's grand prize for the second consecutive time and students and alumni wowed international collectors at Art Basel-Miami Beach, the Venice Biennale and Art Central Hong Kong.

Tell us about SCAD's diverse degree programs.

SCAD offers undergraduate and graduate

degrees in more than 40 majors and 75-plus minors. Many don't realize the plethora of career opportunities beyond "traditional" art and design disciplines. I stay attuned to student interests and seek alumni and professional

insights to develop programs in emerging fields, such as offering the first-of-their-kind programs in accessory design, sequential art, themed entertainment design and equestrian studies, among others. —S.F.



Despite only having aired one season, the series—which is filmed on location—has been lauded not just for its writing and acting, but for elevating the city itself to lead character status.

The Walking Dead, AMC's zombie-apocalypse saga now in its eighth season, is a huge hit that has become synonymous with Atlanta. The show set up shop in Atlanta for 2010's season one, following the direction of the comic book series of the same name, which opens its story in Atlanta and surrounding neighborhoods.

"Once we got here and we realized the caliber of the crew and the caliber of the people that were available to use down here—the director of photography, art department, props, costumes—there was no reason to ever leave Atlanta," says *The Walking Dead* executive producer Greg Nicotero, who also directs and is the brains (pun, intended) behind the show's award-winning special effects makeup.

"I would bring any production down here to Atlanta if I could get the same crew to work on it with me, because they are that good."

Nicotero set down roots in the Atlanta area, buying a home and partnering with *The Walking Dead* star Norman Reedus to open Nic & Norman's, a gourmet burger restaurant in Senoia, Georgia.

"It's been great, it's so much fun," Nicotero says. "It also gives fans another opportunity to

connect to the show."

The secret behind the entertainment industry's love affair with Atlanta isn't really a secret at all. There's a travel-friendly infrastructure, most notably Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, ranked the busiest in the world. The cost of living is significantly easier on the wallet than in New York City and Los Angeles.

The state also began offering generous film tax credits back in 2008 after losing business to Canada and Louisiana, both of which had aggressive tax incentives.

"That was really the game changer for us," says Lee Thomas, deputy commissioner of the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office. The state saw its industry economic impact skyrocket from \$240 million in 2007 to \$9.5 billion in the 2017 fiscal year. There are now more than 28,000 people in Georgia directly employed by the film and television industry.

"It's the one time in 20 years of public service that I can say a piece of legislation . . . has had this level of impact on a single industry," says Pat Wilson, commissioner of Georgia's Department of Economic Development. "We are growing a workforce that didn't exist."

Major productions started flocking to Georgia—*The Vampire Diaries*, *Stranger Things*, *Ozark* and the feature film *Baby Driver*—and



Baby Driver, filmed in Georgia.

they all needed trained crew members. So when Governor Nathan Deal launched the state's High Demand Career Initiative, the state started with the Georgia Film Academy, which trains area residents on everything from lighting, set design, script supervision and costume design to technical work.

"We're seeing these people [get] paid internships," Thomas explains, "and then they're getting full-time employment on these shows."

The industry, in turn, began investing in the Atlanta area. While a number of production houses have sprouted up in the last decade, Pinewood Atlanta Studios in Fayetteville is by far the biggest.

Occupying a former wheat field, Pinewood

sits on 700-plus acres and operates 1 million square feet of production, vendor and support space, including 18 sound stages, where several-Movie studios were shot, including *Spider-Man: Homecoming* and *Captain America: Civil War*.

"There's this whole 'farm-to-film' thing going on," says Frank Patterson, president of Pinewood Atlanta Studios. "There are people from rural areas [in Georgia] working in lumber who are ending up here. They're in business because of homebuilding, but [now] they're able to expand."

With the Fayetteville complex situated 20 minutes from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta, "we have a direct flight to the greatest storytellers in the world," Patterson says.

"The fact that Atlanta is so easy to get to makes it a win. Next to London, Atlanta is the most attractive marketplace in the world to make a movie right now."

Bush is looking forward to seeing what else comes out of his beloved city.

"I'd love to see Atlanta become the musical pedestal of the south," he says. "It has a long history of making people feel things, and in 10 years, I hope the gravity of Atlanta has pulled the curiosity and the imagination of people into new places." ▾

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—GRAMMY AWARD-WINNING SINGER-SONGWRITER KRISTIAN BUSH

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