

SAFIYA BIO

Safiya, a rising star in jazz, neo-soul, and reggae, is making waves with her invigorating energy and innovative approach. Emerging as a beacon of positivity and cultural fusion, Safiya's artistry transcends boundaries, infusing her Afro-Caribbean roots with the rich tapestry of jazz influences. Backed by her influential band, Safiya delivers performances that captivate audiences worldwide.



A Berklee College of Music graduate, Safiya's talent has garnered acclaim, including a nomination for the New England Music Award Jazz Act of the Year (2023) and her most recent nomination for Reggae Artist of the Year (2025) for a Boston Music Award. Her impressive resume includes headlining performances at prestigious festivals like Bams Festival, Salem Jazz Festival, and Point Sebago Reggae Festival. Notably, she embarked on a mini-tour in Tokyo, Japan, in winter 2023, captivating audiences with her mesmerizing sound.

In addition to her stellar performances, Safiya is making waves in the entrepreneurial sphere with her visionary project, Travel Through Music. This groundbreaking venture, featured prominently in publications like Forbes and The Boston Globe, aims to inspire cultural exploration and foster connections through music. Through Travel Through Music, Safiya offers audiences unforgettable experiences and provides world musicians with unprecedented exposure.

While Safiya released her first single in 2020, she is gearing up to unveil new projects this year, promising an exciting evolution in her musical journey. Recognized as one of Boston's Extraordinary Women in 2023 for her contributions to music, Safiya continues to push boundaries and redefine the jazz, neo-soul, and reggae landscapes.

Featured on esteemed platforms such as Boston Cityline News and Trinidad and Tobago's Morning Synergy TV News, Safiya's influence extends far beyond the stage. With her electrifying performances and visionary ventures, Safiya invites listeners to join her on a transformative musical odyssey, one note at a time.

Musician, travel-lover Safiya Leslie connects cultures via global music



Celina Colby

Celina Colby is an arts and travel reporter with a fondness for Russian novels... [VIEW BIO](#)



Berklee College of Music alum Safiya Leslie has a hefty resume. The musician, singer-songwriter, sound engineer, ethnomusicologist and travel-lover navigates a packed schedule of concerts and trips, as well as a side business crafting subscription music boxes, all with the goal of bringing global music into homes and neighborhoods across Boston and beyond.

“I feel like especially in America, we don’t highlight other cultures, and we typically just listen to the pop and rock and hip-hop and R&B of our own country,” says Leslie. “I feel like because we don’t listen to world music, we lose out on learning about other cultures.”



Colombian singer-songwriter Lizje performs at a Travel Through Music concert. PHOTO: COURTESY SAFIYA LESLIE

Leslie’s concerts center on a specific geographic location, and a number of artists will perform songs from that country in different genres. Then the artists will talk about the styles performed and the country being celebrated, creating a balance between entertainment and education. Leslie also hosts music-based group tours around the world. Earlier this month, she brought a group to Cuba to immerse themselves in the music, dance and culture of the island.

“When you listen to other people’s music and experience people’s dance and cultures, it sometimes knocks biases down, it sometimes teaches you some history, sometimes it teaches you the

similarities and the differences between the cultures,” says Leslie. “You might listen to something and think, ‘Wow, that reminds me of my home.’”

Leslie was part of the 2023 Fenway Cohort, an initiative intending to increase diverse representation in the Fenway neighborhood and build community through the arts. On Sept. 21 at 4 p.m., Leslie will host a Travel Through Music concert at The Station in Fenway centering music of the African diaspora. The event will include Caribbean and African artists, dancers and a marketplace of African goods. Leslie herself will perform reggae and calypso-infused songs and then interview each artist on stage.

“The breadth of experiences that this group is aiming to deliver while pursuing their personal dreams and growing their businesses is truly remarkable,” says Andi Simpson, senior vice president for creative and marketing strategy for Samuels & Associates, about the 2023 Fenway Cohort.

Leslie’s [Travel Through Music](#) subscription box service was born during the pandemic when the artist couldn’t perform or travel but still wanted to spread the cultural word. Each month’s box highlights a different destination and includes products from and information about that country as well as a custom playlist of music by an artist from that region.

Though she has a lot going on, Leslie’s vision is extremely focused. All of her work is specifically aimed at creating cross-cultural connections and education through music.

“You realize how similar we all are,” says Leslie. “We have so many borders and so much politics. Music breaks down those barriers.”

The Boston Globe

SOUND CHECK

Radical Heroes will give locals a chance to shine during the MFA's MLK Jr. programming

Three Mass. artists are set to perform at the showcase

By Victoria Wasylak Globe correspondent, Updated January 16, 2025, 4:18 p.m.



Safiya Leslie is one of the performers honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at ArtSpark's "Radical Heroes" showcase this Monday. A. DAVIS

As thousands of Massachusetts residents roam the halls of the Museum of Fine Arts this Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a new display of Dr. King’s legacy awaits them in Gallery 168.

From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., three Massachusetts artists — [Safiya Leslie](#), [DREION](#), and **Kiernan Ceide** — will perform in [Radical Heroes](#), a musical tribute to Dr. King’s vision for racial justice. The new component of the MFA’s annual “open house” holiday is the work of [ArtSpark](#), a Boston-based music and art series founded by Ava Dudani (who performs and releases music as [Ava Sophia](#)).

Dudani established ArtSpark in 2024 to help independent artists grow their careers, with a focus on amplifying and assisting BIPOC artists. When offered the chance to collaborate with the MFA, she eagerly accepted the opportunity to curate a showcase that connected Dr. King’s once-radical mission with ArtSpark’s modern goal of removing “power and privilege” from the arts.

“His philosophy and perspective were considered so controversial at the time,” Dudani explains. “That really jumped out at me — this is what artists do. Our role in society and in life is to be at the forefront of change and to be radical. That’s the opportunity we’re given with our instrument.”

Fulfilling that role sounds different for each musician involved with Radical Heroes. DREION basks in sun-dappled soul and R&B, Leslie connects the grooves of funk, jazz, and reggae, and 15-year-old multi-instrumentalist Ceide gleans inspiration from prog rock, jazz fusion, and metal. But perhaps the most significant part of ArtSpark’s tribute will take place offstage, as the series chips away at a barrier that often limits the upswing of artists’ careers: low pay, or a lack of compensation altogether.

ArtSpark’s events prioritize fair pay for performers, who often settle for paychecks that can barely cover dinner and the gas required to drive to and from a show. As a South Asian American and a performer of 14 years, Dudani understands that proper compensation can be the difference between an artist developing a full-fledged career and struggling to break even every month, especially for BIPOC artists.

“It’s hard to be an artist as it is, but then on top of it, to be a person of color and to face barriers, like financial barriers, access to housing, and education [is even harder],” Dudani says. “That’s why it’s so important for me to not only be paying artists and artists of color, but to be exposing that opportunity to folks who are younger, like Kiernan.”

Fittingly, Monday’s showcase will be Ceide’s first paid gig and debut solo performance, which excites the teenage Malden artist. He describes writing and performing music as being “as close to my calling as it could be,” and he plans to use his payment to invest in his own skill set — perhaps signing up for more music lessons in the future, or purchasing a new instrument.

“It’s a big deal,” he says of the show. “It’s a big step in my career, my life.”

It’s a great example of the impact of a well-paid gig, too.

TRAVEL ✈️ NOIRE

Are you a lover of both travel and music? Then entrepreneur Safiya Leslie has something you will love. The 25-year-old is the creator of Safiya's World Music Playlist, a bi-monthly subscription box that allows you to travel through music as you experience music and culture from countries across the globe.

Based in NYC and [Boston](#), Safiya is a full-time musician, music manager, and booking agent. Born to a Trini mother and a father of African American and Nez Perce descent, Safiya's background allowed her to grow up experiencing lots of diverse music and culture.

"My parents did a great job of allowing me to explore the world at a young age (18 countries and counting.) As a music lover and budding ethnomusicologist, all my life I've seen that music can break down so many walls, biases, and stereotypes about a place. It doesn't matter if music is just instrumental or in a different language; anyone can relate to it."



Safiya created her subscription boxes to continue to bring world music and culture to those who love it. Though these boxes allow people to "travel" without ever leaving their house or setting foot on a plane, she hopes to inspire people to see the world and seek out authentic musical and travel experiences.

As someone accustomed to frequently performing live, lockdowns brought on by COVID-19 were hard on Safiya and her fellow musicians. In addition, these creatives took a major hit on their incomes. With the creation of her subscription box, Safiya has been able to support musicians and small businesses affected by the pandemic. Each purchase gives proceeds back to the featured artist and supports small businesses and artisans.

Each box contains a travel guide, Spotify playlist, keychain, and postcards. Other items, such as travel gear and travel items may also be found inside. Past boxes have included a Bluetooth speaker bottle, a Bluetooth selfie stick/stand, waterproof speakers, a movable camera stand, and more.

As for the music portion, a handwritten note from the featured artist is included, along with artist merch, and a USB cassette tape containing high-quality digital downloads of the musician's music, photos, lyrics, bios, etc.



Destination items may include high-end bags, jewelry sets, home goods, destination snacks and foods, tea/coffee, mugs, keychains, and more.

Safiya’s World Music Playlist boxes are available in three tiers: General Admission(\$29.99), Bookbag Box (\$59.99), and Suitcase box (\$130), which comes with a VIP Artist Experience.

Past boxes have been dedicated to Madagascar, [Singapore](#), Mexico, [Colombia](#), Jamaica, the Philippines, Palestine, [Haiti](#),

India, Kenya, and China.

Safiya’s World Music Playlist will soon be undergoing a name change. At the end of the year, the company’s name will change to Travel Through Music®. They will be partnering with Sofar Sounds in Boston on July 16 for a surprise show featuring artists from their past boxes, and currently have a residency at The Jungle in Somerville, MA. You can see Safiya’s and featured musicians from all over the world there every third Saturday of the month from 4 to 7 PM.

“Every month, I aim to bring you all the things I love in your box. What I love about music is that it can transform and bring you to another place. If you listen carefully, you can learn history through the instrumentation and the rhythms of a song.”



Courtesy of Safiya’s World Music Playlist

“When you hear a new artist and you’re at their show, they tell you the story behind a song. When you travel and you taste new food, it becomes a staple in your recipe book. Or your new favorite piece of jewelry that comes from a small village in Belize. I hope you come on this journey with me on a world music tour from home. Travel through music, here we go!”



For more information, visit www.travelthroughmusic.com and follow [@safiya'sworldmusicplaylist](https://www.instagram.com/safiya'sworldmusicplaylist) on Instagram.

The Boston Globe

MUSIC

This musical journey around the globe comes once a month in a box

By Noah Schaffer Globe correspondent, Updated April 19, 2021, 4:31 p.m.



When Safiya Leslie would perform her genre-spanning concerts at Boston venues like the Beehive, she'd tell the audience to "grab your passports — we're going on a musical journey."

Today, Leslie's own passport remains tucked away, as the COVID-19 pandemic has eliminated many of the performance and travel opportunities the 2020 Berklee College of Music graduate was looking forward to. But the Afro-Caribbean singer/songwriter is now giving world music fans a chance to explore the sounds, sights, and tastes of a different country each month through her Safiya's World Music Tour Playlist subscription boxes.

photo by Ally Schmaling

Each box includes a QR code for a Spotify playlist, postcards, and a USB drive — designed to look like a cassette tape — that introduces subscribers to an artist from the featured county (with whom she shares in the proceeds of the sales). Food and gift items from the country of the month, extensive travel guides, and private Zoom concerts with the artist are included at higher subscription levels.

The boxes were born out of the downtime that Leslie faced after both her booked gigs and travel plans evaporated, along with the theatrical sound engineering work Leslie was hoping to make part of her post-college career. "I did a show on Zoom but it just made me more depressed," she recounts. "Then I tried curating some playlists on Spotify where we'd explore a different country for two weeks, and my fans loved them."

This winter, realizing it would still be a long time before the performing arts fully rebounded, Leslie thought about the subscription boxes she has used to make meals and to sample cosmetics, and realized that a similar service could connect global music fans with homebound musicians. Her first

box, devoted to Kenya, included tea, a rice spice blend, jewelry, and carved soapstone along with the Afro-pop and R&B of [EduArdo Omondi](#). Madagascar is the latest country to be featured, with China up next.

That first box was sent to only five subscribers. Leslie then got the attention of social media influencers, including [Noël Norcross](#), whose YouTube channel is devoted to videos of her “unboxing” the contents of different subscription services. Twenty subscribers have now signed up for Safiya’s World Music Tour Playlist boxes. Mass production isn’t the goal. “Ideally I’d like to scale it up to 50 to 100,” says Leslie. “That way it would be a nice amount for the artist each month — like what they would have gotten from a gig.”

“It’s been very therapeutic, but also a lot of work,” says Leslie, who majored in music production and engineering and music business entrepreneurship at Berklee while minoring in ethnomusicology. Besides choosing the songs and writing the travel guide, Leslie sources the gift items. “I’m trying to support other small businesses, especially ones that give back,” she says. “For instance, I found the Kenyan soapstone on Etsy, and then talked to the owner about how her family does the crafting by hand.”

Leslie, who performs under her first name Safiya, has a real-life gig at the [Point Reggae Festival](#) in Casco, Maine, in June, and is looking forward to the long-delayed video shoot for her debut recording. But with international travel and US tours by international artists likely to be among the last sectors to fully recover, Leslie plans on keeping the boxes going. “I have the featured artists lined up through the rest of the year,” she says.

Safiya’s World Music Tour Playlist boxes range from \$29.99 to \$630. Go to <https://safiya-world-music-playlist.cratejoy.com/> for details.

Let's Pretend - Safiya , Tynicfly (Official Music Video)



Jazz is one of those genres that will forever be respected because it came at a time when music was starting to evolve and highlight African Americans in a new way. It has since become a classic genre we have to seek out, but thanks to artists like Safiya, a new generation is being exposed to its wonders. Only Safiya approaches it with a worldly perspective by adding wonderful Afro-Caribbean notes throughout her latest single, "Let's Pretend," featuring Tynicfly.

Together Safiya and Tynicfly created a wonderful amalgamation of sounds. When "Let's Pretend" kicks off, you think it is going to be a jazz journey, but throughout this audible adventure, it swoops these very lively Afro-Caribbean waves that take this song to a new place audibly. It is not something one hears on a regular basis and stands out from the cascade of sort of the same few genres and styles we hear on a daily basis on mainstream radio. On top of the musical stylings, vocally, Safiya delivers an alluring performance from start to finish.

"Let's Pretend" would fare well on any and all stations and playlists that appreciate the art of jazz, but also celebrates music from a cultural perspective. One could also imagine Safiya performing her debut single, "Let's Pretend," everywhere from local venues to more artistic spaces like museums as it has this beautiful, creative air to it.

Safiya's fusion of jazz and Afro-Caribbean single, "Let's Pretend," is available now on all major music and streaming sites. (August 24, 2021)