

Stanford



Benny Starr

U.S. Cultural Policy Fellow
Stanford Arts Office Programs

Bio

BIO

Black music and Southern culture find a unique voice in Benny Starr, an artist and cultural strategist who fuses Southern musical traditions with storytelling to explore identity, history, and social change. His deep affection for hip-hop, gospel, jazz, blues, and rock has created a fusion steeped in memory, creativity, and the lived experiences of the South. His creations offer a captivating journey that invites you to explore these roots, offering a fresh perspective on a familiar narrative.

Benny Starr's most recent solo project, *A Water Album*, was not just a milestone in his career but a significant historical moment. Recorded live with his bandmates, The Four20s, at Charleston Music Hall and released on Juneteenth 2019, it marked Benny Starr as the first Hip-Hop artist to perform at Spoleto Festival USA. The album itself was a triumph and a testament to his talent, earning the "South Carolina's Best Album" 2019 title by the Free Times, solidifying Benny Starr's place as a visionary independent artist in the South.

In 2020, *Native Son*, a duo of Benny Starr and harmonious singer, songwriter, producer, and multi-instrumentalist Rodrick Cliche, was formed. Together, they are redefining what it means to be dynamic while remaining highly respected. Their music, which combines the comforting allure of Southern breakfast at Grandma's house with the triumphant command of a revolutionary's chant, is a sonic resonance that is both decadent and nourishing. This unique blend of their musical influences sets them apart from other artists and makes their sound a must-listen for any music lover.

Native Son's most recent release, "The Land," is a rallying cry that echoes the injustices of Black Legacy Farmers at the hands of the USDA and is part of an ongoing partnership with The Acres of Ancestry Initiative/Black Agrarian Fund and The Black Farmers Appeal: Cancel Pigford Debt Campaign. As a part of the ongoing collaboration, *Native Son* screened "Restoration: A Concert Film" on Juneteenth 2020. In the fall, "Restoration" was also released for a limited-time viewing to coincide with the Justice for Black Farmers Act of 2020, introduced by U.S. Senators Cory Booker, Elizabeth Warren, and Kirsten Gillibrand on November 30th. To date, "Restoration" has been screened at the Pan African Film Festival, WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival, Seattle Black Film Festival, Reel Sisters of the Diaspora Film Festival & Lecture Series, Nevada City Film Festival, Rhode Island Black Film Festival, Las Vegas Black Film Festival, Nice International Film Festival, and more.

The U.S. Water Alliance recognized Benny Starr's commitment to the creative and artistic process by naming him their inaugural One Water Artist-in-Residence in October 2020. During his 18-month residency and subsequent tenure as Senior Fellow of Arts & Culture, Benny infused arts and cultural strategies into innovative thinking, problem-solving, and programming. In 2021, *Grist* named him one of their 50 Fixers, highlighting his leadership in

climate, sustainability, and equity. In 2023, Benny launched Watercolor Creative, an umbrella for artistic projects, creative strategy, and social practice work with creators, communities, and equity-centered partners, furthering his mission to use creativity for justice and kinship.

Benny later served as a creative strategist with Communities First Fund, embedding arts and culture into their initiatives and programming. He is currently a U.S. Cultural Policy Fellow at Stanford University, examining the intersections of arts, culture, and civic infrastructure.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- Visiting Artist, Stanford Arts Office Programs

LINKS

- Learn More: <https://www.bennystarrsc.com>
- EP 25: Benny Starr: <https://goodfolk.substack.com/p/ep-25-benny-starr>
- Faces of Change: Benny Starr: https://youtu.be/aAuwIzVJNf4?si=Bh1yQAYU_6EjTAFW