

READER

'We're not always treated like people'

Before the pandemic shuttered strip clubs, dancers were fighting for their rights. **By Natalya Carrico 8**



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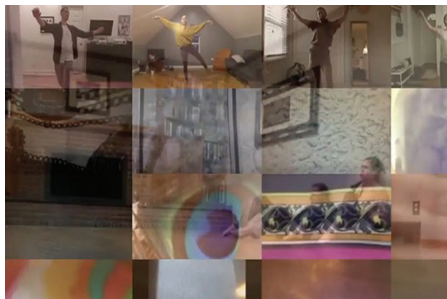
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THIS WEEK ON CHICAGOREADER.COM



Hubbard Street evolves

Space, perspective, and introversion feature thematically in online pieces.

The stay-at-home chronicles

What we're reading, watching, listening to, etc., to pass the time.

Pandemic Pantry

Watch the reboot of the *Reader's* acclaimed Key Ingredient series.

CITY LIFE



Stock up on La Croix for a sober quarantine.
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PSA

Remote recovery

How to deal with addiction in isolation

By **KT HAWBAKER**

My name is KT, and I'm an alcoholic. As I write this lil article, I am officially 107 days sober after an arduous, sweaty—and, admittedly, sometimes fun—struggle with booze. As I write this, I am also keenly aware of how the stay-at-home order would have been my dream scenario 108 days ago. Isolation? TV binges? Wine delivery? I'd be dead. And, for that, I am genuinely grateful for sobriety, as trying as it can be.

When I began attending AA, I quickly became aware of Chicago's tight recovery community. Folks are painfully kind and generous with their time, and there is no such thing as small talk. While I can only speak from my experiences as an alcoholic, I believe these dynamics remain true as meetings take place over Zoom. If you're out there looking for online resources and meetings in this sick, sad time, here's where you can begin:

Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings: An oldie, but a goodie. Don't let the God-biz scare you off—my higher power is a committee comprised of Alison Bechdel, Maria Bamford, Bea Arthur, and Bruce Springsteen. It works if you werk it.

Narcotics Anonymous Meetings: Second to AA in terms of size, NA provides a healing fellowship for folks grappling with drug addiction.

Al-Anon Meetings: This organization exists to support people who love an alcoholic and want peer-to-peer support as they navigate their relationships.

Adult Children of Alcoholics Meetings: A more focused version of Al-Anon, ACA empowers individuals to flesh out the impact of their parents' disease and recover their full selves.

SMART Recovery Meetings: If you're totally allergic to the woo-woo qualities of AA, SMART might be the place for you. Relying on science and cognitive behavioral therapy, this nonprofit org addresses addiction through a secular lens.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Hotline: This government organization helps individuals connect with a recovery community suited to their specific needs.

Of course, this list is hardly exhaustive. There are as many recovery communities as there are hardships, and addiction doesn't discriminate when it comes to identity. Regardless of your background, you don't have to suffer alone. If you find yourself in need of community and refuge, this moment of Internet communion might just be your most accessible entry point. **✉**

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NEWS & POLITICS



POLITICS

A category of one

Albert Dickens: the coolest cat in the newsroom

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

I suppose this story starts in the fall of 1977, when I got a job as a copy boy for the *Chicago Daily News*.

I was 21 years old, just out of college and bursting with enthusiasm about making my way as a journalist.

Think of me like a character in a 70s sitcom: “You’re gonna make it after all . . .”

The editor who hired me—a sourpuss named Signer—tried to bring me back to earth. This copy boy job, he told me, is the bottom rung of the ladder. You’re an office go-fer—don’t even think about working your way up to reporter.

I said: “Yes, sir—I understand.”

I thought: *Yeah, right, Signer—just you watch.*


In those days, the *Daily News* and the *Sun-Times* were owned by the Field family and shared space at 401 N. Wabash Avenue—where what’s-his-face’s tower is currently located.

As a copy boy I wandered among giants—Mike Royko, Ann Landers, Roger Ebert, and Kup. I tried not to gawk.

But even with all these journalistic superstars, the guy I most wanted to emulate was Albert Dickens, a relative unknown editorial assistant in the sports department.

I’d received notice about Albert from Josh, a

NEWS & POLITICS

Me and Albert reunited in the *Sun-Times* newsroom  DENNIS SCHETTER

high school friend who had a summer job at the paper. I believe Josh's assessment went a little like: "Albert Dickens is so fucking cool!" Truer words were never uttered.

Smart, erudite, hip, funny, handsome, impeccably dressed (shirts always pressed, ties neatly knotted), Albert was by far—no doubt about it—the coolest cat in the newsroom.

By the time I got there, he was closing in on 40, but he had a younger vibe. A Black guy from Iowa, he'd graduated from Drake University, done a stint in the Army, and had traveled all over the world.

As far as I was concerned, he was overqualified for the job he had. He should have been a professor or something. The man seemed to know at least something about everything.

Pick a topic, any topic—Freud, wine, farming, whatever—he had something learned to say. I mean, Albert would wisecrack in Yiddish. How a Black guy from Iowa knew Yiddish, I'll never know.

Plus, he had a sneaky sense of humor and a lusty appreciation for dirty jokes and bawdy limericks.

As time went on, Albert and I became friends, and he'd occasionally invite me to his apartment, a studio on the second floor of a walkup around Dearborn and Huron.

Albert was neat and had an eye for art. It was a real bachelor pad—he was unmarried. I half expected a Hollywood starlet or two to walk in at any time.

He had a booming stereo system and a vast collection of jazz, opera, and classical albums. He'd pop on a record and fire up a joint. I'd be like—man, this is living.

As for proving old sourpuss Signer wrong, well, the *Daily News* folded just six months after I got there. Hey, don't blame me—I was just a copy boy. After that, Albert and I went our separate ways.

Fast-forward 41 years...

I started my podcast at the *Sun-Times* office in the West Loop. And I walked in to see Albert—after the *Daily News* folded, he'd moved over to the *Sun-Times*. He was closing in on 50 years in the newspaper business, with no plans to retire.

I wasn't going to mention how much older we both looked from our glory years. But Albert—ever the wise guy—couldn't resist: "Benny, what happened to your Afro? You

used to have such wavy hair. Now it's waving goodbye."

Ha, ha, ha.

As you might imagine, I'm writing this because Albert has died.

I read the news last Tuesday in a couple of bittersweet remembrances in the *Sun-Times* by Steve Greenberg and Rick Telander.

Turns out, Albert was gay—guess that explains the lack of Hollywood starlets in his bachelor pad. He'd spent 36 years in a relationship with James Cubas, a master tailor who died in 2016.

It also turns out that a friend of mine—Kevin Spicer—had been Albert's lover in the 70s. I didn't know that until I saw Kevin's Facebook tribute to Albert. Man, this world is just too damn small.

"I met Albert at a Johnson Publishing reception back in '78," says Kevin. "I was working for the *Defender* as a reporter. The next time I saw him—I was riding my bike along the lakefront and I saw this man throwing a boomerang. I'm thinking—a boomerang? And then—wait a minute, that's Albert."


As Kevin and I swapped tales, we realized our times as friends of Albert's overlapped. In other words, there's a chance I'd have been walking out of Albert's apartment as Kevin was walking in: "If only the walls could talk, right?" says Kevin. "Too bad you can't interview that apartment."

I've been thinking a lot about Albert in the last few days—about him being a Black gay man in the sports department back in the 70s. About all the casual racist comments he must have heard—not to mention the not-so-casual homophobic ones.

Looking back, it never occurred to me Albert was gay. I was just a sheltered kid from Evanston—what did I know about gays? Or anything else, really.

"There are so many hidden histories about Black people and gay people—especially gay, Black people," says Kevin. "People come in all different flavors and shades. Other people want to put you in categories. They want to assign you a role. But Albert was Albert—he was in his own category."

To that let me add one last thing on a personal note...

The coolest cat in the newsroom, Albert was remarkably friendly and encouraging to a copy boy on the lowest rung of the company ladder. 

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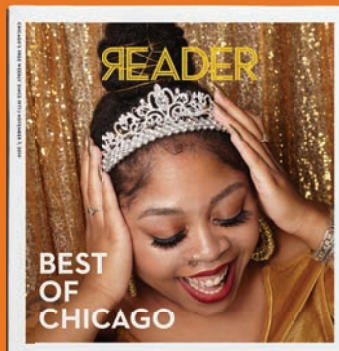
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Thank you, The Reader team

NEWS & POLITICS



HOUSING

Hundreds test positive for COVID-19 at homeless shelters

The city's response is improving, but still "not adequate."

By **MAYA DUKMASOVA**

As the number of new coronavirus infections in Illinois continues to grow, Chicago has finally caught up with testing at some of the city's homeless shelters. Results shared by the Chicago Department of Public Health earlier this month showed that among 1,153 clients and staff tested at 14 shelters, 302 people were positive for COVID-19. However, as of May 7, the department couldn't confirm if anyone has died from the disease.

The city has 58 emergency homeless shelters, according to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, and between 5,000 and 6,000 people without a permanent place to live stay in shelters or on the streets. While the city has set up handwashing stations and portable toilets at homeless encampments, those living on the streets have struggled to find food and medical care since the statewide lockdown began on March 21. Meanwhile,

advocates have been concerned about the spread of the virus in "congregate" shelter settings for weeks.

According to Quenjana Adams, a spokeswoman for the Department of Family and Support Services, which oversees homelessness prevention programs, the city has put in place protocols to ramp up testing at homeless shelters. Shelters are still advised to direct clients with severe symptoms to hospitals and to try to isolate clients with mild symptoms. Adams wrote in an e-mail that the city can help shelters if they're struggling to isolate symptomatic clients, but that "shelter operators have been responsive and proactive in setting aside space within their facilities for isolation. Very few has [sic] notified the department of barriers in this area."

If there's a confirmed positive case of

NEWS & POLITICS

Stacey, shown on March 15 with her cat Simba, says the city dropped off portable wash stations.

📷 LLOYD DEGRANE

COVID-19 among clients or staff at a shelter, CDPH has been deploying medical workers from UI Health and Rush Medical Center to test everyone at the facility within three to five days. Test results come back within a day or two. If a shelter can't provide on-site isolation space for someone who's tested positive but has mild symptoms, a limited number of hotel rooms have been set aside to help with quarantine. Going forward, Adams added, CDPH is planning to retest everyone at the 14 facilities and proactively test at other shelters. DFSS wouldn't say which shelters have had the blanket testing so far.

Still, advocates are concerned that the city's strategy for handling the virus outbreak in homeless shelters isn't sufficient and has been too slow. The response is "not adequate," said Julie Dworkin, policy director at the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. "I think there's still a lot of holes, the biggest one being: what is the time frame for having testing in every shelter and moving out people who are vulnerable?" The city has not been able to provide one thus far.

Dworkin also said that she'd heard anecdotal information about at least a couple of staffers at local shelters dying from COVID-19 and was surprised the city couldn't provide any answers about the number of deaths.

"The city has been improving its response to outbreaks in shelters, but there is still a long way to go before we can truly keep people experiencing homelessness safe from the virus," Dworkin said. "There is not sufficient capacity right now to quickly address cases in shelters. We need to be able to respond immediately when a symptomatic person is identified, to move that person out while awaiting test results, and to be able to immediately test everyone in the facility."

She added that nearly two months into the pandemic "there is no excuse for not having developed a proactive approach to getting high-risk people out of congregate settings." Meanwhile, Dworkin said, shelters aren't admitting people who might show up at their doors with COVID-19 symptoms until they get tested and the virus is ruled out, leaving those dealing with a combination of illness and homelessness more vulnerable than ever. 📺

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‘We’re not always treated like people’

Before the pandemic shuttered strip clubs, dancers were fighting exploitation.

By **NATALYA CARRICO**

Additional reporting by Logan Cruz

On a cold January evening, Aurora lugged a box containing a chrome pole and wooden base into the Empty Bottle. Her eyelids were painted with silver glitter and she wore a white hoodie with a bedazzled script that read “Money makes me cum.”

Aurora, an adult entertainer for the past 11 years, had assembled her portable pole many, many times before. But tonight was special. Other performers, dressed in red latex and lace, metal chokers, and shiny thigh-high boots, mingled with eager and friendly-faced patrons. They gathered around her in the center of the floor, allowing ample room to avoid being smacked by swinging platform heels. The Ukrainian Village bar was host to Capricorn Rising, a fund-raiser organized by the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP). The money raised from raffle tickets, T-shirts, pins, and tips given to the night’s performers would help fund a free legal clinic, a “warm-line” (for support without the urgency of a hotline), and street outreach programs.

As the trance-like music pulsed, Aurora circled the pole with perfected, deliberate measure. Her hoodie was zipped up to obscure her face. The crowd watched, enraptured, as she slowly slid out of the hoodie with practiced and theatrical ease, exposing a white bodysuit and sparkling silver bikini top. She pulled herself up the pole, inverted her body, and hung by one leg that gripped the metal like a snake. Aurora’s gravity-defying movements elicited cheers and showers of dollar bills from the crowd. She later said how

“amazing” it was to dance not for her regular customers, but for an audience gathered in support of sex workers’ rights. “I love giving energy to them,” she said. “It feels right.”

The 38-year-old is part of an ongoing class-action lawsuit claiming that VIP’s Gentlemen’s Club was illegally misclassifying dancers as independent contractors instead of employees under federal and state law. The class-action complaint, filed in 2016 at the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, alleged that dancers at VIP’s were de facto employees of the club, but were paid through customers’ tips instead of with an hourly wage. One major purpose of the lawsuit is to give dancers back pay for the hours spent working while allegedly misclassified.

The original complaint also alleges that dancers paid “house fees” to work and were required to share their tips with “managers and with non-service employees or agents of the club,” like the DJ, in-house makeup artist, and “house mom,” who provided food and sometimes toiletries in the locker room. This is illegal to require of employees, but many strip clubs commonly enact these rules because dancers are listed as independent contractors on paper. Management at Rick’s Cabaret (formerly VIP’s and now under new ownership) said they were “advised not to comment” on the lawsuit.

This lawsuit is far from an anomaly. Two Chicago strip clubs are currently facing class-action lawsuits for worker misclassification (the second was filed against the Admiral Theatre in 2018). Adult entertain-

ment establishments across the nation have been dealing with such lawsuits for decades, sometimes settling these cases by paying out hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. Depending on how many dancers join the suit and how many hours each dancer worked, individual payouts can be in the hundreds or thousands of dollars.

Aurora chose a name for this story that she uses professionally—one that isn’t her legal name. She understands that many dancers refuse to join lawsuits because they fear being blacklisted. Aurora said it can seem like legal action won’t do much to end the cycle: clubs get sued, clubs adjust management, clubs lapse back into unscrupulous practices. This cycle, she said, delegitimizes sex work.

“The root of that mentality is that this is not a real industry, and this is not a real place of employment,” she said. “And I want that to change. Now I know a lot of dancers don’t want to be employees and I’m not saying that all dancers need to be employees. But I’m saying as contractors, we still need to be treated like people. You know? And we’re not always treated like people.”

Only three strip clubs featuring female dancers exist within city limits: Rick’s Cabaret near Goose Island, Pink Monkey in University Village, and the historic Admiral Theatre, which first opened in 1927 as a vaudeville house and now features fully nude entertainers. Chicago’s lack of clubs is certainly not for lack of space or population, not even for lack of interest among club frequenters. From the 1950s through the early 1980s, downtown Rush Street was Chicago’s equivalent of Paris’s Quartier Pigalle, boasting happening jazz clubs, endless bars and restaurants, clubs with nude or topless entertainers, and practically any illicit activity one could desire. The roar of the night scene on Rush was eventually silenced by redevelopment, higher rent for business owners, and more stringent city laws like a 1993 ordinance restricting nudity in establishments that sell liquor.

Outsiders to the adult entertainment industry may consider a dancer’s work to be purely physical. But dancers often describe their work as sales, a business built on physical *and* emotional labor. Each night at VIP’s, dancers would evaluate the crowd and engage with the most promising customers to sell undivided attention. They would observe, they would charm, they would perform in skyscraping platform heels, sometimes in ten-hour shifts. The payoff could be sweet: on

a busy night, or when a dancer met just the right customer, she could bring home hundreds of dollars and on rare occasions break a thousand. On a bad night, though, she might leave with nothing.

Many dancers enjoy the freedom that comes with being an independent contractor, even if that means forgoing employee benefits like paid time off, health care, or worker’s compensation for injuries. But without employee protections, dancers must come together to strike or sue when demanding better treatment. In 2017, a group of 30 New York strippers, led by dancer Gizelle Marie, created #NYCStripperStrike to protest racial discrimination at their workplaces. They claimed that the “bottle girls” and bartenders at their clubs, mostly Instagram-famous white women and Latinas, were stealing tips meant for dancers. They also claimed that club management excluded darker-skinned women from working VIP rooms, where most of the money could be made. Management, who hired the bartenders to bring in more clientele, refused to do anything.

The first American strip club to unionize was the Lusty Lady in San Francisco. The club had hired only five Black women out of about 70 dancers and did not allow the Black dancers to work in the more expensive VIP rooms. Because dancers at the Lusty Lady were employees, Siobhan Brooks—who worked at the club in 1996 and is now a sociologist and associate professor at California State University, Fullerton—was able to work with a local union to file a racial discrimination complaint against the club. But dancers who are listed as independent contractors usually don’t unionize, largely because they wouldn’t get the same protections and privileges as unionized employees. A class-action lawsuit is often a dancer’s best option for reinforcing their rights.

Adelaide Pagano is an attorney at Lichten & Liss-Riordan, a Boston firm that’s fought many workers’ rights cases for exotic dancers, including the ongoing lawsuits against VIP’s and the Admiral. She said that labor misclassification for dancers is prevalent, but dancers don’t bring class-action cases to court often because of fear of retaliation from club management and personal privacy concerns. She advises that dancers who are hired as independent contractors document evidence of a club’s control over their work, including photographs of written rules or manuals and copies of text messages from management.

“You know, that’s just the way the world

continued from 9

is,” Aurora told me about the business. She sat in a low-cushioned chair in her living room, legs folded beside her, occasionally taking drags off a joint. The overhead lights were off, but a couple of desk lamps provided a soothing glow. Two stainless steel poles took up most of the free space behind us. “Everybody is gonna try and get something. I don’t blame them. I get it.”

Aurora first got into stripping after winning \$1,000 in an amateur night Rack of the Month Contest at Jimmy’s Restaurant in Chicago Heights. Soon, she was hired. She lived with her parents and kept dancing to help pay their mortgage and make enough money to travel. (Aurora took her first flight at age 26.) Since then Aurora has worked at venues across the country, and has even pole danced onstage for Snoop Dogg’s tour. A few years ago, Aurora began teaching in-person pole dance lessons from her apartment, both for sex workers and those outside of the industry. She also runs the Tip Rail, where through social media and a blog she offers advice to dancers, a “source for leveling up your stripper career.”

At first, Aurora was hesitant about joining the lawsuit against VIP’s. “Then I got pissed,” she said. “I’ve always been pissed off by it, but you know, you feel powerless. Like you want to do something, and you don’t know who to talk to, you don’t know who to trust.”

Using Facebook groups and e-mail, we asked dancers in the city to fill out an anonymous survey about working conditions. While only a handful of dancers responded, we saw an echo of the complaints Aurora, and lawsuits across the nation, have described, including dancers being forced to wear a specific dress or hairstyle, and dancers of color facing racial discrimination. Still, the women who responded told us they did not join the lawsuit against their club. “I was worried we would all be left without a place to work,” wrote one dancer, who said she worked at the Admiral. “Something like that could get you blacklisted from strip clubs,” wrote another. (Management at the Admiral did not respond to questions about this story.)

For Aurora, joining the lawsuit is worth more than just getting her old house fees back. “What I’m hoping is that someone will take a step back and look at the way the system works and be like, *This doesn’t make any sense.*”



“Things will get better. I just think it’s going to take a long time. We just need more sex workers in office. That’s the solution. We need more sex workers to go out and become politicians.”

-Aurora

Minneapolis, which has less than a quarter of the population of Chicago but four times as many strip clubs, recently proved that sweeping change to outdated legislation is possible. In 2017 the state’s health department found semen stains in most of the city’s strip clubs. By September 2019, the city council passed an unprecedented ordinance to strengthen protections for adult entertainers and enforce improved working conditions. “We demonstrated to the city council that the problem with the clubs wasn’t the falsely assumed problems of ‘vice,’ but problems of financial exploitation,” Eric Sprankle, of Minnesota State University, Mankato, wrote in an e-mail.

Now it’s illegal for club managers and owners to accept tips from dancers; workers’ rights and customer conduct rules are posted in clubs; employees are given copies of their contracts; clubs must develop a written plan for how security camera footage is preserved; no one can be employed as a manager or security staff who has a domestic violence-related conviction within five years; and no retaliation is allowed against workers for reporting violations. “Time is up on the social problem or nuisance approach to how to address adult entertainment,” said Jayne Swift, lecturer at the University of Minnesota and organizer of SWOP Minneapolis. “It’s time to move towards a labor and human rights approach that recognizes that sex workers are members of whatever community they’re in.”

Codi Schei, a 29-year-old sex worker and board member of SWOP’s Chicago chapter, said that aldermen have yet to make efforts to listen to what sex workers are saying they need. “Respectability politics are an unfortunate reality in this type of advocacy, and many groups in positions of power still hesitate to work with sex workers because of widespread criminalization, harmful stigma, and faulty stereotypes,” Schei wrote in an e-mail.

For decades, Chicago’s liquor ordinance has prohibited nudity in clubs with liquor licenses—the fully nude Admiral Theatre has a strict no-alcohol policy; topless Pink Monkey uses BYOB; and at Rick’s Cabaret, which serves liquor, dancers must apply obscuring layers of liquid latex to their nipples and lower breasts. In December 2019, the *Sun-Times* reported that aldermen Matt O’Shea and Michele Smith have insisted that topless dancers in clubs selling liquor is exploitative and leads to human trafficking.

In the same month, however, the city set-

tled a 2016 federal lawsuit brought by artist and entertainer Bea Sullivan-Knoff, who alleged that the liquor ordinance was sexist and transphobic, as it required only the “female breast” to be covered in establishments that sell liquor. Part of the settlement required the city to introduce an amendment striking the ordinance’s current gendered language and allowing all adult entertainers to perform topless, even in establishments with liquor licenses. The amendment process to the ordinance is waiting on further approvals from the City Council. The Chicago Department of Law did not comment on the ordinance’s current status.

For Aurora, getting rid of the liquid latex nipple coverings at her job is welcomed, mostly because latex irritates her skin. “I have hope,” Aurora said. “And I think things will get better. I just think it’s going to take a long time. We just need more sex workers in office. That’s the solution. We need more sex workers to go out and become politicians.”

The interviews for this story took place before the novel coronavirus pandemic. The night at the Empty Bottle now reads like a social-distancing nightmare and the future of clubs—as things reopen, or after another outbreak, and really, until there is a vaccine—is uncertain.

A Houston strip club was permitted to open, as long as it functions as a restaurant without dancers, “even if the entertainers are fully clothed.” A Portland club started a “drive-thru” service, where dancers perform under a tent in the parking lot as customers wait for food. And a club in the Chicago suburbs opened illegally, but “no one showed up.” Meanwhile, some clubs film private shows with solo dancers in empty VIP rooms and sell the videos. Apps like OnlyFans, where users create their own content for paid subscribers, and other social media virtual strip clubs have been popular choices for those performing sex work. Sex workers are among those filing for unemployment, though some are unsure whether they even qualify for benefits. Aurora’s income has almost disappeared, and she fears that she and her partner will have to leave their apartment by August. She mentioned the possibility of moving back in with her parents.

Only a few months ago in January, Aurora shuffled around her kitchen, dressed in a red plaid onesie and fuzzy white slippers. Instead of working at Rick’s that night, she had opted to focus on her personal website the Tip Rail. One blog post, titled “How to Be an Ally,” discusses common misconceptions about sex

workers and what terms industry outsiders shouldn't use (for example, dropping the word "prostitute" from your lexicon). "I know it's about to be 2020, but we still get side-eye, we still deal with some dumb shit, and honestly, we just don't want to be reminded about work outside of work after being up til 5am dealing with that coked out investment banker that wouldn't stop making us look at pictures of all of his yachts," Aurora wrote. "We just want to eat a goddamn omelette and look at dogs on instagram."

Aurora said posts like this directly benefit sex workers not just by addressing stigma, but by creating community. "It helps us to know that there's a cohesion of thought," she explained. "We've all experienced some degree of stigmatization, and that hopefully will empower other people in our industry to know how to identify it when it's happening and what to say."


Aurora charges \$297 for an expert mentorship course and \$57 for an essential course, but she provides her public content for free. She knows not everyone can afford to pay for services. "There was a point in my career when I did not have a lot," she said. "It's important to help people that really can't help themselves whatsoever."

She said she hadn't eaten enough carbs that day, so she whipped up a single pancake. She told me that on Instagram Live she was going to tease apart the meaning of "self-care" and demystify the word for any of her 154 followers who would be tuning in. "Sometimes, yes, [self-care is] getting a massage, getting some rose petals sprinkled across you. But there's a concept of knowing how to address what

parts of your life need the self-care."

Aurora sat at the kitchen counter and propped up her phone. When the stream went live, she explained her ideas with warm directness, even as she struggled to keep a wandering black cat from blocking her screen. Aurora said that no matter how her shift at the club goes, she always comes home and takes care of herself. She slips her tired and bruised legs back into sweatpants or leggings. She drinks magnesium water and wears foam toe separators, sometimes even to bed. When she has more time and more energy, she burns sage and meditates. "I thank the universe for helping me show up as the person that I'm meant to be," she said. "I thank it for the gifts that it gave me. I let go of any negativity, and I breathe in positivity."

Speaking on Instagram Live comes easy for Aurora. She has spent years of her life holding conversations with strangers, men at the bar drinking overpriced beer and half-heartedly watching whatever sports game happened to be on the television. But her real passion is in performance and nurturing other dancers. After ending her 15-minute livestream, Aurora told me about the programs she planned to offer: essential tips and tricks for "baby strippers" (a term for those newest to the industry), and, for more experienced dancers, personalized methods to keep income flowing inside and outside of the club.

"I love this way more than dancing," Aurora said. "I mean, I still love dancing, but this is different. I get to help people. I've helped lots of men. I want to help women." 

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Chicago Dungeon Rentals has been empty for the last two months. © SOPHIA CHASE

COMMUNITY

Bonded together in crisis

The local sex worker community, hit hard amid the pandemic and ignored by social safety nets, is no stranger to mutual uplifting during tough times.

By **ARIEL PARRELLA-AURELI**

Lady Sophia Chase has never been so ravenous for BDSM. The local sex worker and professional dominatrix has been clientless for more than two months and is hungry to get her hands on someone again.

“I am curious what I am going to want to do the most because BDSM is so wide—sometimes you feel like pizza, sometimes you feel like Mexican food—I don’t know if I am going to be craving bondage or suddenly want to be very sadistic,” Chase says.

Chase is the owner of Chicago Dungeon

Rentals, a rental space for BDSM customers and dominatrices in the sex industry. With two locations, business was booming regularly until March, when her clientele decreased to a trickle amid fears of the coronavirus. Then the state’s stay-at-home order went into effect, closing both dungeons; they are not considered essential businesses. Since then, Chase has lost all income and is asking clients to donate, buy gift cards, or shop online to keep the Dungeon afloat.

Sex workers like Chase have been hit hard by

the pandemic, which has cut finances drastically for many who rely on in-person work. Some have turned to online sex work to stay afloat, which can be challenging for those who don’t have an online presence, tech access, or digital marketing experience. Chase had to relearn how to market herself digitally—a careful line to walk since the federal government introduced Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) and the Senate’s Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA), laws that censor online sex communities in a dulled effort to combat sex trafficking and have detrimentally affected sex workers.

Chase went years without advertising herself because she is established in the industry, but in April, she started doing sex phone calls, webcamming, and selling fetish items online, though it’s not as lucrative as in-person work. On March 30, she started using the content subscription site OnlyFans and is now in the top 6.6 percent of creators on the website. “And that doesn’t even cover my rent. So that means [94

percent] of creators are making less than me,” she says.

For other dominatrices who have built up an online brand, the transition to full-on virtual work wasn’t as stark. Leila, a local domme and erotic photographer who asked that we not use their real name, says they started taking phone calls and heavily driving people to their subscription site in March when the shutdown began. Their earnings doubled compared to March; April was the best month on their site.

“Many people resort to online ‘entertainment’ as a coping mechanism,” they say. “It’s also tricky because many people are tight with money and might not be spending much on entertainment, so while [April] was good, next month might not be.”

While struggling amid the uncertainty and anxiety from the new normal, the sex worker community has a reputation of being incredibly supportive, resilient, and fit to weather bad storms. It was one of the first communities to rally around mutual aid benefits as the pandemic’s threats became real—local groups all over the country created relief funds for sex workers that collected thousands of dollars. These aid initiatives highlight the deep roots of organizing that run in the community, which has a history of leaning on one another financially and otherwise because sex workers are often left out of social and government safety nets.

While there isn’t an official relief fund for Chicago sex workers, the community is supporting each other financially, emotionally, and mentally during the pandemic. “With some of the money I’ve saved up I’ve been helping other sex workers who need the help more than I do,” Leila says.

SWOP Chicago, the local chapter of the nationwide grassroots organization Sex Workers Outreach Project (which is behind many country-wide mutual aid efforts), began a virtual Sex Worker Support Group. The group is helping sex workers from all over the U.S. get access to economic aid from groups such as the National Employment Law Project.

Freya Feist, an erotic content creator and cam girl, also stepped up to help local workers negatively impacted by the shutdown, donating about \$500 to Chicago workers who cannot work online. “We need to be holding our community right now and be distributing wealth and what we make to full-service workers, to

ARTS & CULTURE

workers who are street-based, to workers who cannot do that right now,” Feist says.

To raise funds, Feist created two quarantine-themed erotic fantasy videos that sold well and focused on fat fetish content, her industry niche. She also hosted free Camming 101 video conferencing webinars for sex workers looking to get into online content. Feist has been in the industry for about five years and says she is happy to offer her knowledge and experience on lighting, video editing, what toys to use, and how to get customers to buy content.

But while she has supported the community, she also saw a 20 percent drop in online sales for March and a 50 percent dip for April. Although she is able to still create content, the shutdown has disrupted her in-person work. Feist canceled a tour in Los Angeles that would have brought in about \$2,500. And with no federal aid, sex workers know they have to hustle to make money on their own terms.

“We are our own aid. Mayor Lightfoot is not going to be knocking on my door saying, ‘Here’s \$1,000,’” Feist laughs. “The most frustrating

thing is that what [the government] is telling me is I am not a business. What you are telling me is I don’t matter; what I am doing is not worthwhile or my economic impact does not matter.”

The lack of government support not only makes sex workers like Feist feel personally discriminated against, but it highlights the longstanding marginalization of sex workers in the U.S. that is only heightened during the pandemic. Feist wants the public to see that sex work is not just a side hustle or something “fun”—it’s a business that involves digital communication, marketing, and financial skills, just like any other career.

Emma Alamo, who makes leather bondage gear for kink pleasures and fashion, has lost about 70 percent of her income as events and expos were canceled. She is selling items online but is still losing money. She applied for every federal grant to help keep her afloat and was recently surprised to receive money from the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Economic Injury Disaster Loan Emergency

Advance, though she was only given \$1,000 as opposed to the \$10,000 originally promised to small businesses—the SBA recently changed its program rules after seeing the high demand of applicants.

Despite the small boost, Alamo isn’t sure if she will survive the pandemic. She says the sex industry needs help. “Support businesses that might be defined as prurient because we are not getting the bailouts,” Alamo says. “People should be paying for porn, always but now more than ever.”

Sex workers say the demand for their services is there and always will be. But what that will look like after the pandemic is over, and whether businesses like the Chicago Dungeon Rentals will survive, remains a mystery. “I want to be optimistic but I also want to be realistic,” Chase says. “I wish I only operated as a sex worker and could be a work machine, but I am also just like anybody else: I worry about [the virus], about my family, my health.”

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Project Fire participants in Firebird's Garfield Park studio
COURTESY FIREBIRD COMMUNITY ARTS

VISUAL ARTS

Firebird Community Arts rises from the ashes

The community organization spreads the healing practice of glassblowing and ceramics.

BY BRIANNA WELLEN

Fire can heal. It's an idea that has been the center of ArtReach's practice since the introduction of Project Fire in 2015, its flagship glassblowing program focused on serving young Chicagoans dealing with violence-related trauma. Since 1990, ArtReach has existed in one form or another to connect traumatized communities in the city to arts education and practices. Now, in its 30th year, the Garfield Park-based organization is changing its name to Firebird Community Arts and focusing further on the flame.

"The new name, Firebird, is in relation to phoenixes, that through fire recreate and renew themselves," says executive director Karen Benita Reyes. "Both the art forms that we use in our studio, glassblowing and ceramics, require fire and extreme heat, but also we're using them as a way for people to renew and reimagine themselves and their communities."

While the rebirth and renaming were originally slated to be announced at the organization's spring fundraiser, the group was forced to pivot due to COVID-19 and instead reintroduced themselves to the world through a week of virtual events, including a glassblowing demo with artistic director and master glassblower Pearl Dick, drawing workshops with teaching artists, guided yoga and meditation sessions, and more. In addition to those public-facing programs, Firebird has continued and increased virtual trauma psychoeducation group sessions for the young people who were already participating in the programs in person.

A typical Project Fire program starts with a three-hour glassblowing session followed by an hour of a trauma support group. "If we walked in and were like, *tell us what happened to you and how you process it*, people would clam up and be like *get out of my face*.

Whereas after they've been through all this trust building and team building and working nonverbally in this space, all of a sudden they sit down and feel a sort of comfort with each other and are ready to talk," Reyes says. She's found the glassblowing to be particularly beneficial to folks with symptoms of PTSD because it demands full attention—not only is there the immediate danger of burning yourself or shattering glass, but there's a glowing orb of molten lava holding focus. Ceramics work is similarly hypnotic, but in a more calming, tactile way. Reyes says they use that form particularly with people who have language difficulties and with communities that are blind and vision impaired. Final pieces for both art forms are forged in fire, and throughout the process folks are able to connect with others, face their traumas, and participate in a creative experience typically only available to rich, white communities.

Of course, some things have changed during the pandemic—it's not possible to send everyone home with a torch for glassblowing, especially if they're not properly trained, and there's limited capacity for pickups and drop-offs to the kiln for ceramic projects. But Firebird's core values have remained. Maintaining a community around open communication and discussion about dealing with trauma is at the top of that list. Reyes says she's found their young participants are more involved than ever in those sessions. And Firebird's employment program is still fully funded through the end of the year. That means that teaching artists and youth participants in trauma psychoeducation group sessions are still being paid for their time.

Reyes says she's been blown away by the discussions the Firebird teens have been having in the past two months, talking about the deep emotional processing they're having to deal with. Until they can return to the studio again, she's taking in the wisdom of the communities she serves. "Unfortunately a lot of the young people who we deal with are really way too accustomed to having the outside world be dangerous to them," Reyes says. "And that ranges from contact with police to street violence, so having physical confinement to a place to be safe and having to limit one's movements based on that is not new to these folks. So in that way, I've been talking to people a lot about how they're the experts we need in how to handle trauma in isolation right now." ■

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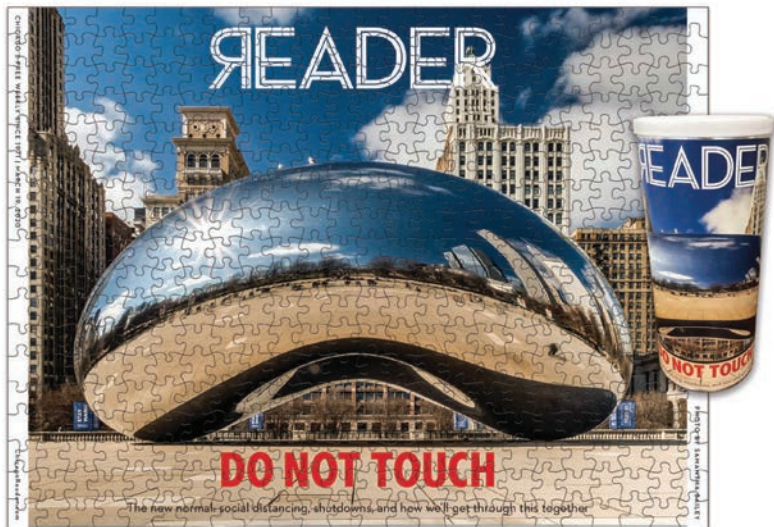
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THEATER



BEYOND THE BLACK BOX

Site-specific work hits a crossroads

Pre-pandemic performance was breaking out of theaters. Now where will it go?

By **BRANDON SWARD**

The truth about theaters is that they're boring. This is not, however, to say that what happens within them is boring; merely that they're rather blank, expectant, waiting. This waiting assumes added significance at the present moment, as no one can predict when lights will return to Steppenwolf, the Goodman, the Lyric. Like us, some will die. Less than two weeks after temporarily closing on March 14, the venerable Hubbard Street Dance Chicago announced the nearly half-century-old Lou Conte Dance Studio would remain shuttered indefinitely. And this is surely just a canary in the proverbial coal mine. If you're worried about how—or even whether—the live arts will survive, your fear is well-founded. In the absence of some wealthy benefactor touching the city with a golden finger, many of our cultural institutions may already be gone. At least in their present form.

Over the past several years, however, Chicagoans have increasingly moved beyond the black box to present their work in locations

not specifically designed for this purpose. Many of these “site-specific” performances have occurred in museums, especially at the Art Institute under the tutelage of Hendrik Folkerts, who was hired in 2017 after a stint curating performance at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. A monthly series, “Artists Connect,” brings artists, poets, dancers, and musicians into the galleries to engage the museum’s collection and draw connections to their own practices. These responses have run the gamut from video games to a solo harp recital of traditional Mexican folk music to a puppet show and more.

Museums have long used these cultural intermediaries to bridge the imagined gap between art and audience. From the docent to the audio guide and now the QR code, there seems to be an anxiety about leaving the act of interpretation solely to the viewer. Performances like those of “Artists Connect,” however, seem to explode interpretation, or at least a certain limited conception of it. The art world is often criticized, and rightly so, for its

Puppeteer Koryu Nishikawa V at the Art Institute
 AYUMI SAKAMOTO

elitism, as though the only way of understanding art is through deep historical knowledge and, increasingly, a fluency in “theory.” These and other performances invite—or challenge—viewers to accept the possibility that a song might be as much of an interpretation as a monograph.

But this knife also cuts both ways. The living bodies of performers can also draw out aspects of works of art incapable of speaking for themselves. Consider the Court Theatre staging of Lisa Peterson and Denis O’Hare’s one-man adaptation of Homer’s *Iliad* in the Persian Gallery of the Oriental Institute, which highlights how that fountainhead of “western” civilization took place not in Greece but in what is now Turkey. By bringing text and images together in this way, the cold stone of ancient statues begins to warm with the heat of those emotions that produced both huge monoliths and epic poetry.

Far from being a mere museum phenomenon, site-specific performance has also

“activated” the public art one can walk by every day without really seeing, such as Henry Moore’s *Nuclear Energy*, a bronze sculpture at the site of Chicago Pile-1, the first artificial nuclear reactor. For the 75th anniversary of the event, the University of Chicago commissioned artist Cai Guo-Qiang to shoot his “Color Mushroom Cloud” into the sky above its metallic counterpart. While the skull-like Moore has a sense of foreboding, the bright Guo-Qiang feels celebratory, perhaps expressing a hope for peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Notably, a student-organized die-in protested the university’s cheery framing, corporeally highlighting the human costs of the Atomic Age.

Beyond art, multiple choreographers in Chicago have brought attention to the powerful influence architecture exerts upon how we move. Commissioned by the Graham Foundation, Brendan Fernandes made visible the perhaps unexpected resonances between ballet and architecture in his *The Master and Form*. Through a series of BDSM-like installations in the Graham’s galleries, pupils from the Joffrey Academy of Dance perform

a series of stretches and exercises, opening a small window into the intense discipline that characterizes the professional dance world. The linearity of their technique echoes that of the building around them and gives us a sense of that curious mix of pain and pleasure which results from gently yet persistently coaxing a body to move in ways nature never intended.

While Fernandes’s *The Master and Form* went on to become part of the 2019 Whitney Biennial in New York, other architecturally responsive dance pieces are altogether impossible to imagine in another venue. Take, for example, *moving installations a stairway and a corridor*, a presentation by HSPRO, the preprofessional division of Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, during a recent residency at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at UChicago. As the title suggests, dancers lead audience members down the Center’s ten flights of stairs, slowly bringing them into the bowels of an unnerving dystopia wherein coins seem to signify money and/or drugs. The eponymous “corridor” is on the second floor, from the windows of which one can see strange geometries come together and fall

apart, like tai chi seen through a *Black Mirror* lens, until the performers appear crowded in the hallway, a dense amoeba of reaching arms, legs, and faces. After the intervention, the space feels different; the Logan’s clean modernist lines have begun to feel like those of a prison or asylum.

Having thus noted some of the similarities and differences between these practices, the question of what is fueling this increasing attention to site within contemporary performance remains. The impulse is rather counterintuitive. There has been much hand-wringing about how to handle the “you had to be there” quality of performance, and site specificity seems to only exacerbate these problems. What the theater loses in its “boringness,” it makes up in its versatility, which is precisely what allows productions to tour from one place to the next. To be sure, the theater that could only host one type of performance would be a bankrupt one (or else a short shrine, such as the Bayreuth Festspielhaus is for Richard Wagner).

We might, then, describe site-specific performance as “doubly ephemeral.” First,



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THEATER



The Master and Form © RCH

there's the ephemerality of all performance, the bodies that disappear after the fact, leaving a residue in documentation, in the minds of the audience. But in addition, the site-specific performance can only be performed in one place. We might see another production of Peterson and O'Hare's *Iliad*, but not one that plays alongside Persian artifacts. This is even more extreme in works specifically and self-consciously made for a certain space, such as *moving installations a stairway and a corridor*. There may be another stairway, and even a stairway of ten floors, but no stairway is quite like this one, with its polished floors and metal handrails, its heavy doors, the gaps between window and wall through which dancers thrust fingers or coins, to say nothing of the echoey shrieks and cries that bounce off the smooth concrete, growing more distorted each time.

What are we to make of this explosion of site-specific performance, particularly within Chicago? Long a "city of neighborhoods," we might less optimistically point out that Chicago is one of the most segregated areas in the U.S. As someone who came of age in the placeless sprawl of the mountain west, moving to Chicago has attuned me to space and my relationship to it in an entirely new way. I tried to explain to my little sister when she moved to Chicago but couldn't find the words. A petite, attractive woman, she's gone on to develop a whole other sensitivity to its streets

and trains that I, as a relatively gender-normative man, haven't had to acquire. It's at once tempting and irresponsible to draw a parallel to this kind of "urban awareness" and the deluge of site-specific performance we've witnessed recently in Chicago.

As we continue to weather these days of quarantine, many of us have newly recognized our real hunger for human proximity, as scenarios that were commonplace a few short months ago are now nowhere to be found. Unfortunately, theaters will likely be some of the last spaces to reopen. Or at least this author finds it hard to imagine gathering together with hundreds of your closest friends for hours in darkness at any point in the near future. Unfortunate given the shoestring budgets with which most cultural institutions operate. Even performances in public spaces feel impossibly distant at present.

Before lockdown, I was looking forward to seeing Tanztheater Wuppertal perform *Palermo Palermo* at the Harris Theater in Millennium Park. In response to the cancellation, the Pina Bausch Foundation made digitally restored video footage of the piece's 1989 premiere available via their Vimeo, a poor but welcome substitute. After about 15 minutes of watching out of the corner of my eye, I was startled to attention by a character in blackface, which sent me into a Google frenzy. I learned that Bausch cut the controversial makeup early on in the run. Apparently, per-

THEATER



Cai Guo-Qiang, "Color Mushroom Cloud" @ ZOHEYR DOCTOR AND REED ESSICK

formance can not only be specific to a place, but also to a time, a culture, a country, a mentality.

Though many organizations have followed suit and opened their archives to the public, performers are nothing if not inventive, and have found ever more creative ways of sharing their work. Dancer and *Reader* critic Irene Hsiao, known about town for her museum interventions, has shared her "Score for an unfinished dance" through the "Allure of Matter" website, a joint exhibition of contemporary Chinese art between the Smart Museum and Wrightwood 659. The score begins with Hsiao's e-mail to the curators, expressing with a delicate longing the feelings of so many of us whose lives and plans have been upended by a virus we cannot see but which has brought the globe to its knees.

Other companies have "simply" moved their performances online. For example, NKAME, the first U.S. retrospective of the late Cuban printmaker Belkis Ayón (1967-99), on display at the Chicago Cultural Center before COVID-19 shut it down, included a virtual presentation by Lucky Plush Productions, a maker of performances that blend contemporary dance and devised theater led by Julia Rhoads and Leslie Danzig. Lucky Plush offered *Rooming House*, a meditation on change that slips between English and Spanish and draws upon the experiences of Cuban expat ensemble members Michel Rodriguez Cintra and

Rodolfo Sánchez Sarracino. Another NKAME participant is Honey Pot Performance, an Afro-diasporic feminist collaborative cofounded by Felicia Holman, Aisha Jean-Baptiste, and Abra Johnson. Honey Pot's *If/Then* incorporates online performances and a series of scores worked through with monthly guest artists, culminating with a New Works Festival featuring all of the artists in a weekend-long performance.

These experiments show us a medium at a crossroads. While all artists have been hit hard by the pandemic, performers (site-specific or otherwise) are the only ones who explicitly rely upon that which is presently most dangerous: sustained, direct, personal contact in physical space. One road, here represented by Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, attempts to reapproximate what we've lost, with the hope that we'll get back to it as soon as possible. Another approach, represented by Honey Pot, is to imagine what "digitally native" performance might look like. A child of the 90s, I know firsthand how the Internet can provide community in times of profound isolation. But I also know how it can bring us face-to-face with the ugliest parts of ourselves. And so, you might ask: Where will we perform once we arrive at our new normal? This I cannot answer. But I can promise you'll want a front-row seat. [f](#)

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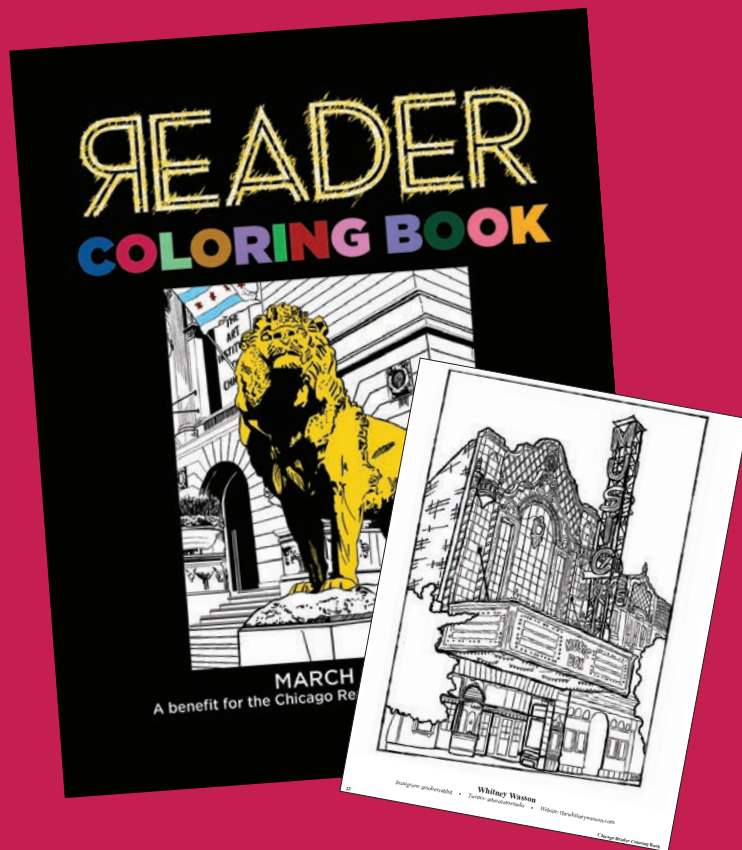
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FILM



SMALL SCREEN

Trade real life for reality TV

What streaming show should you watch based on your quarantine status?

By RIMA PARIKH

On day 600,000 of Illinois's stay-at-home order, it happened to you. You're on your living room floor. You're doing a 1,000-piece custom-ordered jigsaw puzzle of Cardi B and Bernie Sanders photoshopped partying at Tao. You jab one of the dozens of blue pieces into a spot with no luck. You sigh, devastated. This puzzle is just not cutting it anymore. Something's missing. You need gossip. Real gossip. You need reality TV. OK, stop protesting. Let me finish. You DO need it.

Reality TV gets a bad rap for being "trash" and "the mental equivalent of incinerating your brain." And what's wrong with that? If there's a time I want to toss my brain into a blender, ma'am, it is now. Reality TV turns your brain off. It sucks you into a new, addicting universe with its own rules. It promises hours of escape, and all you have to do is sit in one place and hit play. Don't think of reality shows as trash TV. Think of them as documentaries that you don't have to lie about enjoying. Sure, *Blackfish* was "important" but, uh, have you seen *Vanderpump Rules*? If you're new to reality TV, here's a guide on where to get started based on how your quar-

antine is going.

If you're overwhelmed with dozens of new quarantine hobbies, you should watch: *Property Brothers* (Hulu)

You're baking bread. You're reading books. You're knitting. You're basically the perfect 1800s homemaker. Laura Ingalls Wilder is posthumously writing you into *Little House on the Prairie*. Somehow, you've fought off the unending, nightmare-induced sluggishness that many of us have felt during quarantine. Congrats! You might like *Property Brothers*, HGTV's reality show about a pair of small-mouthed twins who fix up busted up homes for a lucky couple every episode. Watching it makes you wonder, "Wow, how do they do it? Could I renovate a house? I probably could if I tried, right? I could probably do it. I did Habitat for Humanity in high school." Feeling like you did something is actually its own type of accomplishment.

If you've become a quarantine homebody a little too easily, you should watch: *90 Day Fiancé* (Hulu)

FILM

Terrace House

You only wear soft clothes now (pajamas). No crunchy clothes (jeans). You've rebooted back into your middle school self, where Neopets, pizza rolls, and wondering if you'll ever have sex one day are your version of *The Good Place*. Sure, you live with your partner, but they're busy doing puzzles on their phone, and you kind of have to talk to your succulents, so . . . You need something that you can watch for hours at a time. TLC's *90 Day Fiancé* is like watching a trainwreck, but also, a lot of these couples earnestly do seem to love each other. And boom, you're invested! Another reason to ignore Zoom calls.

If you're an essential worker, you should watch: *The Real Housewives* franchise (Hulu)

While a lot of folks are grumbling about being stuck at home, you're out there going to work every day. You deserve a lot, like paid sick time, vacation, hazard pay, proper PPE, and I hope you're getting that. You also deserve messy bitches, which is why *The Real Housewives* franchise is for you to devour. Leave it to Bravo for creating reality TV that sucks you in and keeps you mentally sedated. Have a glass of wine and a Klonopin and enjoy the true American pastime: watching rich women hurl drinks at each other.

If you're short-circuiting from the lack of social life, you should watch: *Terrace House* (Netflix)

You're double-booking Zoom calls. You're mixing yourself elaborate cocktails like you're at the bar. You're wearing your prom tux to the grocery store. You practice eye contact in the mirror, anticipating a meet-cute on your next sanity walk. Uh, you need *Terrace House*, a Japanese reality show on Netflix. It's arguably the most realistic reality show. No talking heads, no contrived drama—just six hot people moving into a beautiful house and getting to know each other. I mean, contestants still go to their day jobs at this show. Unlike your average reality show, *Terrace House* residents say things like “hello” and “how was your day?” Normalcy, baby!

If you're ignoring social distancing guidelines and hanging out with your friends like normal, you should watch: *The Bachelor* (Netflix, Tubi)

There are 22 seasons of *The Bachelor*, which means in order to catch up, you have to quarantine (like, really quarantine) for 14 days, in front of your laptop. For the safety of others, please DO NOT leave your home until you are FINISHED with *The Bachelor*. AFTER you finish watching 22 seasons of *The Bachelor*, DO NOT leave your home until you've watched it all again. Repeat until public health officials say it's okay to see your friends. I know it's inconvenient putting your life on pause to watch *The Bachelor*, but look, there have been books written about this show. Maybe you'll become so passionate about it that you'll write your own *Bachelor* thesis, and that will help keep your ass inside.

If you're breaking quarantine to hook up with someone from a dating app, you should watch: *Too Hot to Handle* (Netflix)

Too Hot to Handle is a show about hot people trapped on an island with other hot people. Tragically, they can't hook up, lest they want to risk losing prize money. Yes, this show is kind of boring. Yes, there is a contestant who compares not being able to have sex for a summer to the idea of her mom dying. But there's an important lesson to take away here: If these hot people can more or less keep their hands off each other, then you and Crouton Billington, 29, from Hinge, can settle for a Zoom date. I mean, really? Do you need to endanger the lives of others for some mediocre peen? Is *commuting* for Pandemic Peen worth it to you? No, “Pandemic Peen” would be a great reality show” is NOT the point.

If you're fluctuating between being very horny and being very sad, you should watch: *The Great British Bake Off* (Netflix)

We all need to be gentle with ourselves right now, and that includes those of us that are experiencing, uh, complicated feelings during all this. *The Great British Bake Off* is therapeutic. It is as relaxing as a glass of warm milk (and also, way less disgusting than drinking a glass of warm milk). It's got a variety (a VARIETY!!!) of soothing British accents; it's got contestants rooting for each other; it's got elaborate desserts that are nice to look at. Will this make you less sad? Probably. Will this make you less horny? I don't know! Will you start using the word “chuffed” in everyday conversation? I hope so! 🍪

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Inheritance

NOW PLAYING

RR *Circus of Books*

"I don't know why you think this is worth documenting . . . I don't like all this filming. I don't know what you're gonna come up with from this," said Karen Mason, scoffing at her daughter Rachel behind the camera. To Karen, she and her husband Barry were merely parents and struggling small business owners. To everyone else, however, Karen and Barry and their store Circus of Books existed as an iconic spot in gay Los Angeles. For the Masons, the lucrative but dangerous business of owning an adult store in the 70s had turned from a temporary gig to a 30-year venture. Circus of Books compelled the straight, average, Jewish couple to navigate their own family and faith parallel to the world of porn magazines and movies, sex toys and accessories, and to-scale action figures of pornstar Jeff Stryker. The documentary that tells their extraordinary story is funny and jaw-dropping just as much as it is heartfelt and deeply personal, with excellent moments of mother-daughter (subject-creator) bickering that ground the film and, refreshingly, break the emotional tension. *Circus of Books* is a triumph of filmmaking in the way it covers such a range of topics so seamlessly: LGBTQ history, pornography, religion, obscenity law, media, AIDS, coming out, parenthood, and more. It's a story well worth documenting, whether Karen Mason will ever understand that or not. —TARYN ALLEN

92 min. Streaming on Netflix

Inheritance

Inheritance requires an absurd amount of mental gymnastics from viewers. And that's not because it involves Lauren Monroe (Lily Collins) inheriting a man (Simon Pegg) who her recently deceased father (Patrick Warburton) had chained in a bunker for 30-plus years. This shocking secret that threatens to destroy the wealthy and powerful Monroe family is actually realistic compared to the movie's other offerings. Lauren, for example, is the New York County District Attorney, a position held by only two people in the last three decades, both of whom boast legal careers older than the protagonist. Lauren's younger brother William (Chace Crawford reprising a later-seasons version of *Gossip Girl*'s Nate Archibald) is a congressman running for a second term. No amount of Daddy's string-pulling can account for this. Moreover, they're as unlikely as their careers are unlikely, making *Inheritance* seem like nothing more than a lukewarm take on *The Secret in Their Eyes*. —BECCA JAMES 111 min. In wide release on VOD

Mr. Jones

In 1933 Welsh journalist Gareth Jones traveled to the Soviet Union to observe social conditions; he then surreptitiously ventured into Ukraine, where he witnessed the Holodomor, Stalin's man-made famine that historians

believe to have killed several million people. This passable 2019 docudrama—handsomely directed by Polish auteur Agnieszka Holland (*Europa Europa, In Darkness*) from a humdrum script by Andrea Chalupa—recounts Jones's harrowing journey and later reporting of the travesty. James Norton is affecting in the lead; so is Peter Sarsgaard as Walter Duranty, the adversarial *New York Times*'s Moscow bureau chief who won the Pulitzer Prize for a series of articles about the Soviet Union and later denied the famine. A fictional would-be love interest (Vanessa Kirby) and no less than George Orwell (Joseph Mawle) also factor into the plot; the latter knew of Jones's reporting, and some allege that it inspired aspects of his classic parable, *Animal Farm*. Orwell's presence is factitious and overly didactic, and his scenes highlight the overwrought nature of Chalupa's script. Holland's direction, however, is assured, adding to her career-spanning examination of history's uncomfortable truths. In English and subtitled Russian, Ukrainian, and Welsh. —KATHLEEN SACHS 119 min. 5/22-5/28, Gene Siskel Film Center From Your Sofa

RR *IBR*

Searching for the perfect one-bedroom apartment is like looking for a needle in a haystack. If you manage to locate the near-impossible find, then what? Sarah (Nicole Brydon Bloom), like most, seems to think she'll live happily ever after once she's scored the perfect Hollywood pad. But it's too good to be true, of course. Things unravel quickly, escalating from a loud noise here and a nosy neighbor there to a full-on pet homicide before the big reveal. Sarah has been recruited into a cult unwittingly. The reveal, which seems a natural end point, comes only 45 minutes into writer-director David Marmor's movie, leaving the back half for a more compelling rumination on California's history as America's cult-laden capital. *IBR*'s unique timeline paired with its palpable tension makes for a memorable addition to the horror-movies-about-cults catalog. The question is, is Sarah a susceptible target or a scrappy survivor? Find out. —BECCA JAMES 90 min. In wide release on VOD

The Painter and the Thief

In this uninspired documentary from Norwegian filmmaker

er Benjamin Ree, we witness the start and later development of a beautiful friendship, one that's undeniably meaningful to the participants but no more interesting because of that. The friendship involves the titular painter, Czech artist Barbora Kysilkova, and the thief, a troubled Norwegian man named Karl-Bertil Nordland, both of whom are likeable on-screen presences. Ree follows the pair after Nordland and a coconspirator steal two of Kysilkova's paintings and they meet in an Oslo courtroom, forming an unlikely bond that perseveres over the years. As a result, Nordland becomes the subject of several of Kysilkova's hyperrealistic paintings, while grappling with childhood trauma and the drug addiction that led him to commit the crime. The film reflects both subjects' perspective on these events, likewise showing Kysilkova to be a complicated person with her own issues. Despite the novel subject matter, I was largely unimpressed by this bromidic probing of a stranger-than-fiction scenario, yet another of which, I'd argue, doesn't necessitate its own documentary. In English and subtitled Norwegian. —KATHLEEN SACHS 102 min. 5/22-5/28, Gene Siskel Film Center From Your Sofa

RBG

Documentary makers Julie Cohen and Betsy West celebrate the career of Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, noting her recent emergence as a feminist rock star but, more importantly, her early work as a litigator fighting for equal treatment of women. Brenda Feigen, a cofounder with Ginsberg of the ACLU's Women's Rights Project, provides dramatic recollections of the attorney's first argument before the Supreme Court in 1973, in the case of an air force lieutenant denied the benefits her male peers received. A chronology of Ginsberg's subsequent victories shows how patiently and shrewdly she worked to establish the existence and pernicious effects of sex discrimination (her strategy, one male colleague observes, was like "knitting a sweater"). On the personal side, witnesses recall her love of opera, her warm friendship with fellow justice (and ideological opposite) Antonin Scalia, and her long, happy marriage to Martin Ginsberg, a successful New York tax attorney who loyally supported her judicial career. —J.R. JONES PG, 97 min. Music Box Theater Virtual Cinema

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#CHIMUSIC35

Lori Branch's greatest moments in Chicago music history

The pioneering house DJ shouts out her fellow Windy City originators, including Chaka Khan and Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

By **LORI BRANCH AND AYANA CONTRERAS**

Not only is 2020 the Year of Chicago Music, it's also the 35th year for the nonprofit Arts & Business Council of Chicago (A&BC), which supports creatives and their organizations citywide with business expertise and training. To celebrate, the A&BC has launched the #ChiMusic35 campaign at ChiMusic35.com, which includes a public poll to determine the consensus 35 greatest moments in Chicago music history as well as a raffle to benefit the A&BC's work supporting creative communities struggling with the impact of COVID-19 in the city's disinvested neighborhoods.

Another part of the campaign is this *Chicago Reader* collaboration: a series spotlighting important figures in Chicago music who are serving as #ChiMusic35 ambassadors. First up to discuss her own personal greatest moments

in Chicago music history is Lori Branch, widely credited as the first woman DJ in Chicago's legendary house-music scene. She's been featured in several house-music documentaries and books and has held many DJ residencies. Branch cohosts the *Vintage House* show on WNUR 89.3 FM and serves on the board of the Modern Dance Music Research and Archiving Foundation. She's also a longtime public-health advocate and LGBTQ+ activist—more information is available at lorabrand.com.

This interview was conducted by Ayana Contreras, who's a DJ, host, and producer for WBEZ and *Vocalo* and writes for *DownBeat* magazine.

Ayana Contreras: What's your favorite Chicago music moment?

Lori Branch: Aside from some personal

📷 COURTESY THE ARTIST

moments, what comes to mind is Chaka Khan's performance in 2013 at the annual gala for the Center on Halsted. My favorite performance by one of my favorite artists.

It happened by chance. You know how at galas, people stay to hear the songs they know and then start to peel off? Well, after Chaka Khan finished her famous songs, the crowd of 800 to 900 guests started to thin, until there were about 150 of us. It became a very intimate concert. A native Chicagoan, Chaka Khan invited us to come up to the stage. She took a lot of requests, and it was a huge lovefest. My brother and my friends were there. We talk about it to this day.

For a more public performance, it's definitely Billy Branch. He's my cousin and a popular blues player, but I swear I'm not being biased. It was at a Chicago Blues Festival. The place was packed, the sun was setting—no better place to be in the world. Billy came onstage just as it got dark, and when the spotlight shined on him in this gorgeous blue suit, the crowd just erupted. I felt so proud of Chicago and our music legacy. The blues might not have started here, but it had its own kind of birthplace in Chicago.

What do you think makes Chicago such a hotbed for creating music genres?

There's a steady flow of new kinds of music emanating from Chicago that go global. I have opinions about why, but if push came to shove, I'd say it's because we have the silver lining of segregation here. It fosters a kind of backlash, an artistic explosion. That's what you do when you're forced into a corner. We've seen that in a lot of genres, like rock 'n' roll.

Take Sister Rosetta Tharpe, another Chicago legend. She's the godmother of creating the sound that so many people emulate. Her sound had some country roots in the south, but it really grew up in Chicago. She brought along some of the greats in rock 'n' roll, like Little Richard. I love her story. She came from my family church, the Church of God in Christ on 40th Street on the south side.

Chicago's been the birthplace of so many genres of music—including house music, which I've been doing for a long time. That's a Chicago institution. Don't let anyone tell you different. Its unique, stripped-down sound emanated from the south side. I still DJ, mostly for great festivals or local events that mean something to me—like last year's Chosen Few event and now next year's House Music Festival in Millennium Park. 📷



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MUSIC

ALL AGES FREE

PICK OF THE WEEK

Musical time traveler Paul Burch creates vivid, impressionistic stories on *Light Sensitive*

EMILY BEAVER

PAUL BURCH, *LIGHT SENSITIVE*Plowboy
paulburch.com

PAUL BURCH IS A MUSICAL TIME TRAVELER: four years ago he released *Meridian Rising*, a pristine concept album in the voice of Jimmie Rodgers, the greatest pop star of the Great Depression era. The choice made sense, since Burch likewise is an expert stylist who meshes past popular genres but always manages to sound like himself—he can even stand out when working with artists who are distinctive in their own right, such as art-country collective Lambchop and Chicago country-punks the Waco Brothers. On his own, Burch is more refined; think of him as Nashville's answer to Nick Lowe or Joe Henry. On the new *Light Sensitive*, he's surrounded by a group of tasteful players, including multi-instrumentalist Fats Kaplin, slide guitarist Luther Dickinson, and upright bassist Dennis Crouch. They swirl textures together with the deft touch of jazz musicians, moving the music into intimate spaces that are both nocturnal and joyful. There's hardly a pre-Beatles rock genre that Burch doesn't touch: the album includes an early rock 'n' roll shuffle ("Boogie Back"), a country-pop tune ("The Tell"), a twinkly instrumental ("Glider"), and a bluesy number

("You Must Love Someone") that sounds like it could be an unearthed Rodgers B side. Musically, these songs are impressionistic memories of another time, but they're alluring in large part thanks to their present-tense storytelling. Burch sings, croons, and yelps in the voices of different characters: exotic party hosts, jet-era travelers, Mardi Gras revelers in small-town Alabama, even a bookshop customer who discovers his fortune told in the pages of a "book of dreams." The spark for *Light Sensitive* was an arts commission Burch received to musically document the life of southern raconteur Eugene Walter, whose resumé includes cofounding *The Paris Review* and serving as a translator for Federico Fellini—but you don't need to know the details to enjoy the songs. What resonates from Walter's life is the flamboyant fun Burch is clearly having with songs that skip across genres and geographies. Throughout "On My Flight to Spain," a tremolo guitar cuts between verses of a lonely traveler imaging himself cast in Hemingway's life—and though the plane hasn't landed by the song's end, we're still enjoying the view. —MARK GUARINO



Buscabulla @ MARA CORSINO

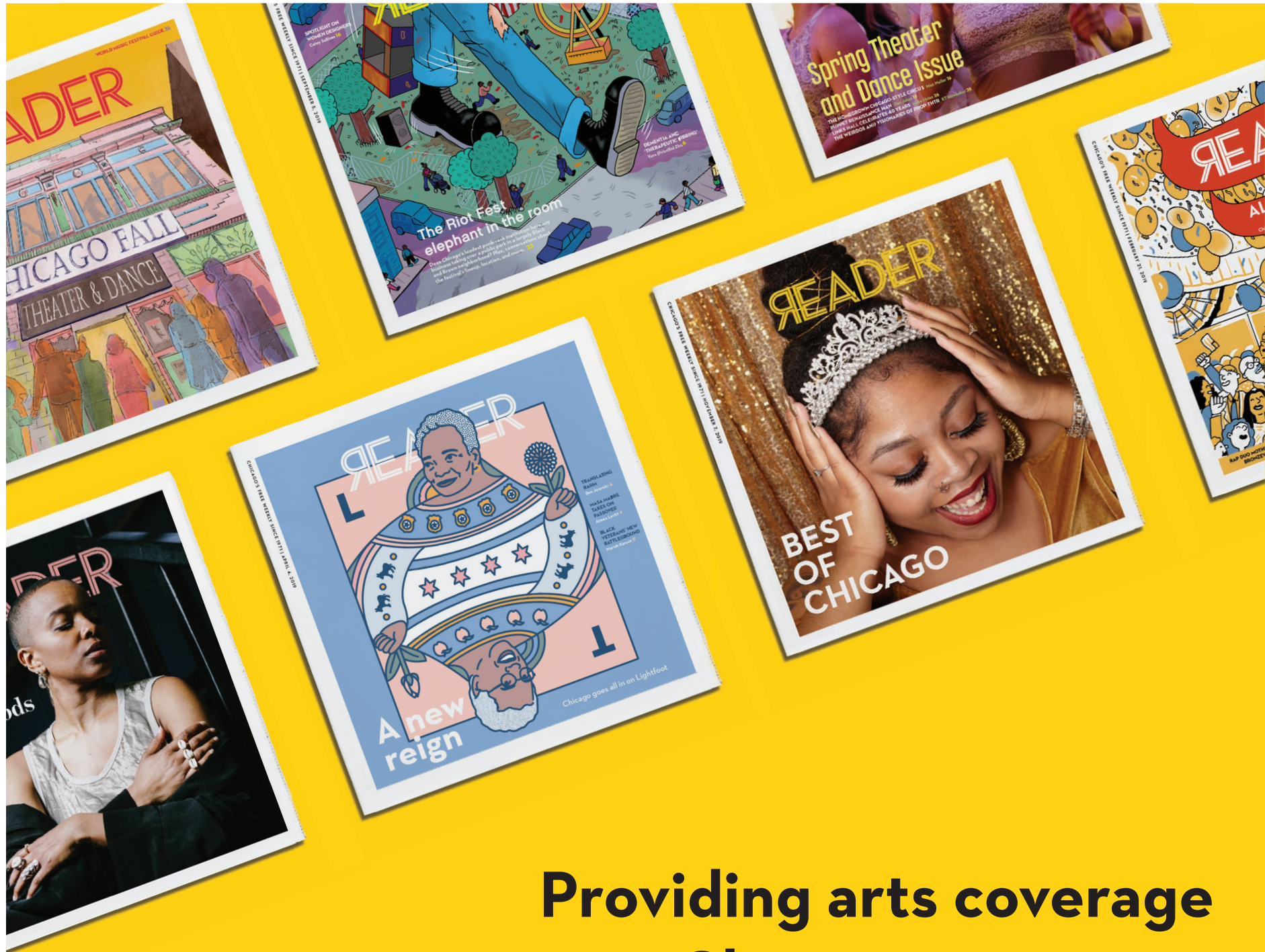
BUSCABULLA, *REGRESA*
Ribbonbuscabulla.bandcamp.com/album/regresa

In the wake of Hurricane Maria, at least 130,000 people left Puerto Rico to live elsewhere. Yet in February 2018, Puerto Rican musicians Raquel Berrios and Luis Alfredo del Valle, aka experimental dream-pop duo Buscabulla ("Troublemaker" in English), returned to the island after nearly a decade in New York City. During those years, they'd become known for their music, which layers minimalist, electro-tropical grooves with high-pitched, ethereal vocals, but despite this success Berrios felt "incomplete" in New York. "Puerto Rico has something—and you probably know it if you know a Puerto Rican—there's something about this island that really calls you," she told NPR earlier this month. After two acclaimed EPs, this month Buscabulla released their debut full-length album, *Regresa* (Ribbon), whose bold sonic palette feels like it developed its fullness while ripening in the sun. Berrios's vocals remain front and center, but the music is less dreamy and more vivid—it blends strange, abstract fragments of Puerto Rican rhythms into a mix of tropical-tinged retro R&B and soul. The drums on "Vámono" take cues from Puerto Rican marching bands and various colorful festival sounds, while the romantic, plaintive bolero "Club Tú y Yo" features orchestral arrangements (courtesy of Helado Negro) that enhance a sense of isolation. Buscabulla's island perspective also adds political double entendres to their lyrics: "Mio," which lays Berrios's croon against slinky smooth bass, seems at first to be about possessing a lover, but on closer listen it's a critique of wealthy tourists who lay claim to what isn't theirs to have. "Manda Fuego" comments on the rise of religious fanaticism on the island with a brief recording of a preacher warning of impending suffering, but with its soulful grooves and ambiguous lyrics, it could also foretell a night of fiery passion. By juxtaposing such disparate emotions, *Regresa* offers sophisticated reflections on anxiety, estrangement, and returning home—in this case, a home that differs greatly from the ideal-

ized vision that del Valle and Berrios imagined while they were in the diaspora. But the promise of better times shines on "Nydia," a tribute to New York-born Puerto Rican actress and singer Nydia Caro, who moved to Puerto Rico at 19. Caro makes a guest appearance on the gently funky tune, and as it turns increasingly upbeat, she prophesies that light will appear in the greatest darkness: "Tú no puedes ver las estrellas," she sings, "Si tú no tienes una noche oscura" ("There is no way you can see the stars / If you don't have a dark night"). —CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON

DARK FOG, *ESCAPE INTO THIS AND ESCAPE INTO THIS 2*Self-released
darkfog.bandcamp.com/album/escape-into-this
darkfog.bandcamp.com/album/escape-into-this-2

When I wrote about prolific Chicago three-piece Dark Fog last winter, the trippy psych voyagers were releasing three albums within a three-month span. It's nice to know that, even in these uncertain times, some things you can still rely on: Dark Fog dropped the EP *Escape Into This* on April 6 and followed it up with *Escape Into This 2* on April 20 (as if there were ever a chance they'd let that date go by). Both releases arrived just a couple months after February's *Psychedelic Landscape*, which closes with the masterpiece "D.T. Suzuki's Bathrobe." The band's founder, vocalist and guitarist Raymond James Donato, recently told me that he created both *Escape* records out of material from his extensive collection of archival Dark Fog tapes. Before the Illinois shelter-in-place order went into effect in March, Donato, drummer Yt Robinson, and bassist Drew Kettering were in the habit of recording every rehearsal and jam session, which is most likely the key to their prolificacy. Donato built these lush tunes by layering extra guitar and effects onto previously recorded songs "in a haze of THC and pandemic freak-out." He captured each new addition in one take, creating something as close to the Dark Fog live sound as we're likely to get during social isolation. The first



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Lil Durk ARMANDO ESTEVES

continued from 24

record consists of four tracks, though the mirror-image titles of “The Fantasy Driver” and “Revird Ysatnaf Eht” indicate that they’re plants grown from the same root. Psychedelia is what happens when the mind’s inner space becomes vast enough to overwhelm physical reality, and these records feel like a beautiful snapshot of the isolated consciousness. Gritty, clicking loops evoke claustrophobia, which prompts the listener’s mind to react like a caged wild animal, releasing adrenaline in a desperate attempt to break free. And Donato’s frenzied, ululating guitars are like rocket fuel for the spirit, powering it up to levitate right out of your body. On the fizzing “Dnim Ruoy Daer” and the fey “In Golden Curtain’s Yellow,” the two-song punch that wraps up *Escape Into This*, astral projection reaches full fruition with futuristic grandeur. *Escape Into This 2* continues in a similar vein, with shorter cuts and a slightly more turbulent sensibility—even when the vocals are soothing, as on “In Dove Daze,” the spiky, processed-through-a-black-hole guitars ripple with unease. On “Lick Celestial,” a rhythm slightly reminiscent of “Misty Mountain Hop” provides a heart-beat under a plasma shimmer that keeps threatening to explode but never quite hits the breaking point. Both albums are available digitally on Bandcamp as pay-what-you-can lockdown offerings, and Donato says that they’ll be released on vinyl this summer. —MONICA KENDRICK

TASHI DORJI & TYLER DAMON, TO CATCH A BIRD IN A NET OF WIND**Trost**

trostrecords.bandcamp.com/album/to-catch-a-bird-in-a-net-of-wind

Has it really been just two months since the Illinois shelter-in-place order went into effect? Sometimes live music seems like a fading memory. But when the original experience is especially vivid, it’s not hard for a record like *To Catch a Bird in a Net of Wind* to bring it all back. The album captures a duo set that electric guitarist Tashi Dorji and percussionist Tyler Damon played at the May Chapel in Rosehill Cemetery, which was part of Elastic Arts’ 2018 Exposure Series. It opens with the sound of Damon striking hand chimes as he walks down between packed pews, sending metallic tones up to the chapel’s vaulted ceiling. As their metallic reverberations bounce back to meet Damon’s advance, Dorji builds from humming feedback to a constellation of shimmering, electric tones. After Damon takes his seat at the drum kit, the duo enact an improvised sonic contest in which they exchange slashing attacks and tumbling retreats, encircled by a halo of overtones. The album feels a bit like a martial-arts flick where each climax tops the one before, but the champions never fall. —BILL MEYER

LIL DURK, JUST CAUSE Y’ALL WAITED 2
Alamo/Geffen
ld2x.com

Chicago rapper Lil Durk dropped his debut mixtape nearly nine years ago, and he’s since matured into



Okkultokrati REMY EIK

one of drill’s most consistent, influential, and successful artists. His four previous major-label full-lengths have all peaked in the top 50 of the *Billboard* 200, including August’s *Love Songs 4 the Streets 2*, which debuted at number four. His flair for melody and his no-bullshit hooks have helped give rise to a new wave of drill artists, including everyone’s new favorite Chicago rap sensation, Taurus Bartlett—better known as Polo G. On Durk’s fifth studio album, *Just Cause Y’all Waited 2* (Alamo/Geffen), Bartlett adds lithe vocals to “3 Headed Goat,” augmenting the brawny texture of Durk’s vocals and the subtle vulnerability in his inflection. *Just Cause Y’all Waited 2* leans on melancholy instrumentals: regal piano notes inform the sound world of “All Love,” and a dusky, lonesome saxophone sets the tone for “Viral Moment.” Durk understands how to look back without getting sentimental, and he remains guarded while combing through his regrets on “Turn Myself In.” He originally released the track in May 2019, just before he surrendered himself to the Atlanta Police Department—it had issued a warrant for his arrest in connection with a February 2019 shooting, and his attempted murder case remains pending. Lil Durk delivers a powerful performance on “Turn Myself In,” and when his Auto-Tuned voice hits the occasional high note, he offers glimpses of the depth and complexity in his story that stray hard-news headlines can’t convey. —LEOR GALIL

OKKULTOKRATI, LA ILDEN LYSE

Southern Lord
okkultokratisl.bandcamp.com/album/la-ilden-lyse

Oslo six-piece Okkultokrati cast a net into rock’s grittiest, dankest seas and dredge up an electrifying hybrid sound: they twist influences from heathen black metal and thrash together with hedonistic rock ‘n’ roll and furious crust punk. Much of the band’s music seems designed for underground shows, drag races, and various more ques-

tionable activities, but in the 12 years since Okkultokrati’s first demo, their songwriting has grown steadily more complex. By 2016’s *Raspberry Dawn* they’d expanded into their most Technicolor palette to date, incorporating synth-laden postpunk, psychedelic weirdness, and even hints of glam rock. Four years later, the brand-new *La Ilden Lyse* (which translates roughly to “Keep the Fire Burning”) charges back into blacks and grays. When I listen to the record on a walk outside (an activity I enjoyed much more frequently before lockdown), I almost expect tracks such as the lush yet ferocious closer, “The Dying Grass Moon,” to make the still-emerging spring leaves shrivel up and drop. But through destruction often comes creation, and *La Ilden Lyse* seems hell-bent on both—for all their bleakness, these songs have a kinetic energy that could reanimate the dead. —JAMIE LUDWIG

SMINO, SHE ALREADY DECIDED “MIXTAPE”

Zero Fatigue
smitransfer.com

When rapper-singer Smino self-released *She Already Decided* on April 20, he added “Mixtape” in scare quotes to the title on Soundcloud. In doing so, the Saint Louis native provided a sly history lesson for young listeners who’ve only ever referred to full-lengths as “projects.” A decade ago, hip-hop mixtapes provided a way for rappers to skirt record-deal obligations, providing them an unregulated outlet where they could remake the hot tracks of the moment and flex their creative muscles. These releases weren’t strictly legal, but major-label executives largely looked the other way—not least because mixtapes allowed their artists to stoke their popularity between studio albums and remain relevant to a fickle public. This was before hip-hop mixtape sites helped transform the format, turning what used to be grab bags of unmastered recordings and raw freestyles into studio-quality music. Streaming further blurred the distinctions

MUSIC



Natalie Chami of TALsounds MARIA TZEKA

between mixtapes and “formal” releases—these days, collections of Drake Z sides are afforded the same importance as soul-baring albums that took years to put together. *She Already Decided* hits like a classic mixtape: Smino puts his stamp on contemporary hits, transforming Roddy Ricch’s “The Box” into “Jamie Boxx (Freestyle),” and raps over instrumentals that make no bones about the beloved songs they’re sampling (“Fronto Isley,” for instance, is built on a snippet of the 1975 Isley Brothers hit “For the Love of You”). He approaches each track with understated cool and his unmistakable smoothness, infusing joy into every well-rounded syllable and slip-sliding verse. Smino knows that a great mixtape has to be fun, and *She Already Decided* gives us a way to make our own cheer while we’re stuck indoors. —LEOR GALIL

THE SOFT PINK TRUTH, SHALL WE GO ON SINNING SO THAT GRACE MAY INCREASE?
Thrill Jockey
thrilljockey.com/artists/the-soft-pink-truth

The Soft Pink Truth’s new album, *Shall We Go On Sinning So That Grace May Increase?* (Thrill Jockey), is a soundtrack for contemplation, discovery, and the seeking of truth. The solo project of Baltimore musician Drew Daniel, best known for his work in experimental duo Matmos, the Soft Pink Truth started in response to a challenge. After Matmos released 2001’s *A Chance to Cut Is a Chance to Cure*, which featured glitchy electronic sounds built from samples of medical procedures, British house producer and musician Matthew Herbert dared Daniel to apply his inventive style to house music. In response, Daniel created 2003’s bumping dance album *Do You Party?* (which Herbert put out on his own Soundlike label). On previous releases, the Soft Pink Truth’s signature has been marrying heady concepts with experimental, sometimes outre compositions under an EDM umbrella; 2014’s *Why Do the Heathen Rage?* is an especially wonderful collection of black-metal covers that uplifts the source material rather than skewering it. But *Sinning* takes a different approach. Daniel works with a diverse group of guest artists—including his Matmos partner, M.C. Schmidt (also his partner in life), and saxophonists John Berndt and

Andrew Bernstein, who’s in Horse Lords—to create an organic, warm, and often jazzy sound. Daniel began working on the album shortly after the 2016 election, and he titled it using Paul the Apostle’s words in Romans 6:1 to express the rage and disconnect he felt during that time. But though *Sinning* is informed by anger, it embraces collaboration and mutual aid, using prominent vocal harmonies, tape delay, and other tools to suggest how we can create a world of our own in the face of adversity. Opening track “Shall” features guest singers Colin Self, Angel Deradoorian, and Jana Hunter, and Daniel samples their choirlike vocals to weave them into the rest of the record. The whole thing is a joyful, loud, and sometimes danceable protest against those who may call us sinners. —SALEM COLLO-JULIN

TALSOUNDS, ACQUIESCE
NNA Tapes
talsounds.bandcamp.com/album/acquiesce

It’s easy to get the impression that Natalie Chami dreams in music—she’s immersed in it in practically every minute of her waking life. By day, she teaches choir, vocal technique, and music technology at the Chicago High School for the Arts. She spends her free time immersed in Chicago’s experimental-music community, making noisy drones as one-third of Good Willsmith and exploring ambient soundscapes with her solo project, TALsounds. In the decade or so that Chami has been active, she’s become a crucial contributor and even one of the faces of the city’s contemporary avant-garde electronic scene. She has a gift for elevating her wafting synths and spectral vocals into something that verges on the mystical, and she continues to use it masterfully on the fifth TALsounds album, *Acquiesce* (NNA Tapes). Chami recorded this material between spring 2018 and summer 2019, improvising her soothing meditations while reflecting upon changes in her life, including the meaningful relationship she’d built with her fiancé. Her overdubbed vocals often shroud the sense of what she’s singing, but on the cinematic “Muted Decision” her lightly plinking seaside synths create nuanced shifts in mood all on their own. —LEOR GALIL

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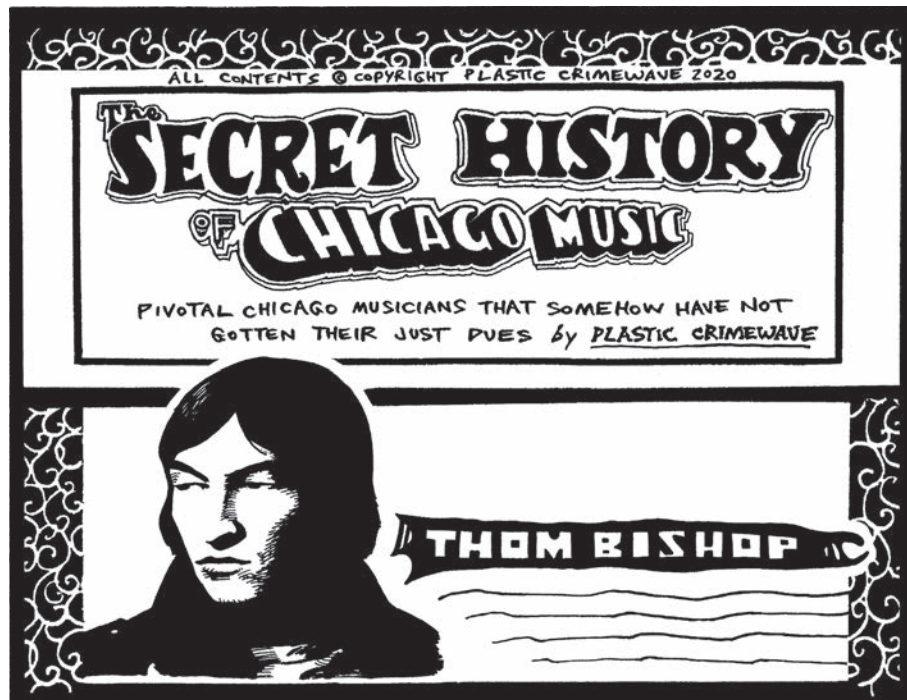
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SLEEPING > ILLAGE



Musical and literary polymath Thom Bishop has a second career as Junior Burke

For 50 years he's been writing songs, lyrics, plays, movies, and more—and his new novel starts with James Dean shooting Ronald Reagan on live TV.

By **STEVE KRAKOW**

I was introduced to the music of Thom Bishop by an obscure 1971 compilation LP, part of a series recorded at the Red Herring coffeehouse in Urbana. The Red Herring hosted a lot of folk music back in the day, and it's still open, though it's now a vegetarian restaurant—I've even been, because I went to college at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The recordings on the Red Herring compilations are charmingly lo-fi and guileless, and I was further enchanted by the mystery surrounding the artists featured—though a 1969 volume does include a track from Dan Fogelberg, who was still in his teens when the LP came out but was already pretty darn good.

Bishop is one of my favorites across the

multiple volumes of the series (he was a stylishly handsome devil too, judging from the few photos from that era I've seen), but he discounts his early-70s output as “embryonic” and deems it barely worth mentioning. When I contacted Bishop, I couldn't help asking him about it, but at least we got the topic out of the way right at the start! And luckily, his career took plenty of interesting turns afterward, so there's still quite a story to tell.

Born Thomas Burke Bishop Jr. in Litchfield, Illinois, Bishop grew up on Chuck Berry, *West Side Story*, Johnny Mercer, and Jacques Brel. He was an army brat, so his family moved all over the country during his youth, from Columbus, Georgia, to Santa Barbara, California—but he attended high school in

Springfield, Illinois, where he played bass in bands such as the Brigs, Johnny & the Impalas (he wasn't Johnny), and the Toffee Shoppe. The Brigs recorded one song at a local radio station, a cover of Richard & the Young Lions' pounding but tuneful garage classic “Open Up Your Door.” It was never pressed or issued, but I haven't given up bugging Bishop to get a listen.

In the early 70s, Bishop began gigging as a singer-songwriter (though he's no fan of the term) in Urbana-Champaign, including at the folk festivals the Red Herring presented each fall and spring. The artists who participated could get their songs included on the aforementioned LPs, and Bishop contributed “White Lines and Road Signs” and “Kissed You Again” to the two volumes of *Folk and Music From the Red Herring* compiled in fall 1971. At publication time, a copy of the second LP was on sale through a local record shop for \$225.

Bishop came to Chicago in 1974 and began playing steadily at famed venues such as Kingston Mines and the Earl of Old Town, usually accompanied by guitarist Louis Rosen—according to Rick Kogan, who wrote about Bishop for the *Tribune* in 1986, he won the *Reader's* “best new artist” honor that year. For a regular gig at Orphans, he put together a band with Billy Panda on electric guitar, Elliott Delman (formerly of Spoils of War and Mormos) on acoustic guitar, Jim Tullio on double bass, and Pennington McGee (who more famously played with SHoCM favorite Terry Callier) on percussion and backing vocals. Bishop also gigged with Callier himself, who worked a transcendent alchemy on folk, blues, and soul. “In my years in Chicago, while there were so many artists and musicians I admired, the one I was truly in awe of was Terry Callier,” he says. “And he was a beautiful person.”

Bishop got a formidable musical education sharing bills with blues royalty (Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker), acoustic guitar gods (John Fahey, Leo Kottke), and legendary local songwriters (John Prine, Bonnie Koloc). Other notable appearances included a show with comedian Jackie Mason, a packed 1978 anti-nuke rally in Seabrook, New Hampshire (where Bishop went on between Dick Gregory and Pete Seeger), and an opening slot for rowdy country outlaw David Allan Coe in downstate Illinois.

In the mid-70s, while getting into writing music for theater, Bishop began recording solo material in New York and Lake Geneva. He debuted in 1981 with the LP *The Wireless Wonder*, and since then he's released three

more albums and an EP billed to Thom Bishop: 1990's *Restless State of Grace*, 1996's *Feed Me a Dream* (recorded in Nashville), 2013's *A Little Physics and a Lot of Luck*, and 2016's *The Amber Ages* (cut in Boulder). But many folks who know him through these records aren't aware that he has a parallel career under another name.

Confused? I sure was. “In 1980, I was cast in an Equity production at the St. Nicholas Theater,” Bishop says. “Equity has a rule that if a member has your name, you have to take a different one. Although I assumed I would never act again, I took ‘Junior Burke,’ the two parts of my name I wasn't using.” Years later, the alias came in handy for a different purpose. “When I was focused more on writing prose fiction, my mentor, Bobbie Louise Hawkins, said, ‘If you want to be perceived as a writer, rather than a musician who writes, you should adopt a pen name,’” Bishop explains. “So I told her I already had Junior Burke, and she said, ‘Well, you can be sure no other writer has it.’ Immediately, everything I submitted under that name was getting published.”

Bishop moved to Los Angeles in 1982, because the Chicago club scene had slowed down and he had no management. He wrote a play called *American Express* that was staged in LA, directed by Second City cofounder Paul Sills and featuring *Saturday Night Live* veteran Laraine Newman. He cowrote the tune “Trials of the Heart” for the 1986 film *About Last Night* and began collaborating on screenplays. He sold several to Universal and Trimark, but in most cases the movies were never produced—and when they were, the scripts had often been rewritten so heavily that he barely cared anymore.

Bishop's focus lately has been writing fiction and teaching, the latter mostly at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. “That's been my primary creative life for the past couple of decades,” he says. He's still making music, though, under both his names—since 2007 he's released two albums and an EP as Junior Burke, including 2019's *America's a Lonely Town*, whose six songs he wrote with his old bandmate Billy Panda. “If most of the songs were written this century, it's a Junior Burke recording,” he says.

Bishop (as Burke) also has a new novel out this month via Gibson House Press, titled *The Cold Last Swim*. Set in an alternate-timeline version of golden-age Hollywood, it kicks off with James Dean shooting Ronald Reagan during a live TV broadcast in 1954 and gets stranger from there. **FI**



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

IN 2016 GOSSIP WOLF described jazz guitarist **Dave Miller** as a Chicago expat based in NYC, but even then he seemed to do as much recording and gigging here as he did there. He's since moved back to Chicago, and his new self-titled album, which comes out Friday, May 22, via **Tompkins Square**, would make any hometown scene proud! The funk- and soul-inflected grooves on **Dave Miller** feature standout local players such as Chicago bassist Matt Ulery, Milwaukee drummer Devin Drobka (whose groups include Field Report and Bell Dance Songs), and V.V. Lightbody keyboardist Dan Pierson (who helps run Miller's new studio, **Whiskey Point Recording**, where the album was made). "Fellow Man" sets the tone early, with a gentle, loping shuffle that would fit in fine on a classic early-70s Hi Records single.

On Monday, May 18, unstoppable Chicago underground hip-hop label **Why? Records** dropped **Art Is Love Vol. 1**. The Why? team also assembled a Justice League of local DIY acts for the 20-track compilation, including psychedelic indie-rock band **Glad Rags**, R&B up-and-comer **Jordanna**, arty jazz-fusion unit **Cordoba**, and scene pillars **Rich Jones** and **Nnamdi**. The comp also features the four MCs who run the label—**Malci**, **Davis**, **Joshua Virtue**, and **Ruby Watson**—who collaborate on two cuts as **Why Footclan**. **Art Is Love** is a pay-what-you-want Bandcamp release, and all proceeds benefit the **Chicago Community Bond Fund**.

Jeff Pezzati's cast-iron shout and indelible vocal melodies helped make Chicago punk forefathers **Naked Raygun** one of the most anthem-friendly hardcore bands of all time—so don't be surprised if you're immediately humming along to his tuneful new solo EP, **The First EP**, self-released on Tuesday, May 19. Gossip Wolf digs lo-fi Billy Bragg-style shout-along "It's Late" and epic, winding opener "Make Me Whole (Chinese Wall Song)," which features stately piano and lovely synthesized strings. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

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Blue October 5/29, 7 PM, livestream on [stageit.com/blueoctoberband](https://www.stageit.com/blueoctoberband)
Bobby Conn & the Superband, Vogds, CCMX film screening, DJ LeDeuce 10/3, 7 PM, Co-Prosperity Sphere
Camilo Séptimo 8/26, 8 PM, Martyrs

CHIRP Record Fair and Other Delights 10/3, 8 AM, Chicago Journeymen Plumbers Local Union 130 Hall
Chosen Few Virtual In-House Picnic & Festival 7/4, livestream performances and DJ sets at [chosenfewdjs.com](https://www.chosenfewdjs.com)

Dan & Shay, Ingrid Andress, Band Camino 8/15, 7 PM, United Center
Elrow 11/27, 8 PM, Radius Chicago, 18+

Erabella, Makena, When We Was Kids, Synovial, Far Under 7/17, 7 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

Flotsam & Jetsam, Wrath, Creep, Spare Change 5/23/21, 7:30 PM, the Forge, Joliet
Robbie Fulks 5/24, 8 PM, livestream at [twitch.tv/hide-outchicago](https://www.twitch.tv/hide-outchicago)
G-Herbo, King Von, Lil Load- ed, Shaun Sloan, Pretty Sav-

age 8/12, 7:30 PM, the Forge, Joliet

Sarah Harmer 2/12/21, 8 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

Sophie B. Hawkins 5/29, 6 PM, livestream on [stageit.com/digitaldragfest](https://www.stageit.com/digitaldragfest)

Chris Hillman, Herb Pedersen, John Jorgenson 10/25, 8 PM, City Winery

Carlos Johnson 8/10, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Keep Your Mind Free featuring Jeff Parker, Nicole Mitchell, Tomeka Reid, Damon Locks 5/28, 8 PM, livestream at [ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts](https://www.ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts)

Lumpen Radio presents Brett Naucke, TALSounds, Leya, White Boy Scream, Ben Bab-bitt 5/22, 8 PM, livestream on [twitch.tv/lumpenradio](https://www.twitch.tv/lumpenradio)

Shawn Mullins 10/27, 8 PM, City Winery

Nile 11/3, 7 PM, the Forge, Joliet

Ramsey Lewis's 85th Birthday Celebration 5/30, 1 PM, livestream at [stageit.com/JanetLewis](https://www.stageit.com/JanetLewis)

SongsJam Competition hosted by Fourth Coast Ensemble 9/3, 7:30 PM

Stay-At-Home concert series featuring Ryan Joseph Anderson 5/30, 4 PM, in public in selected neighborhoods in Berwyn and Oak Park (locations secret until the show starts) with concurrent livestream at [facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub](https://www.facebook.com/fitzgeraldsnightclub)

Struggle Jennings 6/30, 7 PM, the Forge, Joliet

Summer House Series Virtual Edition with DJ Koko, DJ Torin Edmond, DJ Nick Non-stop 5/28, 6 PM; 6/4, 6 PM, livestream info at [facebook.com/summerhouseseries](https://www.facebook.com/summerhouseseries)

Paul Thorn 10/28, 8 PM, City Winery

Vox Effusis Vol. 1 curated by Lou Mallozzi featuring Lynn Book, Jacques Dernierre & Vincent Barras, Jaap Blonk, Ute Wassermann 6/13, 2 PM, livestream at [ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts](https://www.ess.org/the-quarantine-concerts)

Vundabar 11/15, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Waltzer: Behind the Mask video premiere and livestream 5/28, 8 PM, livestream at [twitch.tv/hideoutchicago](https://www.twitch.tv/hideoutchicago)

Whitney 6/4, 7 PM, livestream to benefit the National Independent Venue Association, info at [sleeping-village.com/events/whitney/](https://www.sleeping-village.com/events/whitney/)

Peter Yarrow & Noel Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul & Mary 10/4, 7 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan

The Masked Singer National Tour 6/4/21, 7:30 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original date will be honored

Dave Matthews Band 7/2/21-7/3/21, 7:30 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original dates will be honored

Maybe April 7/17, 8 PM, City Winery, postponed until a date to be determined

Monsta X 6/16, 7:30 PM, United Center, postponed until a date to be determined

One Night of Queen featuring Gary Mullen & the Works 3/27/21, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont, rescheduled

Oso Oso 6/10, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, canceled

Out of Space presents Big Boi and more 6/24/21, 7 PM, Temperance Beer Company, Evanston, rescheduled, 18+

Out of Space presents Ckamp 8/8/21, 7 PM, Canal Shores Golf Course, Evanston, rescheduled, 18+

Out of Space presents Death Cab for Cutie 8/7, 7 PM, Canal Shores Golf Course, Evanston, canceled

Out of Space presents Drive-By Truckers, J.D. McPherson 6/25/21, 7 PM, Temperance Beer Company, Evanston, rescheduled, 18+

Out of Space presents Emmylou Harris, Los Lobos 8/5/21, 7 PM, Canal Shores Golf Course, Evanston, rescheduled, 18+

Above & Beyond 6/5-6/6, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, canceled

All Dressed Up & Nowhere to Show featuring Watkins Family Hour 6/2, 7 PM, rescheduled; livestream at [facebook.com/evanstonospace](https://www.facebook.com/evanstonospace)

Awolnation 6/6, 5:30 PM, Aragon Ballroom, canceled

Birthday Bands BBQ 6/7, 2 PM, Hideout, canceled

Brent Cobb 6/16, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, postponed until a date to be determined

EARLY WARNINGS

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Marshall Crenshaw & the Bottle Rockets 11/21, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled

Charley Crockett 6/11, 8 PM, City Winery, postponed until a date to be determined

Ana Everling & the Taraf 5/26, 8 and 10 PM, Jazz Showcase, canceled

Ezra Bell 6/25, 8 PM, Martyrs', canceled

Fratellis 1/22/21, 8 PM, Metro, rescheduled, 18+

Green Day, Fall Out Boy, Weezer 8/13, 5:30 PM, Wrigley Field, postponed until a date to be determined

Journeyman: a Tribute to Eric Clapton 6/26, 8 PM, City Winery, postponed until a date to be determined

Kennyhoopla 6/23, 7:30 PM, Schubas, postponed until a date to be determined

Sonny Landreth 7/9, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled

Maroon 5, Leon Bridges, Meghan Trainor 6/13, 6:30 PM, Wrigley Field, postponed until a date to be determined

The Masked Singer National Tour 6/4/21, 7:30 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original date will be honored

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Out of Space presents Emmylou Harris, Los Lobos 8/5/21, 7 PM, Canal Shores Golf Course, Evanston, rescheduled, 18+

Out of Space presents George Clinton & Parliament Funkadelic 6/27/21, 7 PM, Temperance Beer Company, Evanston, rescheduled, 18+

Out of Space presents Neko Case and more 6/26/21, 7 PM, Temperance Beer Company, Evanston, rescheduled, 18+

Out of Space presents Smokey Robinson 8/8, 7 PM, Canal Shores Golf Course, Evanston, canceled

Mike Phillips 7/9, 8 PM, City Winery, postponed until a date to be determined

Primus 7/10, 7 PM, Chicago Theatre, postponed until a date to be determined

Haley Reinhart 8/1, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, canceled

Rüfüs Du Sol 5/30, 8 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion, canceled

Shiner 8/13, 8:30 PM, Lincoln Hall, rescheduled; tickets purchased for original date will be honored, 18+

Slander 6/5, 9 PM, Aragon Ballroom, canceled

Sons of Serendip 7/16, 8 PM, City Winery, postponed until a date to be determined

Chris Stapleton 8/29, 5 PM, Wrigley Field, postponed until a date to be determined

Cassidy Stirtz 8/3, 8 PM, Martyrs', rescheduled

Stormzy 6/9, 9 PM, Metro, postponed until a date to be determined, 18+

Tri Patterns 6/19, 9 PM, Martyrs', canceled

Violence, Dysphoria, Wraith, Gavel 3/13/21, 7 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, rescheduled; tickets purchased for the original date will be honored, 17+

Violet Crime 6/20, 9 PM; 7/18, 9 PM; Martyrs', canceled

Windy City Smokeout 7/10-7/12, United Center, canceled

Chris Young, Scotty McCreery, Payton Smith 5/30, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park, canceled

UPCOMING

Agnostic Front 8/23, 8 PM, Subterranean, 17+

Hammerfall 10/7, 7 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Jason Hawk Harris 6/25, 8 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn

Legendary Shack Shakers 9/13, 8 PM, Beat Kitchen

Torres 10/16, 9:30 PM, Empty Bottle

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OPINION



PARENTING

On being a single dad, a journalist, and a Black southsider during the pandemic

It involves juggling my kid's Zoom-call cameos and a new beat, and checking in on my homies.

By **EVAN F. MOORE**

Evan F. Moore is a culture/entertainment writer with the Chicago Sun-Times. Evan attended Donald Trump's Chicago rally and lived to tell about it.


My kid is having one hell of a rookie season in terms of her education. This was supposed to be her first full year of school, but she's spending the last three months of it at home instead of in class. Three weeks ago, I was at my home office reading over a story when she walked

up with tears in her eyes and said, "Daddy, I wanna go to the playground."

I told her that as soon as the germs are gone, we can go back to the playground.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, I'm running out of excuses. Like the rest of us, she's trying to make sense of the new reality.

Also, right before Governor J.B. Pritzker's shelter-in-place executive order took effect, I took on a new beat at my newspaper. A new sked that allows me to have a social life? Not so fast, my guy.

Not exactly the rookie season we were counting on for my daughter's education.  EVAN F. MOORE

For me, and every other career-minded single parent, the new reality is working from home while co-parenting. That means filing stories, transcribing interviews, chasing down leads, sitting in on Zoom meetings, and wondering if I'll be laid off or furloughed like so many other journalists.

Along the way, my daughter has joined a couple of conference calls. Once, she crashed the meeting to tell everyone "hi" and to ask for chocolate milk. While transcribing an interview I did with a city official, I heard my kid in the background of the recording, laughing at one of her favorite TV series—most likely *Paw Patrol* or *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*.

On my lunch break during the weeks I have her, we stay in touch with her teacher through e-learning and Zoom meetings coordinated by the parents of her classmates. And a couple of weeks ago, the teachers and staff at her school staged a drive-by parade for the students, honking their car horns and holding up signs of encouragement while passionately describing to their students how much they miss them.

"That was fun," my daughter blurted out.

She misses her teacher and her classmates; it was a dope moment.

Maybe some of y'all won't bitch at teachers now since so many of you are finding out their worth?

As for the fam, one of the reasons I moved back to the old neighborhood last year, outside of being closer to my daughter, was to be nearby my elderly parents—two retired Chicago Public Schools teachers—in case something comes up and they need me.

My kid knows what she's getting out of a visit to grandma and grandpa's: spaghetti and chocolate. After all, grandma and grandpa's house is a lawless place where parents are powerless when it comes to a grandbaby's warm embrace.

Unfortunately, we've had to cut our visits short due to social distancing guidelines, my parents' susceptibility to COVID-19, and the fact that they live blocks away from Symphony South Shore, the nursing home/rehabilitation center where 70 percent of the residents tested positive for COVID-19.

I check on the homies, too. Especially the ones who are dads. I've made it a point to

reach out to them every now and again to see how they are holding up. Some of them haven't seen their children outside of phone calls and FaceTime. Also, a few of them are gig workers, which means their ways to earn have been yanked away by the pandemic.

A couple of weeks ago, I had a 30-minute conversation with one of my friends, and we asked each other about how our families were holding up, we talked about the first two episodes of *The Last Dance*, the ESPN documentary on the Bulls' 1998 championship season, and he asked for something a true friend wouldn't say no to—my Netflix login (I hooked him up).


It was an important check-in because men—particularly Black men—have a tendency to internalize our feelings and our mental health; we think the world is against us and we don't reach out. Recent events, and history, back up our suspicions.

It's a tough sell when elected officials and the press—entities that have had a historically prickly relationship with our community—tell us to stay in the house due to a pandemic while gun violence, racism, and systemic issues feel much more imminent, as the TRiiBE pointed out in their article describing the disconnect with the aforementioned groups.

And no one is immune. State representative Kam Buckner tweeted about his experience shopping while Black when a police officer stopped him. The police officer told him: "People are using the coronavirus to do bad things. I couldn't see your face, man. You looked like you were up to something."

These are some of the reasons so many of us laugh at white people who want to reopen the state. Seems like it's not so fun living under what Black folks deal with each and every day.

Nevertheless, it's onward and upward for me and mine. My kid is tough, and we'll adjust to whatever comes our way.

One day, it'll all make sense and we'll head back to the playground—hopefully. 

 @evanFmoore



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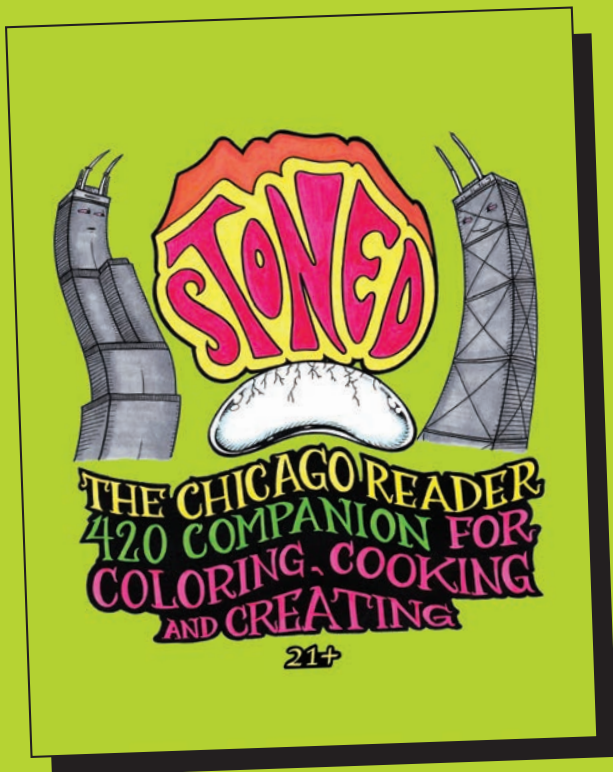
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OPINION



JOE NEWTON

SAVAGE LOVE

I fantasize about hot guys in Nazi uniforms

We don't pick our (problematic) kinks.

By DAN SAVAGE

Q: Here's a non-COVID question for you: I'm a queer white female in a monogamish marriage. I vote left, I abhor hatred and oppression, and I engage in activism when I can. I'm also turned on by power differentials: authority figures, uniforms, hot guys doing each other. Much to my horror, this thing for power differentials plus too many WW2 movies as a kid has always meant that for my brain (or for my pussy) Nazis are hot. Fuck me, right?

Other maybe relevant bits of info: I'm not interested in roleplaying with actual partners, I'm fairly sure this proclivity is not reflective of any deeper issues, and I'm both sexually and emotionally fairly well sorted. Not perfect, but fine working order and all

that. And I get it: people like what they like, don't judge yourself for your fetishes, just get off without being an asshole to anyone. The problem is that my usual way of getting off on/indulging my fantasies is to read erotic fiction on the Internet. I'd love your input on whether seeking out Nazi porn is problematic for some of the same reasons that porn depicting sex with kids is problematic. Am I normalizing and trivializing fascism? —**FREAKING ABOUT SEARCH HISTORIES**

A: Seeking out child porn—searching for it online, downloading it, collecting images of children being raped and sexually abused—is problematic (and illegal) because it creates demand for more child porn, which

results in more children being raped and sexually abused. The cause and effect is obvious, FASH, the victims are real, and the harm done is incalculable.

But while it may discomfort someone to know a nice married lady who donates to all the right causes is furiously masturbating to dirty stories about hot guys in Nazi uniforms doing each other, FASH, no one ever has to know that. So you do no harm—not even the supposed harm of discomforting someone—when you privately enjoy the fucked up stories you enjoy. And while there are doubtless some actual Nazis who enjoy reading dirty stories about other Nazis, most people turned on by dirty stories about Nazis are turned on despite

themselves and their politics. Transgressive sexual fantasies don't arouse us because they violate societal norms and expectations (in a safe and controlled manner), FASH, but because they allow us to violate our sense of ourselves too (ditto). Just as a feminist can have rape fantasies without actually wanting to be raped herself or for anyone else to be raped, a person can have sexual fantasies about hot guys in Nazi uniforms doing each other without wanting Nazis to come to power.

I have to say it was easier to give anti-Nazi fetishists like you a pass—to shrug and say “you do you” but please keep it to yourself—before racist demagogues, white supremacists, and anti-Semites started marching around waving Trump flags. But no one picks their kinks and being told “that shouldn't turn you on” has never made a problematic or transgressive kink less arousing. And when you consider the number of non-erotic novels, movies, and television shows the culture cranks out year after year—and how many actually trivialize fascism (I'm talking to you, *Hunters*)—it seems insane to draw a line and say, “Okay, this story about Nazis isn't okay because that lady over there masturbated while reading it in private.”

Q: I'm an apartment-dweller in a dense urban area. Last night I overheard my neighbors having sex—no big deal, right? I consider myself a sex-positive person, and have always held and espoused the belief that if you can't have loud sex in your own home, where can you have it? But the sex I overheard last night was fairly kinky. Someone I read as a cis man was dominating someone I read as a cis woman. They were in the apartment right across from mine—about 20 feet away—


and my bedroom window faces theirs. There was a LOT of derogatory talk, hitting, name-calling, giving orders, and some crying. I could tell it was consensual—she was very clearly having a good time—and I eavesdropped long enough to witness the postcoital return to equilibrium. Everything seemed great. But physically I experienced this as overheard violence. I was shaking and had a hard time getting to sleep afterwards. I'm glad I stuck around until the end. It helped me feel better. I guess what I'm saying is that I needed some aftercare. I'm still thinking about it this morning, and I'm concerned that being triggered by my neighbor's sex is going to become a regular part of my life. I'm wondering about the ethics of the situation: Do kinky folks have an obligation to muffle potentially triggering sounds? Or is any overheard sex potentially triggering to someone and am I therefore applying a double standard here? What do you think? —THE VANILLA NEIGHBOR

A: You went from overhearing kinky sex to eavesdropping on it—meaning, you went from accidentally hearing your neighbors fucking to intently listening as your neighbors fucked. And you needed to do that. You heard something that sounded violent but hearing more led you to guess it was consensual sex and listening all the way to the end—all the way through the aftercare—confirmed your guess was correct. So for your own peace of mind, TVN, you needed to keep listening. But you don't need to listen next time. If it triggers you to hear your neighbors fucking, *don't listen*. Close the window and crank up some music or go for a walk and listen to a podcast.

That said, TVN, you raise an interesting ethical question: Are kinksters—particularly the kind of kinksters who enjoy verbal abuse and impact play—obligated to keep it down? While I think people should be considerate of their neighbors, people are allowed to have sex in their own homes, TVN, and it's not like vanilla sex is always quiet. But if the sex a couple enjoys could easily be misinterpreted as abuse or violence by someone who accidentally overhears it, that couple might wanna close the window and turn up some music themselves—not only to avoid alarming the neighbors, but to spare themselves the hassle of explaining their kinks to a cop.

For the record: I would tell a person who enjoys a good single-tail whipping to find a soundproof dungeon to enjoy that in (because that shit is *loud*) but I wouldn't tell a person who screams her head off during PIV intercourse to find a soundproof box (even though her shit is *just as loud*). Instead I would urge her to fuck at 8 PM, when most people are awake, rather than 2 AM, when most people are asleep. (It can be annoying listening to someone screamfuck but it's even more annoying to have your sleep ruined by a screamfucker.) Is this a double standard? Perhaps. But it's one I'm willing to endorse.

Q: 1. Is it safe to hook up again? 2. Will it be safe to hook up again soon? 3. You'll tell us when it's safe to hook up again, right? —GETTING REALLY IMPATIENT. NEED DICK. REALLY.

A: 1. It isn't. 2. At some point. 3. I will. 

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